Newsom’s proposed budget includes intergovernmental Housing Accountability Unit

By Josh Stephens, California Planning & Development Report, January 11, 2021

“Among billions for bonds, homeless housing programs, and home loan assistance programs, one of the smaller line items [in Gov. Newsom’s proposed 2021-22 budget] may have the most profound impact on urban planning statewide.

“At a mere $4.3 million, the Housing Accountability Unit promises to serve a Janus-faced role in the relationship between the state and local governments.

“The unit, housed in the Department of Housing and Community Development, will monitor, enforce, and provide technical assistance to facilitate production of affordable housing statewide. The language of the budget implies that Newsom wants localities to embrace their Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) obligations and will encourage ‘active engagement before enforcement becomes necessary.’ The unit will ‘act as an ombudsman and help local governments navigate and comply with state housing laws and make sufficient progress.’

“Many local governments have protested the increased RHNA goals on the grounds that cities are built-out, geographically constrained, or otherwise unable to identify suitable land for up-zoning and densification.

“The unit will also help cities compete for housing-related planning grants from the state.

“In essence, Newsom wants to leave cities with fewer excuses for not complying with RHNA.

“The Department of Housing & Community Development declined comment on the proposal.”

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