



maps, time to first hearing ranged from 97 days to 477 days, with an average of 244 days.

Non-Governmental Constraints

Environmental Constraints

Throughout the County, physical environmental constraints exist that hamper housing development. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require that new development proposals be reviewed for potential impacts on or from the environment. The Planning Department and other County agencies have the responsibility to enforce County policies, CEQA, NEPA, and ordinances regulating development on flood plains, areas of potential seismic hazard, areas of excessive slope, conservation areas, areas with inappropriate conditions for septic tanks, and other environmental issues. Large portions of the County have one or more of these constraints. These problems usually reduce the density allowed and bring into play mitigation measures and other necessary requirements which add to the cost of the project. The County Planning Department has developed an environmental data base with an extensive mapping system as part of the Comprehensive General Plan to facilitate a timely identification of environmental hazards and resources.

The environmental review process on the one hand can provide useful information for the jurisdiction about impacts on local environments and needed mitigation measures, as well as useful construction and market information for builders, buyers, lenders, and others. On the other hand, the process may also be viewed as an expensive, complex, and time consuming burden.

The environmental review process facilitates housing by:

- Directing housing development to locate away from environmental hazards and resources and ensuring a reasonable level of public safety from environmental hazards through mitigation;
- Ensuring that adequate public facilities such as sewer, water, and roads will be available; and
- Ensuring that adequate public services such as schools, fire protection, police, and health services will be available.

The environmental review process add to housing development costs in the following ways (not all projects require all these costs):

- Environmental Assessment fees (with initial case submittal);
- Environmental Impact Report review fees;
- Consultants costs for preparing preliminary studies;
- Consultants costs for preparing EIR or other technical studies, if required;
- Increasing permit processing time, thereby increasing the total interest costs on borrowed money, property taxes, and other holding costs; and
- Costs of mitigation of potential environmental impacts.

The rapid increase in housing prices throughout the 1980s and 90s cannot be attributed solely to environmental regulation; however, there is evidence that this necessary process has played a significant role in delaying housing projects and increasing finished lot costs.