

Bay Area Housing Policy Comparison Guide

Six Categories Benchmarked Across 15 Cities

Introduction

Housing policy varies significantly across Bay Area cities. Some municipalities encourage housing growth with permissive policies, while others prioritize slow growth and neighborhood character. This guide explains the six policy categories tracked in the Housing Policy Benchmarker and shows you how to use policy comparison for strategic planning.

Six Policy Categories

1. Inclusionary Housing Policy

What it is: Percentage of new units required to be affordable, or fee paid in lieu of inclusion.

Why it matters: Directly impacts housing cost and affordability—VLI targets often depend on strong inclusionary policies.

2. Maximum Density Limits

What it is: Zoning limits on units per acre in the most-dense residential and mixed-use zones.

Why it matters: Higher density limits enable more units per site, accelerating housing supply.

3. ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) Policy

What it is: Rules for secondary units on single-family lots (size, detached vs. attached, parking, fees).

Why it matters: ADUs provide affordable housing supply with minimal infrastructure cost.

4. Development Impact Fees

What it is: Per-unit fees for parks, traffic, schools, affordable housing, and public facilities.

Why it matters: High fees increase housing costs; comparison shows which cities subsidize growth.

5. Parking Requirements

What it is: Minimum spaces per unit by bedroom count and transit access.

Why it matters: Parking mandates increase construction costs; transit-oriented reductions can lower housing costs.

6. Approval Timeline

What it is: Average days from application to entitlement; presence of ministerial or SB 35 streamlining.

Why it matters: Faster approvals reduce carrying costs and enable faster housing delivery.

How to Use Policy Comparison

You want to increase housing approvals

Compare your inclusionary housing %, density limits, and parking requirements to peers. Which policies are outliers? Which could be adjusted?

You're designing a new transit-oriented development

Look at peer policies for parking reductions near transit and reduced density/height limits.

You need to meet VLI targets

Study cities with strong inclusionary policies and high VLI compliance. What policies work?

You're proposing a policy change

Use peer comparisons to show council/planning commission what other cities allow. Frame as a competitive advantage.

Use the Housing Policy Benchmarker to compare your city's policies against 14 peer Bay Area jurisdictions and see which policies drive housing outcomes.