Summary: This bill would facilitate mixed-income and affordable housing development in high-resource communities that lack affordable housing options through streamlined development approvals and various land use incentives.

Background: Removing land use barriers to equitable and inclusive development in high-resource areas is an essential part of addressing California’s housing crisis and increasing choice and opportunity for lower-income families. Many of the places with the most existing resources and amenities (e.g., good schools, parks, etc.) remain inaccessible to lower-income people and people of color. The lack of dense multifamily housing is one of many barriers that impede access.

High-resource areas do not necessarily have existing high-quality transit, but they can support green infill development, which is crucial for future transit expansion. In addition, they are places that have low-wage jobs but offer little chance for the people who have those jobs to live close to where they work. If we are serious about addressing the state’s housing needs and reducing auto dependence, we need to increase density and expand infill development in more parts of the state.

The Bill: Using data and mapping, this bill will require the Department of Housing and Community Development to identify high-resource areas that lack affordable housing opportunities. In these areas—places where there are strong indicators of exclusionary land use patterns and where adding high-density housing would both increase access to opportunity and have a climate benefit through reduced commute distances for lower-wage workers—housing developers would be eligible for various incentives to stimulate the production of mixed-income and affordable housing. The bill’s incentives would not be available in areas that are at high risk for gentrification and displacement.

AB 1279 would incentive mid-rise multifamily buildings that are 100% affordable to lower-income households along main roads and in commercial areas. It would also incentivize smaller mid-rise multifamily buildings that include units affordable to lower-income households along main roads in areas that allow residential uses.

To incentivize development without displacement, the bill would:

- Provide for streamlined approval for qualifying housing projects.
- Allow for zoning overrides and waivers of development standards, such as setback and parking requirements, that can make dense projects infeasible.
- Require high-priced projects under 10 units to pay an affordable housing fee in recognition of the value created by the ability to build more densely.
- Protect existing local policies that require greater levels of affordability.
- Provide an opportunity for communities to avoid the bill’s requirements by taking concrete actions to increase multifamily and affordable housing development.

Sponsors:
- California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
- Public Advocates
- Western Center on Law and Poverty

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