

NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A NEGATIVE DECLARATION FOR THE 2024-2029 HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE AND SAFETY ELEMENT UPDATE PROJECT IN THE CITY OF SONORA

PROJECT TITLE: 2024-2029 Housing Element Update and Safety Element Update
PROJECT SPONSOR: City of Sonora
PROJECT LOCATION: Citywide
Sonora, CA 95370
DATE OF PUBLIC NOTICE: July 14, 2025
PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD: July 14, 2025 through August 12, 2025 (5:00 pm)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the City of Sonora has prepared and intends to adopt a Negative Declaration for a General Plan update to the Housing Element for the period 2024-2029 and to the Safety Element, as described below.

Project Description:

The City is updating the General Plan Housing and Safety Elements in order to align them with other General Plan Elements, as required by State law, including the Land Use, Circulation, Conservation and Open Space, Noise, Public Facilities and Services, Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Economics, Community Identify, and Parks and Recreation Elements. Both updates strive to align with recently enacted State laws and meet State requirements. The Safety Element Update is intended to adopt new climate change and wildfire mitigation strategies that will help the City better prepare for possible new and more severe climate scenarios.

Housing Element Update

The 2020 Census indicates a citywide population of 5,003, which is estimated to have decreased to 4,940 people in 2021. The City is the only incorporated area in Tuolumne County, and therefore the largest city in the area. The City is proposing to adopt the Housing Element for the Seventh Cycle planning period from 2024 to 2029. The Housing Element, which is part of the City's General Plan, is a policy document designed to provide the City with a coordinated and comprehensive strategy for promoting the production of safe and affordable housing within the community. Per State law, the housing element has two main purposes:

1. To provide an assessment of both current and future housing needs and constraints in meeting these needs; and
2. To provide a strategy that establishes housing goals, policies, and programs.

The proposed Housing Element Update describes and analyzes the housing needs of Sonora residents and the issues confronted by the City, and provides goals, policies, and quantified objectives related to the maintenance, preservation, improvement, and development of housing.

Housing Element Update Background

The City's Housing Element serves as an integrated part of the General Plan and is subject to detailed statutory requirements, including a requirement to be updated every five years and mandatory review by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). This action includes the adoption of the HEU, which is a policy document; no actual development of parcels is included as part of the HEU. The proposed HEU is a five-year plan for the 2024-2029 period. Pursuant to Government Code Section 65583, a housing element is required to consist of an identification and

analysis of existing and projected housing needs and a statement of goals, policies, quantified objectives, financial resources, and scheduled programs for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing.

According to the Regional Housing Needs Plan (RHNP), the City of Sonora has a Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of two (2) new units for the 2024-2029 period. Of the two units needed, one new unit is needed for very low income and one for low income. This is half of the need of Tuolumne County, in which two units are needed for very low income and two for low income. Combined, the City and Tuolumne County need six new units. The Housing Element Update identified two adequate sites with appropriate densities to meet the current RHNA requirements. The City has sufficient vacant property that, once developed, would result in units across all income categories beyond the cycle’s requirement. No rezoning would be required. The Seventh Cycle Housing Element was adopted in summer 2025. The Seventh Cycle Housing Element was submitted to HCD and found to be in compliance in summer 2025, contingent upon timely implementation of stated programs.

As shown in Table 1 below, the identified vacant sites can accommodate the RHNA allocation in all income categories. The table illustrates a surplus capacity of 52 very low-income sites, 52 low-income sites, 24 moderate income sites, and 24 above moderate-income sites based on the allowed density of the identified sites.

**Table 1
Summary of Ability to Meet RHNA**

Table 3-26: Capacity to Meet RHNA Requirement					
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	Above Moderate	Total
RHNA Requirement	1	1	0	0	2
RHNA Sites					
Lemke	53	53	0	0	106
Cuesta Heights	0	0	24	24	48
Total Capacity	53	53	24	24	154
<i>Surplus</i>	52	52	24	24	152

Rezone

As noted in Housing Element Program 3.1 and consistent with the California Department of Housing and Community Development’s (HCD) correspondence dated June 9, 2025, the 5th and 6th Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) candidate site(s) are to be rezoned to accommodate by-right housing pursuant to Government Code Section 65583.2 (c). Specifically, Program 3.1 requires the City to amend the City’s Municipal Code by adding Chapter 17.21, entitled Regional Housing Needs Assessment Overlay Zone District (RHNAOZD), to Title 17 of the City of Sonora Municipal Code. The Regional Housing Needs Assessment Overlay Zone District (RHNAOZD) applies to the following property:

**Table 2
RHNAOZD Site**

Regional Housing Needs Assessment Overlay Zone District Sites						
Site Name	APN	Existing Zoning/General Plan Designation	Approx. Acreage	Maximum Density	Unit Potential	Affordability
Lemke	044-430-055	R3/HDR	11.05*	21.75 du/acre	106	Low/Very Low

* Based on the site constraints and the topography of the area, the portion of this parcel that falls within the range of 0-15% slope would be developable at 9.19 acres.

The Lemke site is the sole remaining 5th and 6th RHNA site at 9.19 acres of vacant land of an 11.05-acre parcel in the R3 Zone. The R3 Zone has a maximum density of 21.75 dwelling units per acre, making the R3 zone suitable for lower-income housing. However, based upon site constraints, including topography, the realistic capacity of the site is 106 lower income units. The projection is based on taking the developable portion of the site (9.19 acres) at the average density of multi-family developments in the City (11.6) acres.

As an overlay zone, the RHNAOZD would layer on top of the base R3 zoning regulations, leaving in place the option to develop under the base zoning, but providing the opportunity to develop the property through a ministerial by-right approval process should an applicant propose 20 percent low-income deed restricted affordable housing. The by-right approval process is subject to objective design standards. Accordingly, the Lemke property will be rezoned to have a zoning designation of R3/(RHNAOZ), as required for HCD Certification of the City's 2024-2029 Housing Element of the General Plan.

The purpose of the RHNAOZD is to acknowledge existing statutes, thereby memorializing an existing by-right approval process and application of objective design standards afforded to developers of projects that include 20 percent of the units as housing affordable to lower income households in accordance with Government Code Section 65583.2. Other than the by-right approval and objective design standards processes established by the RHNAOZ, no land use changes are proposed with the rezone of the Lemke property.

2024-2029 HEU Goals and Policies

Based on the City's ability to meet the RHNA allocation as described above, the HEU is a policy document; no actual development of parcels is included as part of the approval. The project evaluated herein therefore does not include development. The Housing Element goals, policies, objectives, and programs, which can be found in Chapter 3.6, Housing Plan, reflect the City's continued commitment to actively support residential development and plan for the City's fair share of regional housing needs.

Safety Element Update

The Safety Element Update (SEU) analyzes potential natural and human-caused hazards to safety in the City and provides goals, policies, and actions to minimize these hazards. The SEU evaluates hazards that may affect existing and future development and growth and provides guidelines for protecting the community and minimizing harm to the extent feasible. The goal of the SEU is to reduce the risk of injury, death, property loss, and other hardships to acceptable levels. Periodic updates of the Safety Element ensure that goals and policies remain relevant and responsive to community needs, hazard situations, and State law. California Government Code Section 65302(g)(1) identifies the following list of safety risks that, at a minimum, must be examined in each Safety Element:

- Seismically induced surface rupture*
- Ground shaking*
- Ground failure*
- Flooding*
- Tsunami
- Seiche
- Dam failure
- Slope instability leading to mudslides and landslides*
- Subsidence*
- Liquefaction areas
- Other seismic hazards

- Wildland and urban fires*
- Climate change*

Items denoted by an * are potential hazards relevant to the City of Sonora.

Background

Throughout the history of the City of Sonora, the City has dealt with various natural and human-caused hazards, including earthquakes, wildfires, droughts, land movement, train derailments, flooding, and a pandemic. Landslides and mudslides have occurred as a result of severe weather and flooding, and most of the City has been identified as being within a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). The City's Safety Element is updated periodically to ensure the City continues to address the relevant natural and human-caused hazards of the time. In the twenty-first century, climate change has become a prevalent safety concern for all jurisdictions, as it increasingly affects other hazards such as severe weather, flooding, wildfires, diseases, extreme heat, and drought. Safety Element updates are now required to evaluate local hazard events and the likelihood of future hazards in the context of climate change.

The City's SEU addresses hazards of concern relevant to the City and provides goals, policies, and implementation measures to adapt to and minimize these hazards. The 2024 Sonora SEU was developed in conjunction with the development of the 2024 City of Sonora Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP). The LHMP identifies specific needs, goals, mitigation actions, capital improvement projects, and local and regional partnerships relevant to the City of Sonora, for the purpose of protecting the community from natural and human-caused hazards. Further details regarding natural disasters, including relevant mitigation actions to reduce vulnerability, are included in the LHMP. The LHMP incorporates a process where hazards are identified and profiled, the people and facilities at risk are analyzed, and mitigation actions are developed to reduce or eliminate hazard risk. The implementation of these mitigation actions, which include both short-term and long-term strategies, involve planning, policy changes, programs, projects, and other activities. The hazards identified in the SEU and many of the goals, policies, and implementation measures included in the SEU coincide with the hazards, goals, and actions included in the LHMP.

Natural and human-caused hazards determined relevant to the City of Sonora in the SEU include the following: wildfire and urban fire hazards, seismic hazards, geologic hazards, flooding, hazardous materials/wastes, emergency operations, human caused hazards, climate change, critical facilities and infrastructure, and evacuation. Similar to the HEU, the SEU is a policy document; no actual development or rezoning of parcels is included as part of the approval. In addition to the goals and policies, the SEU includes implementation measures for action items for the City. The goals, policies, and implementation measures for the SEU are included in each hazard type analysis.

Environmental Review:

An Initial Study (IS) has been prepared under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for review and action by the City of Sonora. The IS evaluates the potential environmental impacts of the Project. Based on the results of the IS, it has been determined that the Project would not have a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Report is not required, and a Negative Declaration (ND) has been prepared. The City of Sonora is hereby releasing this IS/ND, finding it to be accurate and complete and ready for public review.

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15072(g)(5), this notice must disclose whether any listed toxic sites are present. As noted in Section 9, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, of the IS/ND, the project site (citywide in the City of Sonora) includes the following sites included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5: 16 hazardous waste sites, 5 of which have open cases. Neither the Housing Element Update nor the Safety Element Update propose development on any of these sites.

Public Review and Comment:

The public review and comment period for the IS/ND is July 14, 2025 through August 12, 2025 (5:00 pm). All comments received during the review period will be considered by the City prior to finalizing the IS/ND and making a decision on the Project. Any interested party may comment on the Project or the IS/ND. Comments should focus on the sufficiency of the IS/ND in discussing possible impacts on the physical environment and ways in which potential adverse effects might be minimized in light of the IS/ND's purpose to provide useful and accurate information about such factors.

Comments must be received no later than **5:00 p.m. on August 12, 2025**. All comments must be in writing. Please be sure to include your name, address, and telephone number with your comment. Please send comments to the following address:

Tyler Summersett, Community Development Director
City of Sonora Community Development Department
94 North Washington Street, Sonora, California 95370 Email:
tsummersett@sonoraca.org

Document Availability:

The IS/ND is available for review online at:

<https://sonoraca.com/city-of-sonora-news/housing-and-safety-elements-environmental-document/>

A copy of the IS/ND is also available for public review in the Community Development Department, 94 N. Washington Street, Sonora, California 95370, during normal business hours of Monday-Thursday, 8 AM to 4 PM (except 12:30-1:30 PM). Hours exclude public holidays observed by the City of Sonora.