



SAN DIEGO FAIR HOUSING LAB

Coastal Opportunity

A fair housing analysis of housing production
and access along San Diego's coast

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What This Analysis Does

This report examines the concentration of measured opportunity along San Diego's coast, what has been built there over the last twenty-five years, and what has happened to the households who live there. It looks closely at Pacific Beach and La Jolla within a wider coastal geography.

It does not address land use law or permitting procedure, it makes no legal conclusion, and it takes no position on any specific development or application.

What It Can and Cannot Show

Throughout, this report distinguishes between what its data establishes, what the data suggests without settling, and what it cannot establish at all.

Each of those is labelled where it appears rather than left to the reader to infer. Where a figure does not clear its own margin of error, the report says so and states what the data supports instead.

Prepared By

Prepared, researched, and published by San Diego Fair Housing Lab, a community research organization not yet incorporated or funded.

This report's methodology, findings, and conclusions are the author's own.

The Lab seeks paid data and research work from a range of organizations, community groups, municipalities, and private firms in order to sustain itself. No such engagement is connected to this report, nor has any outside party directed or approved it.

Every figure derives from public data: the U.S. Census Bureau, the California Department of Housing and Community Development, CalEnviroScreen, and the City of San Diego's own filings to the State. Each is reproducible from the sources cited.

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Findings that cut against its argument are stated in the same terms as findings that support it. Where the data cannot support a conclusion, that is stated rather than implied.

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How California Maps Opportunity

California scores every neighborhood on the resources it offers and the changes it is undergoing. Those scores steer affordable housing dollars and shape what cities must justify in their Housing Elements. Four state map layers do the work. Here is what each measures, and the San Diego thresholds behind them.

01 · THE MAP

What an Opportunity Area Is

California grades every census tract on the education, economic, and environmental resources available there, then sorts it into Highest, High, Moderate, or Low Resource. Tracts are ranked within their own region.

Money follows the grade.

The state's Low Income Housing Tax Credit competition awards points to family projects sited in Highest and High Resource areas.

State law requires the analysis.

AB 686 requires every California city to affirmatively further fair housing and to analyze access to opportunity in its Housing Element.

San Diego has a deadline.

Under the Baker Settlement the City agreed to show that by 2028, at least 70 percent of affordable housing projects are permitted in moderate, high, or highest resource areas.

170
of 311

City of San Diego census tracts are graded High or Highest Resource. Ninety-five are graded Low Resource.

02 · THE SCORE

How the Score Is Built

A tract earns one point for each of nine indicators where it beats the San Diego regional median, shown in parentheses.

EDUCATION · 4 POINTS

4th grade math proficiency	(47.2%)
4th grade reading proficiency	(49.9%)
High school graduation rate	(92.3%)
Students not in poverty	(46.2%)

ECONOMIC · 4 POINTS

Above 200% of the federal poverty line	(79.6%)
Adults with a bachelor's degree or higher	(42.7%)
Adults 20 to 64 who are employed	(76.3%)
Median home value	(\$761,900)

ENVIRONMENTAL · 1 POINT

Not in the region's most burdened 5% of tracts	(38 of 688)
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0 – 3 Low Resource	4 – 5 Moderate	6 – 7 High	8 – 9 Highest
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03 · THE CHANGE MAP

Where Neighborhoods Change

The Neighborhood Change Map flags lower-income, mostly people-of-color tracts with large gains in white share and income.

PATHWAY 1 · SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE

Baseline: at or below 120% of regional median income with an above-region people-of-color share. Both thresholds must be met.

1A · since 2000, top half of regional increases

Non-Hispanic white share	+5.1 pts
Median household income	+109%

1B · since 2013, top quarter of regional increases

Non-Hispanic white share	+7.2 pts
Median household income	+82%

PATHWAY 2 · RECENT CHANGE NEARBY

All three conditions required.

- Within one half mile of a Pathway 1A tract
- Since 2013: white share +4.1 pts or income +60%
- Since 2013: rent +64% or value-to-income gap over 25 pts

Changes are nominal. Thresholds are percentiles of increases across the San Diego region. 44 of 311 city tracts meet a pathway.

04 · TWO MORE LABELS

Two More Definitions

One label marks concentrated disadvantage. The other marks concentrated advantage. Fair housing law asks cities to act on both.

HIGH-POVERTY & SEGREGATED AREAS

A tract qualifies only when it meets both tests.

- Poverty: 30% or more of residents below the federal poverty line
- Segregation: a racial or ethnic group, or people of color overall, overrepresented relative to the county at a location quotient above 1.25

San Diego County reference: 56.8% people of color, 34.3% Hispanic, 11.9% Asian, 4.4% Black.

The overlay serves two AFFH aims at once: avoid deepening segregation and poverty, and increase access to opportunity for low-income families.

RACIALLY CONCENTRATED AREAS OF AFFLUENCE

A neighborhood that is both disproportionately white and disproportionately affluent compared to the surrounding county. The common research threshold is a tract at least 80% non-Hispanic white with median household income of at least \$125,000.

Identified in San Diego: La Jolla, Kensington, and Ocean Beach Highlands. Regionally: Carlsbad, Encinitas, Solana Beach, Poway.

How the Map Was Made

San Diego's opportunity map did not appear on its own. Deed restrictions, a 1923 zoning ordinance, federal lending grades, and a coastal height cap each drew lines that are still on the ground. Here is the documented record, and what the City has now agreed to do about it.

01 · 1910 – 1948

Zoning's Long Reach

Deed restrictions, zoning, and federal lending maps decided who could live where. Many of those boundaries are still on the ground.

- Racially restrictive covenants appeared in San Diego deeds from about 1910. Historian LeRoy Harris found one in every deed he sampled.
- The 1923 zoning ordinance reserved one of five zones for single-family dwellings and expressly left private covenants in force.
- Federal appraisers graded La Jolla "all white. No threat of any foreign infiltration" around 1936. It is now on the City's list of racially concentrated areas of affluence.
- Shelley v. Kraemer made racial covenants unenforceable in 1948. Covenant language kept appearing in San Diego deeds afterward.

TODAY

Single-family-only zoning covered 81 percent of the city's residential land in 2023. Every area the City now identifies as high-poverty and segregated was graded C or D on the 1936 lending map.

City of San Diego Assessment of Fair Housing, Housing Element Appendix HE-A. KPBS, November 2021 and September 2023.

02 · 1972 – 2026

Three Height Limits

San Diego has three separate 30-foot height rules with overlapping names. They answer different questions and cover different ground.

COASTAL OVERLAY ZONE · STATE, 1976

Implements the California Coastal Act. Requires a Coastal Development Permit. Height follows the underlying base zone.

COASTAL HEIGHT LIMIT · PROPOSITION D, 1972

A 30-foot cap approved by voters on November 7, 1972, from the ocean to Interstate 5. It reaches inland well past the state coastal boundary.

CLAIREMONT MESA HEIGHT LIMIT · CITY, 1989

A separate 30-foot cap the City Council adopted east of Interstate 5, outside Proposition D, to protect low-scale character and views.

TODAY

The 30-foot cap restricts how much housing can be built along the coast from La Jolla to the Peninsula. That strip is 37 of 38 tracts High or Highest Resource and includes multiple racially concentrated areas of affluence.

Courts twice invalidated attempts to lift the cap for Midway. RCAA counts use the Lab's tract-level screen. Source: San Diego Municipal Code, Chapter 13, Article 2.

03 · 1968 – 2021

The Affirmative Duty

Fair housing law has two halves. The ban on discrimination is well known. The duty to open access became explicit in California in 2018.

- The Fair Housing Act of 1968 barred discrimination in housing. Shelley v. Kraemer had ended enforceable covenants in 1948.
- The 1988 amendments added disability and familial status protections and set accessibility rules for covered multifamily housing.
- AB 686, signed September 30, 2018, made affirmatively furthering fair housing a state planning duty. San Diego's Assessment of Fair Housing followed on June 8, 2021.
- Homeowner rules and planning group review are race-neutral standards that can restrict housing where covenants once did.

TODAY

Land-use decisions now carry a second test: whether they expand access to high-opportunity areas.

Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. California AB 686. City of San Diego Assessment of Fair Housing.

04 · 2019 – 2028

The Baker Settlement

In 2019, residents of Encanto, Logan Heights, and Lincoln Park sued the City over where it was adding housing density.

- Filed May 30, 2019 in federal court under the Fair Housing Act and California's Fair Employment and Housing Act.
- Plaintiffs argued density increases landed in lower-income communities of color while high-resource areas changed little.
- The Council authorized settlement January 27, 2025 by a 7 to 1 vote, finalized in March 2025 with no admission of wrongdoing.
- The settlement funds up to \$500,000 for the Housing Commission's First-Time Homebuyer Program and \$650,000 in attorney fees.

TODAY

The City agreed to show that by 2028, at least 70 percent of affordable housing projects are permitted in moderate, high, or highest resource areas. The court retains jurisdiction.

San Diego Housing Commission Staff Report HA-2025-7, February 26, 2025. Baker v. City of San Diego, No. 3:19-cv-1013.

This sheet records documented actions and their dates. Tract-level counts of racially concentrated areas of affluence use the Lab's regional-percentile screen, a different instrument from the City's community-level identification of La Jolla, Kensington, and the Peninsula.

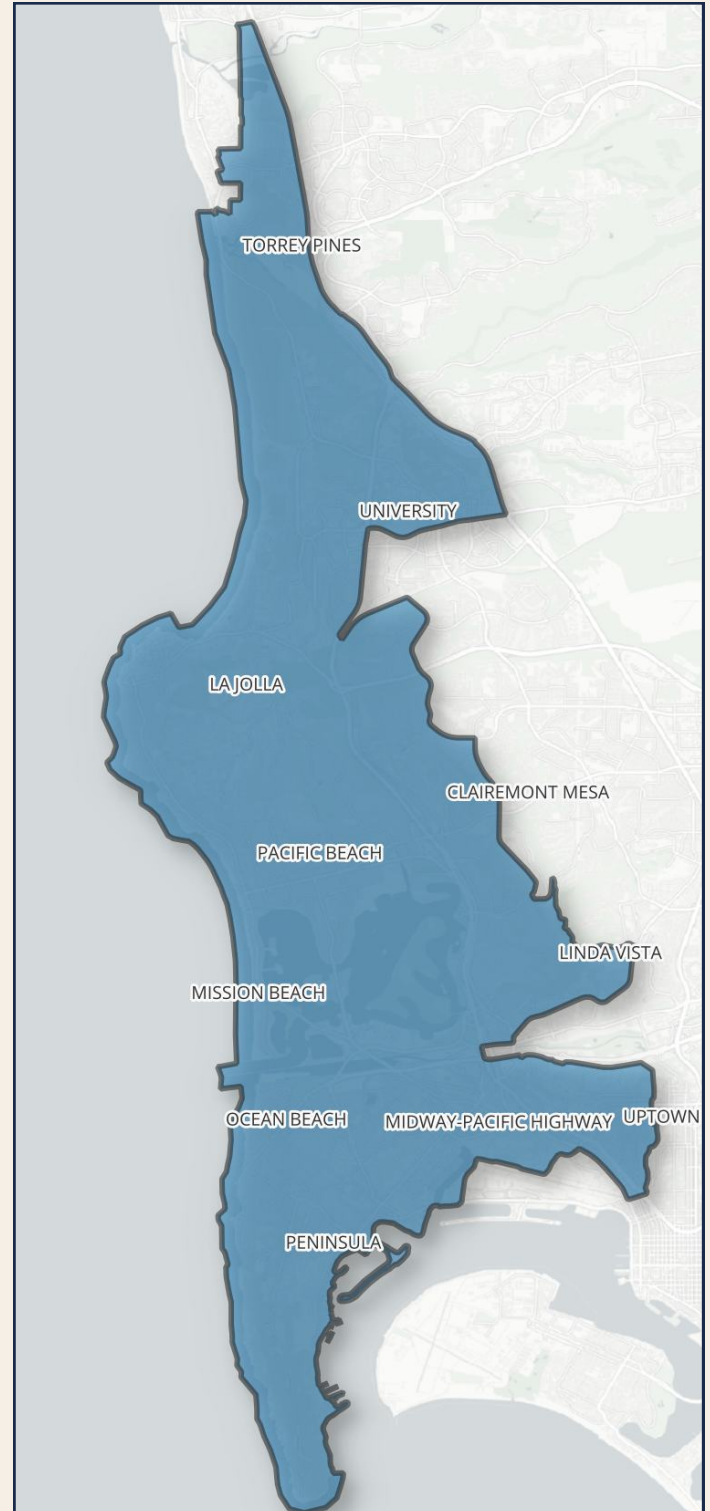
Sources: City of San Diego Assessment of Fair Housing, Housing Element 2021–2029, Appendix HE-A. KPBS, November 17, 2021 and September 27, 2023. Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley. San Diego Municipal Code, Chapter 13, Article 2. California Legislative Information, AB 686. San Diego Housing Commission, Settlement Approval report, March 2025.

Prepared by San Diego Fair Housing Lab, 2026

The Coastal Area. The geography this report examines runs from Torrey Pines in the north to Peninsula in the south, and inland to the ridge above Mission Bay. It covers all of Peninsula, Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Mission Bay Park, Pacific Beach, La Jolla, Midway-Pacific Highway and Torrey Pines, together with the western tracts of Uptown, Linda Vista, Clairemont Mesa and University that sit against that coastal core. **It is a grouping created for this analysis and is not a City or state boundary.**

How the boundary was drawn, and one caution that belongs with it. The grouping was assembled by judgment against stated criteria rather than by a mechanical rule, and the criteria are these. It stops clearly north of Downtown, because Downtown's housing history, land market and opportunity profile make it a different case rather than the southern end of this one. It does not simply stop at Interstate 5, because western Clairemont Mesa carries its own height limit under a separate overlay and behaves like the communities to its west. Western Uptown is not height-constrained at all, but it is persistently affluent and has produced almost no housing, so it behaves the same way for different reasons. The northern connection between Clairemont Mesa and Torrey Pines follows communities with similar opportunity scores and similar production records.

The caution follows from the last of those. Two of the criteria used to include a community, its opportunity level and its housing production, are among the things this report then measures across the grouping as a whole. A reader should not treat "this geography is high-opportunity and low-producing" as an independent finding about the grouping, because the grouping was partly assembled on those grounds. The findings that do not depend on the grouping at all are the ones about Pacific Beach and La Jolla, which are the City's own community planning areas, and the overlay comparison in Section 4, which uses the City's published zoning boundary rather than anything drawn here.



The Coastal Area, the sixty-tract geography this report examines.

Coastal Opportunity

Opportunity and housing access in coastal San Diego

SAN DIEGO FAIR HOUSING LAB

August 2026

San Diego Fair Housing Lab Draft, 2026-08-19

The Opportunity

San Diego's coast holds the greatest concentration of measured opportunity in the city, and over the last twenty-five years it added no households at all while the city added more than eighteen percent. Those two facts, held together, describe one of the clearest fair housing opportunities the City has in front of it today.

The coast is where San Diego's strongest measured educational outcomes sit, alongside the lowest environmental burden recorded anywhere in the city and the economic conditions associated with long-term upward mobility. Fifty-five of the sixty census tracts in the city's coastal geography fall in the State of California's two highest resource tiers. That concentration is not a matter of opinion or of local reputation. It is measured, tract by tract, by the state.

Over the same twenty-five years, that geography added population and added no households. Its occupied homes today are statistically indistinguishable from where they stood in 2000, while the city's grew by more than eighteen percent. The result is a widening distance between where opportunity is concentrated and where San Diego is adding places to live.

Opening the coast is not a remedy owed to one neighborhood. Opportunity is a regional resource, and the obligation to affirmatively further fair housing is an obligation to expand access to it. The coast is where the same policy change reaches the most opportunity at once, and where it makes fuller use of public investment San Diego has already made.

Expanding access to the coast is not an argument that anyone should have to leave their neighborhood to reach opportunity, and it is not a substitute for investing in the parts of San Diego the city has underinvested in for decades. Both obligations are real, and neither discharges the other. This report is about one of them because that is the one its data can speak to.

Opening the coast is not a remedy owed to one neighborhood. It is where a change in policy would reach the largest concentration of measured opportunity in San Diego.

1. What This Analysis Found

The coast holds San Diego's densest concentration of measured opportunity, and the strongest evidence for that has nothing to do with what a house costs there. The State of California scores every census tract in California on education, economic, and environmental conditions, and sorts it into one of four resource tiers. That classification is the most consequential measurement in this report, because access to a Highest Resource neighborhood is associated with outcomes that follow a household for decades. Every one of Pacific Beach's thirteen census tracts and every one of La Jolla's eight is High or Highest Resource. The measures this report leans on hardest are the ones no home price enters: fourth-grade math and reading proficiency, high school graduation, and environmental burden.

It also ended the last quarter-century with no more households than it began, while its population grew. Occupied homes across the coastal geography stood at 90,609 in 2000 and 89,748 today, a change of -0.9 percent against a margin of error of plus or minus 1.9 points and therefore not distinguishable from no change at all. Citywide they grew 18.5 percent over the same years, from 442,094 to 523,840, an increase that clears its own margin more than twenty times over. In the current state housing cycle, which began in 2021, Pacific Beach and La Jolla each permitted new housing at roughly a third of the citywide rate.

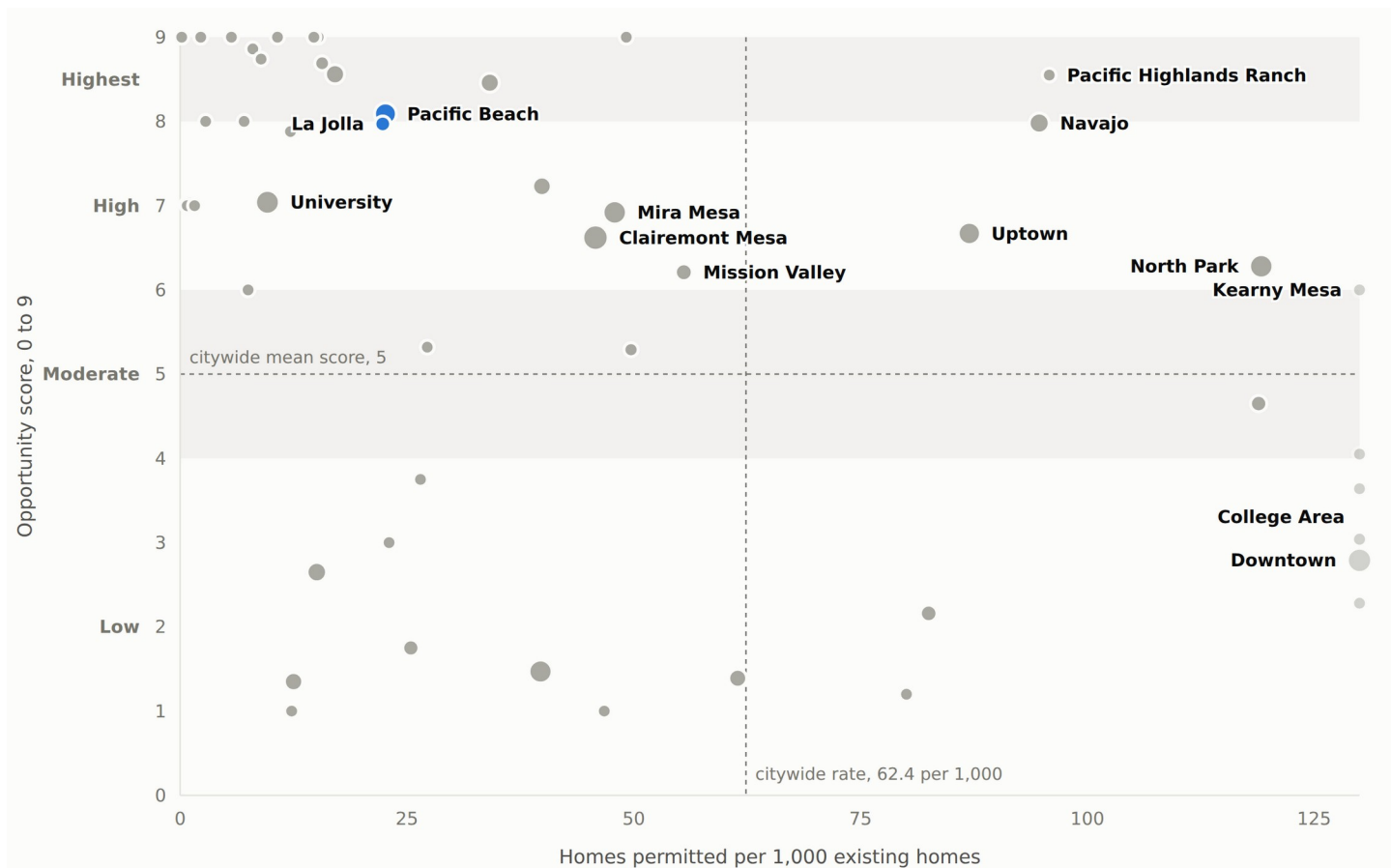
Pacific Beach was permitted 81 homes below the regional median in the current cycle and has completed three. La Jolla was permitted seven and has completed one. Citywide the figures are 6,711 permitted and 238 completed. Permitted and completed are reported separately throughout this report, and no rate is computed between them.

In a 2022 departmental memorandum, the City's Planning Department documented that the coastal height limit is a barrier to building homes and to building rent-restricted homes. In a July 2022 departmental memorandum, the Planning Department recorded that the Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone "remains as a barrier to maximizing the construction of homes and residential developments with restricted rents." What has not been established, and what this report adds, is where that barrier sits relative to opportunity.

The coast has absorbed very little of the region's housing growth, and the measurable neighborhood change has occurred elsewhere. The state identifies 44 of San Diego's 311 census tracts as showing a neighborhood-change pathway. Exactly one of the coastal geography's sixty tracts does. Those pathway areas are concentrated in the parts of the city that were affordable at the start of the period. The coast is silent on that instrument because it was already among the least accessible ground in San Diego before the period began, with housing costing 6.90 times local income in Pacific Beach in 2000 against 4.51 citywide.

San Diego has already added substantial housing on high-opportunity ground elsewhere, with very different neighborhood outcomes depending on the place. Mission Valley permitted 3,557 units at 98.3 percent multifamily, more than doubled its occupied homes, and carries no displacement flag on any of its five tracts. Uptown, the community planning area containing Hillcrest, built at nearly four times Pacific Beach's rate on comparable ground and carries flags on two of its twelve tracts. North Park built more still and carries flags on ten of thirteen. Production is possible on high-resource land. What follows from it varies.

Families make the access question concrete. Pacific Beach houses far fewer children than the city as a whole, and it added no renter households over a period when the city added nearly a quarter more. The schools serving it draw substantially more students into their attendance area than they send out. Familial status has been a protected class under federal fair housing law since 1988, which makes whether families can reach a high-opportunity neighborhood a fair housing question rather than only a housing market one.



Opportunity against housing production across San Diego's community planning areas.

Opportunity against production, every planning area at once. Each dot is one of San Diego's community planning areas. Its height is the population-weighted opportunity score the State assigns, on the same 0 to 9 scale used throughout this report, with the four resource tiers banded behind it. Its distance to the right is homes permitted per thousand existing homes in the current housing cycle, and the size of the dot is the size of the existing housing stock. Pacific Beach and La Jolla are marked.

Source. California Department of Housing and Community Development, Opportunity Map 2026, against Housing Element Annual Progress Report filings geocoded to census tract. Opportunity scores use the 311-tract household universe and production the wider 322-tract universe. The horizontal axis stops at 130 per thousand so the rest of the city is not compressed against the left edge, and the six planning areas above it are drawn at the right edge in a lighter tone rather than at their true position: Midway-Pacific Highway at 419.29, Kearny Mesa at 250.14, Downtown at 214.43, Otay Mesa at 177.33, College Area at 176.65, and Greater Golden Hill at 164.86. Scores are population-weighted means of an ordinal tier scale, so small differences between planning areas inside the same band are not meaningful. A dot's position says nothing about why a place builds what it builds.

Displacement and access are different questions. The coast is where that difference is clearest.

2. What Opportunity Means Here

Census tract. A small statistical area the Census Bureau uses to report data, usually holding between 1,200 and 8,000 people. San Diego's city limits contain 311 of them in this analysis. It is the smallest geography at which most of this data exists.

Community planning area. The City of San Diego's own neighborhood planning boundaries. Pacific Beach and La Jolla are each one. Every figure here that names a neighborhood uses these official boundaries.

Coastal San Diego. A grouping of 60 census tracts created for this analysis and not a City or state boundary. It covers all of Peninsula, Ocean Beach, Mission Beach, Mission Bay Park, Pacific Beach, La Jolla, Midway-Pacific Highway and Torrey Pines, together with the western tracts of Uptown, Linda Vista, Clairemont Mesa and University that sit on the ridge against the coastal core.

High Resource and Highest Resource. The Opportunity Map's two top tiers. Scores of 0 to 3 are Low Resource, 4 to 5 Moderate, 6 to 7 High, and 8 to 9 Highest.

Opportunity score. The Opportunity Map's 0 to 9 summary of a tract's position. The citywide average in San Diego is 5.

Education subscore. The part of the opportunity score built from fourth-grade math proficiency, fourth-grade reading proficiency, high school graduation rates, and the share of students not in poverty. Scored 0 to 4.

CalEnviroScreen. California's measure of cumulative environmental burden by census tract, produced by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, combining pollution exposure and population vulnerability and reported as a percentile. A tract at the 5th percentile is less burdened than 95 percent of California tracts. The Opportunity Map's own environmental domain draws on CalEnviroScreen in the state's published methodology. This report uses CalEnviroScreen percentiles as a separate measure and does not treat them and HCD's environmental burden flag as independent confirmations of each other.

The case for the coast as a fair housing opportunity does not rest on its housing being expensive. It rests on measures that have nothing to do with price.

The organizing framework for this report is the California Department of Housing and Community Development's Opportunity Map, which scores every census tract in the state and sorts it into one of four tiers. All thirteen Pacific Beach tracts and all eight La Jolla tracts are High or Highest Resource. Ten of Pacific Beach's are Highest, as are six of La Jolla's. Across the wider coastal geography, 55 of 60 tracts fall in those two tiers, against 54.7 percent of tracts citywide.

That classification carries more weight in fair housing analysis than any other single measure available at this scale. It is the state's own instrument, it is applied uniformly to every tract in California, and it is the measure California law directs jurisdictions to use when assessing whether housing decisions expand or restrict access to opportunity. Where a household lives inside that map is associated with school performance, economic mobility, and environmental exposure over a lifetime.

One caution belongs at the front of that finding rather than in a footnote. Median home value is one of the inputs to HCD's economic component, so a tract's resource tier and its housing costs are not fully independent of each other. A reader is entitled to ask whether "Highest Resource" is a restatement of "expensive." This report therefore leans hardest on the education and environmental components, into which no home value or property price enters at any point.

The education component is the cleanest of those. It is built from fourth-grade math proficiency, fourth-grade reading proficiency, high school graduation rates, and the share of students not in poverty. Eleven of Pacific Beach’s thirteen tracts score the maximum on it. In its strongest tract on both measures, 06073008006, math proficiency reaches 66.2 percent against a regional median of 47.2 percent and reading proficiency 72.8 percent against 49.9 percent. That tract is named as the neighborhood’s highest performer rather than as a typical one. Those are measured student outcomes. Recomputing the component from those four school measures alone reproduces the state’s stored value on every one of the 681 tracts where it can be tested, and no home value enters any of them. One of the four, the share of students not in poverty, is derived from student household income, so this is a measure independent of property value rather than one independent of income altogether.

The environmental evidence points the same way and is equally independent of price. Not one of the twenty-one Pacific Beach and La Jolla tracts carries an environmental burden flag. Pacific Beach’s population-weighted CalEnviroScreen burden sits at the 6.9th percentile statewide and La Jolla’s at the 5.9th, against 37.1 for the city as a whole. Across the coastal geography the figure is 17.0, and it holds across the cluster’s tracts rather than resting on a few low-burden outliers.

Taken together, these are the conditions that make coastal access a fair housing question. What is constrained is not a view. It is access to schools that perform, air that is measurably cleaner, and a set of conditions the state itself associates with better long-term outcomes.

What that means for San Diego. These conditions did not arise on their own. Public investment built and sustains a great deal of what the opportunity map measures on the coast: the schools, the transportation, the parks, the infrastructure, and the environmental quality that the city and the state have funded over decades. Expanding who can live within reach of those assets allows investment San Diego has already made to serve more households. A fair housing strategy aimed at the coast is therefore a question of efficiency as well as equity: it puts existing public resources within reach of more people without requiring the city to build them again somewhere else.

Table 1. Both neighborhoods sit at the top of the state’s scale.

Geography	Tracts High or Highest Resource	Mean opportunity score	Environmental burden flags	CalEnviroScreen percentile
Pacific Beach	13 of 13	8	0	6.9
La Jolla	8 of 8	7	0	5.9
Coastal San Diego	55 of 60	7	2	17.0
Citywide	170 of 311	5	23	37.1

Source. California Department of Housing and Community Development, Opportunity Map 2026, and CalEnviroScreen 5.0. Universe: the 311-tract household universe. The opportunity score is a mean of an ordinal 0 to 9 tier scale, reported as the tier the population-weighted mean falls within: Pacific Beach’s mean of 8.09 falls in tier 8, La Jolla’s of 7.97 in tier 7, and Coastal San Diego’s of 7.53 also in tier 7. The environmental burden flag and the CalEnviroScreen percentile are correlated measures of environmental conditions and are not independent confirmations of each other. The 2 flagged coastal tracts are the same 2 flagged inside the overlay zone in Table 4 and are not additional to them.

What this does not claim: that opportunity scores capture everything worth measuring about a neighborhood, or that a high score means a place is good to live in. These indicators record where public systems have concentrated schools, environmental protection and investment. They do not measure the worth of residents, the strength of communities, or the social networks, institutions and family ties a neighborhood holds. A low score describes underinvestment, not deficiency.

The coast's advantage is measured in the conditions that support opportunity, and San Diego's opportunity is to make those conditions accessible to more people while making fuller use of the public resources already concentrated there.

3. The Coastal Exception

Occupied homes and housing units. A housing unit is a dwelling that exists. An occupied home is one where someone lives. The difference is vacancy, which includes second homes and units used part of the year. Both figures in this report are net change across a period rather than a count of individual units, so a place can show net growth in housing units and little or no net growth in occupied homes. That distinction carries the central finding of this report.

RHNA cycle. The Regional Housing Needs Allocation, the state process assigning each city a housing target over roughly eight years. San Diego's sixth cycle began in April 2021. Production figures cover that cycle unless stated otherwise.

Multifamily. Five or more homes in the same building. This is a narrower category than it sounds: duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and accessory dwelling units are counted separately throughout this report.

Accessory dwelling unit. A second, smaller home added to a lot that already has a house. Sometimes called a granny flat or backyard unit.

Seasonal, recreational, or occasional-use units. A Census Bureau vacancy category for homes that are not the occupant's usual residence: second homes, vacation homes, and units used part of the year. Short-term rentals, which the City licenses under its Short-Term Residential Occupancy (STRO) program, may fall into this category, but the two are not the same measure. A licensed short-term rental can also be counted as occupied or as available for rent depending on how it is used, and this report does not treat the Census category and the City's license roster as interchangeable.

The coast did not stop growing. It stopped adding households.

Across the sixty-tract coastal geography, occupied homes stood at 90,609 in 2000 and 89,748 today. That is a change of -0.9 percent against a margin of error of plus or minus 1.9 points, so the direction of the movement is not established: what the data supports is that the geography added no households, not that it lost them. Over the same period the city's occupied homes grew from 442,094 to 523,840, an increase of 18.5 percent that clears its own margin more than twenty times over. Coastal population grew 7.3 percent across the same years.

Both tenures are flat, and that matters more than either one moving. The measured owner-occupied change is 1.8 percent downward and the renter-occupied change 0.2 percent downward, and neither clears its own margin of error: the ratios are 0.62 and 0.05. Neither is offered here as a decline. Citywide over the same period owner households grew 13.3 percent and renter households 23.7 percent, both clearing comfortably. What the split establishes is that the coast's flat result is not one tenure offsetting the other. The city's household growth reached owners and renters alike, and the coast's absence of growth did too.

The flat result is not the product of one place or one unusual event. Of the geography's sixty tracts, fifteen lost housing units outright, twenty-six were stable, and eighteen grew. Total housing units across the geography rose 3.6 percent while the citywide figure rose 21.7 percent, and the vacancy rate rose 4.1 percentage points against a citywide rise of 2.6 points.

La Jolla is the sharper case, while Pacific Beach shows the same pattern in a different form. La Jolla’s occupied homes fell from 11,002 to 10,454, a decline of 5.0 percent, while its total housing units rose 2.1 percent and its population rose 4.2 percent. It is the sharpest household decline among the neighborhoods this report examines. Its change of 548 occupied homes sits against a margin of error of plus or minus 527, exceeding it by 21 homes. That margin is a floor: it excludes both the 2000 sample’s own error and the boundary harmonization, and the change stops clearing once the 2000 endpoint carries a margin above plus or minus 150 of its own, roughly 1.5 percent of La Jolla’s household base. A margin that narrow is not plausible for a long-form sample harmonized across two tract generations. This report therefore treats it as the largest decline it observed rather than as an established one. Its vacancy rate rose from 9.8 percent to 16.0 percent, the highest current rate of any geography examined here. Pacific Beach’s occupied homes rose 1.9 percent over the same period, 390 homes against a margin of error of plus or minus 895, so that movement is not distinguishable from no change either. Citywide the same measure grew 18.5 percent. Neither neighborhood added households measurably.

Neither is producing much new housing. Pacific Beach permitted 547 units in the current state housing cycle, 22.6 for every thousand homes it already had. La Jolla permitted 278, at 22.3. The citywide rate is 62.4. The shortfall is not peculiar to either neighborhood: the coastal geography as a whole permits at 36.5 per thousand and Council District 1, which contains both, permits at 24.5. Both sit far below the city.

Less has been finished than was authorized, and the gap is largest where it matters most. Of the 547 homes Pacific Beach was permitted to build this cycle, 89 have been completed. Of La Jolla’s 278, 53 have been completed. Across the city, 4,207 of 35,482 permitted homes have been completed. Most of the cycle’s permits are too recent to have plausibly finished, so these counts will rise, and the coast is not unusual in that respect.

The below-market column is where the coast is different. Pacific Beach has completed 3 homes affordable below the regional median from this cycle’s permits. La Jolla has completed 1.

A stricter test removes the timing question entirely. Among permits issued between 2018 and 2022, old enough that 99.4 percent of matched San Diego projects of the same age have finished construction, Pacific Beach permitted 13 homes below the regional median and has completed 5. **La Jolla permitted 3 and has completed none.** That zero rests on a base of three units and a single ordinary project would change it, which is why it is reported as a count.

Table 2. Permitted and completed, in counts.

Geography	Permitted	Completed to date	Below-market permitted	Below-market completed
Pacific Beach	547	89	81	3
La Jolla	278	53	7	1
Coastal San Diego	3,654	523	269	15
Citywide	35,482	4,207	6,711	238

Source. City of San Diego Housing Element Annual Progress Report filings to the State, geocoded to census tract. Universe: the production universe, 62 coastal tracts and 322 citywide. Current state housing cycle, which began in 2021. A home counts in this table because its own permit fell in this cycle, not because construction finished inside it. The completion columns are not a numerator over the permitted columns beside them and no rate should be computed from the pair: most of this cycle’s permits are too recent to have plausibly finished.

One further count belongs with these, because it changes what the permit figures can be read to mean. A large share of what has actually finished construction in Pacific Beach was authorized before this data begins: 282 completed homes trace to permits issued before 2018, more than everything completed from the two tracked permit cohorts combined. Most of what is being delivered in Pacific Beach today was approved before the record this report can follow.

What was built matters as much as how much. Accessory dwelling units accounted for 39.2 percent of coastal permits against 17.7 percent citywide, while multifamily buildings accounted for 46.3 percent against 73.5 percent citywide. Inside Pacific Beach, accessory units were 121 of 202 permits issued in 2025. Permit records do not show whether an accessory unit is rented to a household, occupied by the owner’s own family, or held empty, so the effect of that composition on occupied homes cannot be read directly from the permit data.

Pacific Beach makes the gap between units and households concrete. Its total housing units rose 8.6 percent, from 22,253 to 24,167. Its occupied homes moved from 21,001 to 21,391, a difference of 390 that does not clear its own margin of error. Net housing-unit growth of 1,914 accompanied that movement. Both figures are net change across the period rather than a disposition of individual units, and the comparison is between two net movements. Two of Pacific Beach’s thirteen tracts lost housing units outright. Citywide, average household size fell from 2.62 to 2.52, a decline that clears its own margin of error more than three times over. Pacific Beach’s moved from 1.93 to 1.99, a change that does not clear its margin, at a ratio of 0.45, and is not offered here as growth. What the data supports is that the city’s households got measurably smaller over the period and Pacific Beach’s did not measurably change.

Seasonal and occasional-use housing makes the pattern legible across the whole geography. The Census Bureau records these as units that are not the occupant’s usual residence. Across Coastal San Diego they rose from 3,209 to 5,030 and now account for 48.8 percent of the geography’s vacant stock, against 27.1 percent citywide. In La Jolla they rose from 791 to 1,037 and account for 51.9 percent of that planning area’s vacant stock. In Pacific Beach they rose by 798 units and account for 53.1 percent. The total number of homes Pacific Beach was permitted to build in the entire current state housing cycle is 547. Those two figures span different periods, a quarter-century of change against a four-year cycle, and they are reported that way.

Table 3. Units grew. Occupied homes did not.

Geography	Total unit change	Occupied home change	Population change	Permitted per 1,000 existing	Seasonal share of vacant stock
Pacific Beach	8.6	1.9	4.4	22.6	53.1
La Jolla	2.1	-5.0	4.2	22.3	51.9
Coastal San Diego	3.6	-0.9	7.3	36.5	48.8
Citywide	21.7	18.5	14.1	62.4	27.1

Source. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census and American Community Survey five-year estimates, with production from Annual Progress Report filings. All columns are percentages except permitted per 1,000. Household measures use the 311-tract universe and production the wider 322-tract universe. Three of the four occupied-home changes do not clear their own margins of error at the 90 percent level: Coastal San Diego at -861 homes against plus or minus 1,689, Pacific Beach at 390 against plus or minus 895, and La Jolla at -548 against plus or minus 527, which exceeds its printed margin by 21 homes but not durably: that margin excludes the 2000 sample’s own error and the boundary harmonization, and the change stops clearing on any 2000-endpoint margin above plus or minus 150. Only the citywide increase clears comfortably. This column reports estimates, and the text states which of them are distinguishable from no change. The seasonal-share column carries a wider margin than the others because it is a proportion of a proportion, seasonal units within vacant stock where the vacant stock is itself an estimate: Pacific Beach’s 53.1 percent sits against plus or minus 9.5 points. Its 26.0-point gap to the citywide figure nonetheless clears, at 2.7 times its own margin, as does Pacific Beach’s vacancy rate against the citywide rate at 2.5.

What this does not claim: why the coast added no households while its population grew. That is not established by this data. Nor does it claim that occupied homes declined: the measured change does not clear its own margin of error.

More people. No more households. The city added eighteen percent.

4. When a Standard Constrains Access

Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone. A City zoning rule limiting new buildings to 30 feet above finished grade. San Diego Municipal Code sections 132.0501 through 132.0505. Voters adopted it as Proposition D in 1972. It runs from the city's northern limits south to the Mexican border, seaward to the limit of city jurisdiction and inland to Interstate 5 as that highway existed on January 1, 1971. Four areas sit outside it: downtown, Mission Bay, the Border area, and Midway-Pacific Highway. Amended by Proposition L in 1988, Proposition D in 1998, Proposition C in 2000, Measure E in 2020, and again in 2024.

Deed-restricted. Housing whose affordability is secured by a recorded legal covenant for a set period. Not every below-moderate home is deed-restricted.

Racially concentrated area of affluence. A neighborhood where affluence and racial concentration occur together: a place markedly wealthier and markedly whiter than the region around it. It is the mirror of the racially concentrated area of poverty that fair housing analysis has examined for decades, and federal and state fair housing guidance treats both as relevant. The City of San Diego identifies racially concentrated areas of affluence at the community level, naming whole communities.

Affirmatively furthering fair housing. California law defines this as "taking meaningful actions, in addition to combating discrimination, that overcome patterns of segregation and foster inclusive communities free from barriers that restrict access to opportunity based on protected characteristics." Government Code section 8899.50, added by AB 686 in 2018. It binds public agencies, including cities, and reaches local housing elements.

A development standard can be neutral in its language and still have an exclusionary effect on access to opportunity. The City has already documented that this one constrains housing. What has not been established is where it constrains it.

Fair housing law has long recognized that a rule applying equally to everyone can still produce unequal access. California's affirmative obligation goes further than prohibiting discrimination: it asks whether a jurisdiction's own laws, programs, and land-use decisions expand or restrict access to opportunity. That is a different question from intent, and it is the question this section asks.

Three rules that govern coastal development

Three separate regulatory regimes govern development along San Diego's coast. Two of them limit building height. The third governs coastal permitting and is routinely confused with the other two.

The **Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone** is the best known. Codified at sections 132.0501 through 132.0505 of the Municipal Code, it restricts new buildings to thirty feet above finished grade. Its area runs from the city's northern limits south to the Mexican border, seaward to the limit of city jurisdiction and inland to Interstate 5 as that highway existed on January 1, 1971. San Diego voters adopted it as Proposition D in 1972.

The **Coastal Overlay Zone**, sections 132.0401 through 132.0404, implements the California Coastal Act, which the Legislature passed in 1976. Its stated purpose is to protect and enhance the quality of public access and coastal resources, and it works through coastal development permits rather than through a height cap. It does not limit building height, and it is worth naming here precisely because it is so often assumed to. It matters to this analysis for a procedural reason: amendments to development regulations inside its boundaries require certification by the California Coastal Commission as a Local Coastal Program amendment, so changes to coastal development standards involve the state as well as the City.

The **Clairemont Height Limit Overlay Zone**, sections 132.1301 through 132.1306, provides supplemental height regulation for properties in the Clairemont Community Plan Area. The City Council adopted it in December 1997, effective January 2000, and amended and renamed it in January 2026. Its limits are set by a recorded map rather than stated in the code text, and that map now carries five tiers rather than one: 30, 35, 40, 55 and 65 feet. Thirty feet was the former flat limit across the whole area.

One consequence of that amendment is worth stating precisely, because it is this report's argument happening in real time.

The 2026 changes do not take effect inside the Coastal Overlay Zone until the California Coastal Commission certifies them. In the part of Clairemont that is coastal, the thirty-foot limit is therefore likely still the operative standard while the rest of the community has moved to a five-tier scheme.

The sequence is worth stating plainly, and stating carefully. The federal Fair Housing Act was enacted in 1968. San Diego's coastal height limit followed in 1972, the state's Coastal Act in 1976, and the Clairemont height limit in 1997. Those dates sit inside a broader and well-documented transition in American housing law. Racially restrictive covenants, which wrote racial exclusion directly into property deeds, were held judicially unenforceable by the United States Supreme Court in *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 made it unlawful to write or enforce them. California has continued to address their legacy in the present: Assembly Bill 1466, enacted in 2021, requires county recorders to identify and redact discriminatory covenant language from recorded property records, and San Diego County is among the jurisdictions carrying out that work now.

As those explicitly racial instruments became unenforceable, land-use regulation remained the mechanism determining what could be built and, through it, who could afford to live where. That transition from overt exclusion to facially neutral land-use standards is the general history against which any modern land-use rule is examined under fair housing law. **It is context for the question, not evidence about this rule.** Nothing in this report suggests that the coastal height limit was adopted as a substitute for racial exclusion, or that its adoption is connected to covenants in any way.

This report does not claim that the coastal height limit was adopted in order to exclude anyone. The City's own record states its purpose as the protection of coastal views, and no evidence in this analysis contradicts that. The affirmative fair housing question is a different one and does not depend on the answer. It asks what a rule does now.

The City's own account

On July 15, 2022, the City's Planning Department produced a memorandum on regulatory barriers within the overlay zone, written by its Deputy Director to the Planning Director. Its opening paragraph separates the rule's purpose from its effect.

"While the intent of the Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone was adopted to protect views to the coast by restricting the development of taller buildings, it has also resulted in limiting the overall amount of new housing development for either for sale or rental."

City of San Diego Planning Department, July 15, 2022

The same paragraph carries the effect through to cost and to rent-restricted housing specifically.

"This has contributed to the cost of development and imposes a barrier to maximizing the number of homes that can be built on properties and the construction of homes that are rent restricted throughout the City."

City of San Diego Planning Department, July 15, 2022

Its closing assessment is more direct: the overlay "remains as a barrier to maximizing the construction of homes and residential developments with restricted rents."

The memorandum assembled a sample of thirteen housing developments built within the overlay since 2000. Twelve of the thirteen were located and confirmed inside the published overlay boundary for this analysis; the thirteenth has no public street address and is reported here as unresolved rather than assumed. Every one of the thirteen is three stories. One of the thirteen has homes with rents deed-restricted below market. The sample's own geography is worth reading: five of the thirteen are in Peninsula, four in Midway-Pacific Highway, two in Pacific Beach, and none in La Jolla. On rent-restricted housing across the whole overlay, the memorandum reports that communities inside the zone account for about three percent of the City's rent-restricted homes, a figure it sources to a March 2022 communication from the San Diego Housing Commission. That is a measure of existing stock at a point in time.

That is a City record of a housing constraint. It is not an analysis of where the constraint falls.

What the constraint means in the geography we measured

The memorandum never asks how the geography under the overlay compares to the rest of San Diego on opportunity, and it makes no reference to resource tiers, to race, or to fair housing. That comparison is what this analysis contributes, and it is where the constraint stops being a housing statistic and becomes a fair housing question.

The overlay's own boundary is published by the City as a mapped zoning layer, so the comparison can be made directly rather than estimated. Fifty-one census tracts fall inside it on a majority-land-overlap basis for household measures, and fifty-three on the slightly wider universe this report uses for production rates.

80.4 percent of those tracts are High or Highest Resource, against 54.7 percent citywide. They hold persistent or newly classified concentrations of affluence at 31.4 percent against 8.4 percent citywide. They permitted 32.54 homes per thousand existing against 62.37 citywide, and housing affordable below the regional median at **2.32 per thousand against 11.80 citywide.**

Those last two figures are the finding. On total housing, the overlay permits at roughly half the citywide rate. On housing affordable below the regional median, it permits at roughly a fifth. Whatever this geography does to housing supply in general, it does considerably more of it to the kind of housing that expands access to the opportunity concentrated there.

Two qualifications belong with those numbers rather than after them. The overlay is not a synonym for the affluent northern coast: roughly a fifth of its area lies in the south bay, and the comparison above covers the whole zone. And the result does not depend on how a straddling tract is assigned. Every conclusion here holds under all three assignment rules tested, and tightening the rule strengthens rather than weakens it.

Two different quantities land on nearly the same number, and this report treats neither as confirming the other. The memorandum reports that communities inside the overlay hold about three percent of the City's rent-restricted homes, which is a share of existing stock in 2022. Measured independently against this cycle's permitting, tracts inside the overlay account for 3.02 percent of the city's below-market production over a four-year cycle. One is a stock at a point in time and the other is a flow across four years. **No change over time can be computed between them,** and their similarity is a coincidence rather than a corroboration.

Table 4. Inside the overlay, below-market production runs at a fifth of the citywide rate.

Geography	Tracts, household data	Tracts, permit data	Share High or Highest	Permitted per 1,000	Below-moderate per 1,000	Burden flags
Inside the Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone	51	53	80.4	32.5	2.32	2
Outside the overlay	260	269	49.6	67.8	13.52	21
Citywide	311	322	54.7	62.4	11.80	23

Source. Overlay membership from the City's published zoning layer, assigned by majority land-area overlap with water excluded. Share High or Highest is the share of tracts in the State's two highest resource tiers. Permitted per 1,000 counts all homes permitted per thousand existing homes, and below-moderate per 1,000 counts only those affordable below the regional median. Burden flags counts tracts carrying an environmental burden flag. Two tract counts appear because household measures and production measures count different things. Household measures use the tracts where people live and where the Census reports their characteristics. Production measures use a wider set, because a tract can record building permits without meeting the household screen. Both counts are correct and they are not meant to agree. The first two rows are a partition of the third on both universes, 51 plus 260 and 53 plus 269, and their environmental burden flags sum to the citywide 23. Inside the overlay, housing is permitted at 0.48 times the rate outside it, and housing below the regional median at 0.17 times.

Who lives in that geography now

A **racially concentrated area of affluence** is a neighborhood where affluence and racial concentration occur together: a place markedly wealthier and markedly whiter than the region around it. The concept is the mirror of the racially concentrated area of poverty that fair housing analysis has examined for decades, and federal and state fair housing guidance now treats both as relevant.

This report applies its own tract-level screen for **persistent concentrations of affluence**, meaning tracts that have held that position over time rather than arriving at it recently. That is a narrower and more demanding test than the concept in general use, and it is a different instrument from the City of San Diego's own identification of racially concentrated areas of affluence at the community level. The two are not combined anywhere in this report.

On that screen, San Diego contains sixteen persistent concentrations of affluence. **Fifteen of the sixteen are inside the coastal geography.** Counting tracts that are either persistent or newly classified, the coastal geography holds 22 of its 60 against 26 of the city's 311, a share roughly four and a half times the citywide figure. Six of La Jolla's eight tracts meet it, so a single planning area holding 2.6 percent of the city's census tracts holds 37.5 percent of its persistent concentrations. Four of Pacific Beach's thirteen tracts meet it and the other nine do not. Those four form a single connected area along the boundary with La Jolla, confirmed by testing tract adjacency directly against boundary geometry rather than read from a map. One of the four, tract 06073008006, straddles the planning-area boundary itself: 62.1 percent of its land sits in Pacific Beach and 37.6 percent in La Jolla. The pattern does not stop where the City's planning lines are drawn.

Two things are true at once, and the report says both. The coastal geography contains an unusually high concentration of persistent affluence, and the height limit has the housing-constraining effects the City itself documented. These conditions coexist in the same geography. Nothing in this analysis establishes that either produced the other.

That distinction between condition and motive is what allows the fair housing question to be asked cleanly. This data establishes where persistent concentrations of affluence are, and where the housing constraint operates. It does not establish how those patterns came to exist, and it does not establish that the height limit was adopted for an exclusionary purpose. The City's stated purpose was the protection of coastal views. What remains is the affirmative question: a current land-use rule limits housing across a geography that holds both the city's highest measured opportunity and nearly all of its persistent concentrations of affluence, which makes access to that geography an unusually important fair housing question.

The City has opened these rules before

The Municipal Code records the coastal height limit being amended by Proposition L in 1988, Proposition D in 1998, Proposition C in 2000, Measure E in 2020, and again in 2024. Four areas now sit outside the thirty-foot limit entirely: downtown, Mission Bay, the Border area, and the Midway-Pacific Highway area. The Clairemont height limit was itself amended and renamed by ordinance in January 2026, with the change taking effect in March.

This is not an argument that the rule is technically amendable. It is that San Diego has repeatedly chosen to open or modify restrictive height limits where a public interest called for it, that voters have supported doing so, and that the City was doing it as recently as this year. The question this report puts to the City is whether maintaining the coastal overlay in its current form across the highest-opportunity coastal communities advances the City's current fair housing obligations.

The City has already documented what this standard does. This report shows where it does it.

5. Where San Diego's Housing Pressure Has Landed

Displacement pathway flag. A marker the Neighborhood Change Map assigns to a tract meeting one of three definitions. Pathway 1A covers tracts that were low- or moderate-income and predominantly communities of color in 2000, and that experienced racial, ethnic, and economic change at or above the regional 50th percentile between 2000 and 2023. Pathway 1B covers tracts meeting the same baseline conditions in 2013, with change at or above the regional 75th percentile between 2013 and 2023. Pathway 2 covers tracts within half a mile of a Pathway 1A tract that show more recent racial or economic change together with either high rent growth or a large gap between home value and income percentiles. For these purposes, low- or moderate-income means a tract median income at or below 120 percent of the regional median at baseline, and a community of color means the tract's people-of-color share exceeded the regional share at baseline. A neighborhood that was never affordable has no such baseline, so the absence of a flag does not mean the neighborhood is open.

Measured against the citywide rate, the coast absorbed very little of the region's housing growth. The measurable neighborhood change has occurred elsewhere, in the parts of San Diego that were affordable when the period began.

The State of California maintains an instrument for identifying neighborhoods where lower-income residents show signs of being pushed out. It works by detecting a neighborhood changing away from a lower-income, historically underserved baseline. Across San Diego, **44 of the city's 311 census tracts carry one of its neighborhood-change pathways. Exactly one of the coastal geography's sixty tracts does.**

Those 44 tracts are not distributed at random. Their median household income is \$81,240 against \$110,065 citywide, and 65.2 percent of their residents are people of color against 59.4 percent citywide, a gap of 5.8 points that clears its own margin of error twice over. What separates them most sharply is the direction of change. Over the period the instrument measures, the white share of their population rose 8.7 percentage points while the citywide white share fell 8.2 points, and their median income rose 195.6 percent against 126.0 percent citywide. **The signs point opposite ways**, and the 16.8-point gap between those two directions clears its own margin more than thirteen times over.

These are the parts of San Diego that were more affordable and more diverse when the period began and that have changed fastest since, in the direction the state's instrument was built to find.

On the medians in this report: a geography's median income and median home value are both population-weighted means of tract medians. Medians do not aggregate, so no exact margin of error exists for comparisons built on them. The income comparisons above were tested against a bound that treats each tract median as an independent estimate and therefore understates the true uncertainty; the income gap holds at nearly eight times that bound. Home value is the American Community Survey's owner-estimated value, a five-year estimate of what owners say their property would sell for, rather than a sale price or an assessed value; recent sale prices in the highest-cost tracts run well above it. The race figures are aggregates and carry ordinary margins.

The one exception inside Coastal San Diego is tract 06073009000 in Linda Vista, which meets two of the three pathway definitions at once. It is the only tract across the entire coastal geography to meet any of them.

The coast's silence on that instrument is a property of the instrument as much as of the coast. The pathway definitions are built to detect change among an existing lower-income population. Coastal San Diego's housing costs were already far above the city's when the measurement period began, so the population the instrument looks for was largely not there to be found. **A neighborhood can be largely inaccessible to households with ordinary incomes and register nothing at all on a displacement measure.**

The citywide evidence for that reading is strong, and it is the bridge between the regional pattern and the coast. Displacement pressure concentrates in the neighborhoods that were affordable when the period began. Among the two least expensive deciles of San Diego tracts by 2000 housing cost, pathway flags appear in 32.3 percent and 48.4 percent of tracts. Those two deciles hold 25 of the city's 43 flagged tracts, 58.1 percent of them, on 20.0 percent of the tracts. Above them there is no gradient to describe. The remaining eight deciles run between 0.0 and 16.1 percent, rising and falling four times across the range, on counts of between none and five flagged tracts each. The concentration is the finding, and it sits at the bottom of the price distribution rather than sloping down from it. The neighborhoods that were reachable in 2000 are the neighborhoods where pressure is measurable now.

Pacific Beach sat at the far end of that distribution before the period this report measures began. In 2000, its housing cost 6.90 times local income, against 4.51 citywide, at a time when the conventional standard for affordability sat near three times income. That is the starting condition, and everything measured since is change on top of it. La Jolla's current population-weighted median home value is \$1,892,200 against a citywide \$932,173.

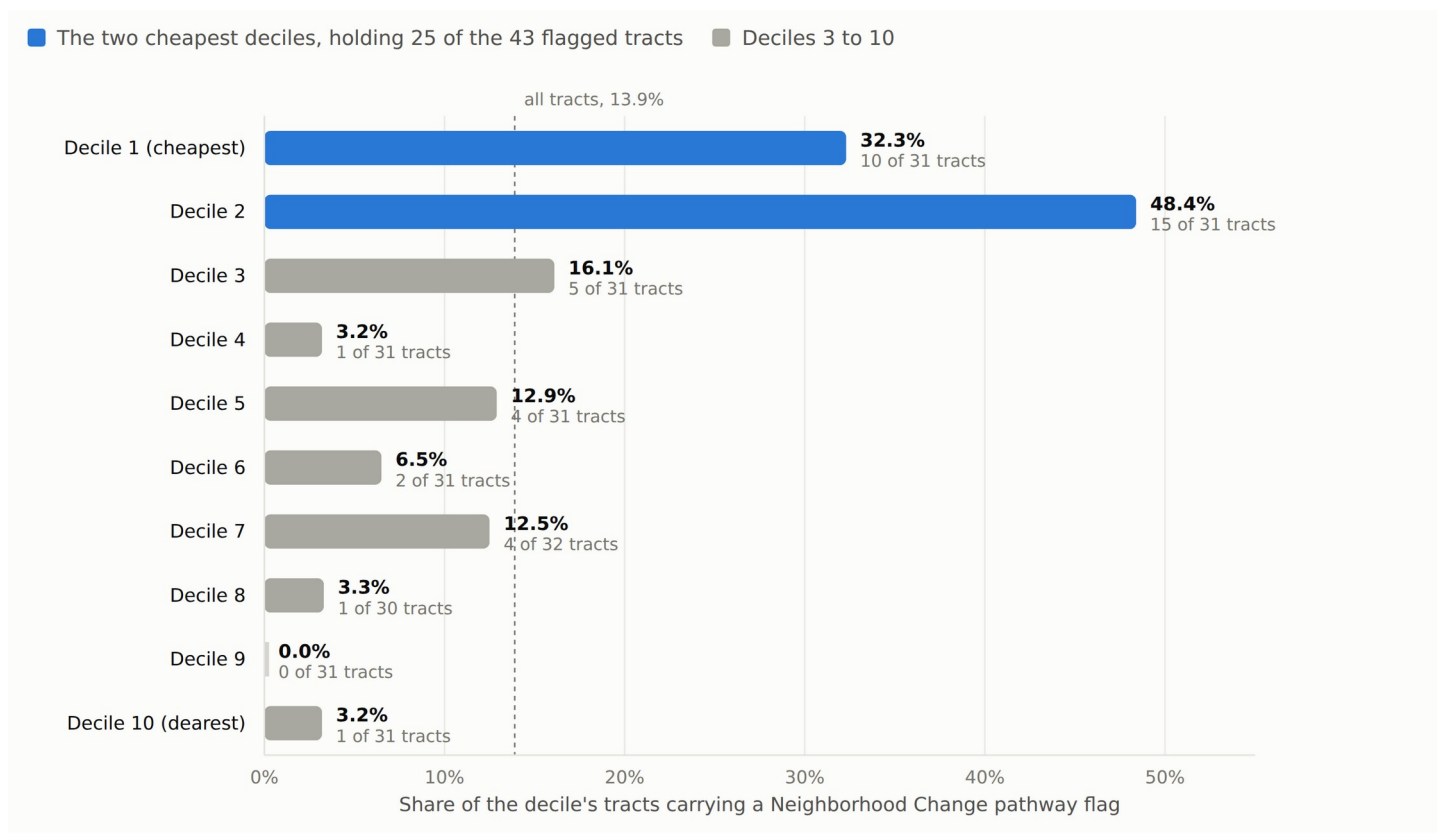
Both neighborhoods have changed substantially since. Pacific Beach's income measure rose 168.2 percent and its rents 68.5 percent; La Jolla's rose 94.5 percent and 72.6 percent. All four figures sit above the state's regional thresholds for rate of change. Neither planning area carries a pathway flag anywhere. What that shows is that **substantial appreciation can occur in a place without triggering a displacement measure, when the place began from a high enough cost baseline.** The two results measure different things and neither contradicts the other.

Set beside the production record, the geography of the two findings is the point. The coast permitted 36.5 homes per thousand existing against 62.4 citywide, and has completed 523 homes against 4,207 citywide, across ground the state rates among its highest-opportunity in the city, and carries one pathway tract in sixty. **Permits are decisions; completions are homes delivered, and neighborhood change follows the second.** The neighborhoods carrying the city's measurable neighborhood change are, disproportionately, the ones that were affordable in 2000. North Park, Greater Golden Hill, Linda Vista, and the communities along the I-94 corridor are among the places where that change is visible. **They are named here as places where measurable neighborhood change occurred, not as destinations for households displaced from the coast.**

A second pattern in the same data cuts against the simplest reading of it. Displacement pathway flags do not rise steadily with distance from the shoreline. They form a hump. Incidence is near zero at the coast, peaks around 48.4 percent roughly three miles inland, and falls away again further inland. That shape holds after controlling for how affordable a tract was in 2000, and the 2000-price relationship holds after controlling for distance, so the two are measuring different things rather than the same thing twice.

It is reported here because it complicates a coast-against-inland story rather than supporting one. The places under the most measurable pressure are neither the coast nor the far interior. They are the middle ring, and what they have in common is not their distance from anything but their position in the housing market when the period began.

Housing demand that was not accommodated in the city's highest-opportunity communities remained part of a single regional housing market. What this data establishes is a striking geographic separation between where opportunity is concentrated and where neighborhood-change pressure is occurring. It does not establish a household-by-household path from one to the other, and this report does not claim one.



Displacement pathway incidence by 2000 housing-cost decile.

Where displacement pressure sits. Each bar is one decile of San Diego census tracts ranked by median home value in 2000, cheapest at the top, and its length is the share of that decile's tracts now carrying a state Neighborhood Change pathway flag.

Source. California Department of Housing and Community Development, Neighborhood Change methodology, against 2000 median home value. Universe: the 310 city census tracts carrying a 2000 median home value, sorted into equal-count deciles on that value. One city tract is absent, 06073005202 in Downtown, whose 2000 value is stored as a literal zero; it is pathway-flagged, so the chart covers 43 of the city's 44 flagged tracts. One tract is worth between 3.1 and 3.3 points in every decile, so several of the gaps between bars are smaller than a single tract. Deciles 4, 8 and 10 each hold exactly one flagged tract and read 3.2, 3.3 and 3.2 percent; deciles 5 and 7 each hold exactly four and read 12.9 and 12.5. Those gaps are differences in denominator rather than in incidence. Deciles 6 and 8 differ by one real tract, but by less than one tract is worth, so their ordering would reverse on a single reclassification. Decile 9 reads 0.0 percent because none of its 31 tracts is flagged, which is not evidence of an absence.

No displacement is not evidence of open access.

6. What Happens When San Diego Builds on High-Opportunity Ground

San Diego has already added substantial housing on high-opportunity ground. Those places grew, and what followed varied a great deal from one to the next.

Across the city, the census tracts that became more racially representative between 2000 and 2024 are the tracts where multifamily housing was permitted. In that group, 94.7 percent of permitted units were multifamily. In the tracts that stayed both racially concentrated and affluent, the figure is 1.9 percent. That second group of fifteen tracts permitted 691 units in eight years. The relationship holds across every threshold and baseline tested, at a magnitude that never becomes small.

One limitation belongs with that finding rather than after it. Housing production is measured from 2018 forward, while the neighborhood-change classification measures 2000 to 2024. The two series run in parallel over different windows, and this report does not claim that either caused the other.

Mission Valley is the largest example. It permitted 3,557 units, 98.3 percent of them multifamily. Its occupied homes grew 105 percent. Its share of residents of color rose from 30.9 percent to 52.6 percent and its Black population grew 264 percent, on a 2000 base of 478 residents small enough that a movement of a few hundred people shifts the rate substantially. None of its five census tracts carries a displacement pathway flag.

Civita, inside Mission Valley, is the clearest single picture in this report of what opening high-opportunity land looks like. Census tract 06073009203 went from 211 occupied homes to 2,495, a nearly twelvefold increase. It permitted 1,315 units over the period, 95.3 percent of them multifamily and roughly four percent duplex to fourplex, with **no single-family housing at all**. Two hundred and one of those permitted homes are affordable below the regional median, and none of the 201 has been completed to date, against 586 of the tract's 1,315 permitted units finished so far. The permitting record is the finding here; the affordable homes it authorized have not yet been built. The tract is classified Highest Resource, with the maximum score on the education component, and it carries no displacement pathway flag. Its share of residents of color rose from 29.8 percent to 46.8 percent while the surrounding region diversified alongside it. A single census tract absorbed more below-market housing than Pacific Beach's thirteen tracts and La Jolla's eight combined, on ground the state rates as highly as the coast.

North Park and Uptown sit on comparable ground to Pacific Beach and La Jolla, and they are not the same case as each other. Both are majority High or Highest Resource. North Park permitted 119.2 units per thousand existing homes, permitted 400 homes below the regional median, and carries displacement pathway flags on ten of its thirteen tracts. It is the example of substantial production occurring alongside substantial measured neighborhood change, and its occupied homes grew 11.2 percent. Uptown permitted 87.0 per thousand, permitted 279 below-market homes, carries flags on two of twelve tracts, and grew its occupied homes 12.9 percent. It is the cleaner example of high production on high-resource ground with much less measured pressure. Pacific Beach permitted 22.6 per thousand and La Jolla 22.3, and permitted 81 and 7 below-market homes respectively. Completions on the same cohort are much smaller everywhere and are in Table 6: North Park 31, Uptown 8, Pacific Beach 3, La Jolla 1.

Downtown complicates the picture and this report states it rather than working around it. Downtown permitted at 214.4 units per thousand, more than three times the citywide rate. Its population grew from 12,154 to 38,681 and every racial group grew in absolute numbers. Its share of residents of color rose from 42.4 percent to 48.1 percent. Ten of its eleven census tracts carry a displacement pathway flag. None of its eleven tracts sits in the state's two highest resource tiers, which is the material difference between Downtown and the coast.

Completions across the same comparison set show how much of any permitting record has so far become housing. From this cycle's permits, Downtown has completed 570 homes of 6,431, North Park 438 of 3,319, Uptown 182 of 2,200, and Mission Valley 105 of 801. On below-market homes the same cohort gives North Park 31, Mission Valley 13, Uptown 8, and Downtown none, against the 1,091 below-market homes Downtown was permitted to build. Downtown's zero is a matter of timing rather than a claim about what it delivers, since its completions across the whole tracked period run to 208, and the same caution applies to it as to the coast.

Read across all five, production volume does not by itself determine what happens to a neighborhood. Mission Valley built the most in absolute terms and carries no flags. North Park built heavily and carries flags on most of its tracts. Uptown built nearly as much as North Park and carries few. What separates them is not how much they built.

The comparison the coast has to answer is a concrete one. San Diego has demonstrated that high-opportunity communities can absorb substantial multifamily housing, including housing affordable below the regional median, on ground the state rates the same way. North Park permits at more than five times the Pacific Beach and La Jolla rate and Uptown at nearly four times. Mission Valley, the most modest of the three, still permits at two and a half times. Pacific Beach and La Jolla have the same high-opportunity characteristics and have permitted dramatically less. That is the question in front of the City, and it does not require believing that production guarantees any particular outcome.

Table 6. Comparable ground, two and a half to five times the housing.

Geography	Tracts High or Highest Resource	Permitted per 1,000 existing	Completed to date	Below-market permitted	Below-market completed
Pacific Beach	13 of 13	22.6	89	81	3
La Jolla	8 of 8	22.3	53	7	1
North Park	8 of 13	119.2	438	400	31
Uptown	10 of 12	87.0	182	279	8
Mission Valley	4 of 5	55.5	105	35	13
Downtown	0 of 11	214.4	570	1,091	0
Citywide	170 of 311	62.4	4,207	6,711	238

Source. Opportunity tiers from the 2026 Opportunity Map on the 311-tract household universe; production from Annual Progress Report filings on the wider production universe. Uptown is the community planning area containing Hillcrest, and every figure in that row is the planning area. Uptown's household tract count of 12 and its production tract count of 13 are both correct: one tract is excluded from the household universe as group-quarters heavy. Downtown's zero below-market completions is a matter of timing rather than delivery, and the same caution applies to it as to the coast.

What this does not claim: that multifamily construction caused these neighborhoods to diversify, or that building housing prevents displacement. These are comparative patterns across places, not a demonstrated mechanism.

The city has done this before, on ground as good as the coast's.

7. Opportunity Is Also About Families

Familial status. A protected class under the federal Fair Housing Act since 1988. It covers households with one or more children under 18, and the protection also extends to pregnant people and to people in the process of securing legal custody of a child.

School attendance area. The geography whose resident students a public school is assigned to serve. It is larger than the immediate neighborhood around a school building, and the distinction matters to this report: where a school sits and the population it serves are two different things.

Familial status has been protected under federal fair housing law since 1988. Pacific Beach houses few children, and the schools serving it draw students from well beyond it.

Only 10.6 percent of Pacific Beach residents are under eighteen, against 18.8 percent citywide. Its 18-to-34 share is 44.4 percent, against 28.4 percent. The neighborhood is just under 70 percent renter, at 68.8 percent of households now against 69.4 percent in 2000. Its renter households stood at 14,568 in 2000 and 14,711 today, a difference of 143 that sits well inside the margin of error on the neighborhood's household counts, so what the data supports is that Pacific Beach added no renter households at all. Citywide, renter households grew 23.7 percent over the same period.

La Jolla arrives at a similar place from the opposite direction. Its sixty-five-and-over share rose from 23.8 percent to 31.4 percent, more than twice the citywide 14.9 percent, while its 18-to-34 share fell to 14.5 percent. Its renter households register an 11.0 percent decline that does not clear its own margin of error, at a ratio of 0.92, so like Pacific Beach it is a coastal neighborhood that added no renter households rather than one that measurably lost them.

The schools serving the coast already operate as a regional resource. A school attendance area is the geography whose resident students a school is assigned to serve. San Diego Unified allows families to enroll outside their own attendance area, and roughly 38 percent of the district's students do. Mission Bay High's attendance area takes in approximately 302 students who live outside it and sends approximately 87 of its own residents outward, a ratio of roughly three and a half to one and the most lopsided of the five schools examined. Choice enrollment is ordinary in this district. A flow of this size is not.

That flow has a physical form. Modeled excess inbound travel by parents driving students into the attendance area runs between 2,030 and 7,504 daily vehicle miles. That figure is modeled rather than observed, built from enrollment counts and estimated trip distances, and the width of the range reflects the range of assumptions rather than a precise measurement. It is reported as a range for that reason.

The two findings together establish something the report has been building toward. The educational resources concentrated on the coast are already serving households from across San Diego, and the modeled travel figures show that reaching them involves substantial additional driving. What the data establishes is an association between a regional school geography and the travel it generates. It does not establish that housing constraints caused those trips, and this report does not claim they did.

Whether Pacific Beach has few children because few families wish to live there, or because its housing market makes entry difficult for households with children, is not established by this data, and this report does not claim to establish it. What is established is that the resource is regional, that the neighborhood houses few of the children who use it, that it added no renter households over a quarter century in which the city added nearly a quarter more, and that it permits new housing at a third of the city's rate. Familial status being a protected class is what makes those four facts, taken together, a fair housing question rather than only a housing market one.

What this does not claim: why any individual family chooses a school outside its attendance area.

Pacific Beach's schools already serve families from across San Diego. Its housing, at a third of the city's building rate, does not.

8. The Opportunity in Front of the City

Below-moderate income. Every affordability tier other than above-moderate: acutely low, extremely low, very low, low, and moderate. The tiers are defined against the regional median income.

Baker Settlement. The 2025 settlement of *"Baker v. City of San Diego and Housing Authority of the City of San Diego"*, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, No. 3:19-cv-1013-JO, filed May 30, 2019, concerning the distribution of the City's affordable housing. The City committed that it "will continue to monitor its housing production and include data that demonstrates that by at least 2028, at least 70% of the affordable housing projects in the City are permitted in moderate, high or highest resource areas."

Pacific Beach and La Jolla are where expanding housing access would reach the largest concentration of the resources this report has measured.

Neither is an isolated case. They are the two planning areas examined most closely here, and they sit inside a sixty-tract coastal geography that shows the same underlying pattern throughout: exceptionally high measured opportunity, low housing production, and constrained access. What is true of these two is true of the geography around them.

The combination is unusual enough to state in one place. All twenty-one of their census tracts are High or Highest Resource, and sixteen of the twenty-one are Highest. Not one carries an environmental burden flag. Both permit housing at roughly a third of the citywide rate and housing affordable below the regional median at a small fraction of it. Both were already far outside conventional affordability in 2000. Neither carries a displacement pathway flag anywhere, despite substantial income and rent change. And their schools already serve a population reaching well beyond the children who live there.

California's affirmative fair housing framework asks jurisdictions whether their own land-use decisions expand or restrict access to opportunity. The City has also committed to a specific distributional standard of its own. In settling *Baker v. City of San Diego* in 2025, a federal case filed in 2019 over the distribution of the City's affordable housing, the City committed to continue monitoring its housing production and to include data demonstrating that by at least 2028, at least 70 percent of the affordable housing projects permitted in San Diego are in moderate, high, or highest resource areas. That commitment does not create the obligation this report describes. It reinforces it, and it shows the City has already accepted the principle that where affordable housing is built matters as much as how much of it there is.

Pacific Beach's record against that principle has two halves. Every one of the 81 homes it permitted below the regional median in the current cycle sits in a High or Highest Resource tract, the top two of the state's four tiers, against 51.6 percent of homes citywide reaching Moderate or above. The City's commitment is measured against a Moderate-or-above bar, which Pacific Beach clears with a tier to spare. And 68 of those 81 homes are in a single census tract, 06073007800, while nine of the neighborhood's thirteen tracts produced none at all. La Jolla shows the same shape at smaller scale: six of its seven below-market homes are in one tract, 06073008101, and six of its eight tracts produced none. The City's commitment is expressed in projects rather than in homes, and Pacific Beach's record holds on either basis. All 11 of its below-market projects sit in High or Highest Resource tracts, and those 11 projects account for the same 81 homes. Citywide, 52.6 percent of below-market projects reach Moderate or above, against 51.6 percent of below-market homes. **The settlement counts projects**, so 52.6 is the figure its 70 percent target is measured against; the homes figure is shown because this report counts homes everywhere else.

It is possible to name every home affordable below the regional median that these two neighborhoods have actually completed across the tracked period, because there are eight of them. Pacific Beach has completed seven: five very low income homes, one low income home, and one moderate income home, all deed-restricted. La Jolla has completed one, a deed-restricted low income home. Across the tracked permit record, those eight homes are what twenty-one census tracts of the highest-rated ground in San Diego have finished building below the regional median.

The coastal record is a question of scale and distribution rather than direction. The below-market housing the coast has permitted points toward the objective the City has set for itself. There is very little of it, and almost all of it sits in one census tract per planning area.

That is what makes this an opportunity. A development standard is among the constraints in play here, and a development standard is a thing the City has both the authority and the precedent to modify where a public objective warrants it. This report does not establish that height is the binding constraint on any particular parcel. Land cost, floor area, parking, setbacks and coastal permitting all bear on what gets built, and separating their effects would take a parcel-level feasibility analysis this report does not perform. What it establishes is narrower and still substantial: the geography under this standard permits housing below the regional median at a fifth of the citywide rate, and the City's own Planning Department has recorded the standard as a barrier to building homes and to building rent-restricted homes.

The opportunity behind that standard is measured, and it is the densest concentration of it in San Diego. Expanding access to it could extend that opportunity to households across the city who have had no realistic path into a Highest Resource neighborhood, alongside the residents already there. What any specific change would actually produce, in homes, in prices, and in who could afford to occupy them, is a question this report does not answer and does not attempt to. It measures the distance between where opportunity sits and where San Diego builds. Closing that distance is a design problem, and designing it is the City’s work rather than this report’s.

What this report does not assert. This report offers no legal conclusion. It does not assert that the City of San Diego has violated any federal, state or local fair housing obligation, and nothing here should be read as that finding. It describes what a development standard is associated with in the geography it covers, and it leaves the legal characterization of that association to the people whose job that is.

And what it does not measure. This report measures access: who can reach the coast, and on what terms. It does not measure what the people who live there now want, what they believe they would lose, or how they weigh those things against the access of people who do not live there. It has no instrument for any of that, and the questions are real ones. They are simply not the questions this data can answer.

Table 7. Almost all of it sits in one tract per neighborhood.

Geography	Below-market homes permitted	Homes in the single largest producing tract	Tracts producing none	Tracts total
Pacific Beach	81	68	9	13
La Jolla	7	6	6	8
Citywide	6,711		156	322

Source. Annual Progress Report filings, current state housing cycle, on the 322-tract production universe. The citywide cell for the largest producing tract is left empty because the quantity is not comparable across geographies of different tract counts: the maximum share a single tract can hold falls as the tract count rises, so a citywide figure would read as diffuseness rather than measure it. The comparable citywide statement is that ten of the 322 tracts hold 48.6 percent of below-market production. Pacific Beach’s 81 homes are the same 81 that sit entirely in Moderate, High or Highest Resource tracts.

Few changes available to the City could reach this much opportunity at once.

Methods, sources, and verification

Sources. U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Decennial Census and American Community Survey five-year estimates. California Department of Housing and Community Development, Opportunity Map and Neighborhood Change methodologies. California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, CalEnviroScreen 5.0. Housing production from the City of San Diego's Housing Element Annual Progress Report filings to the State, geocoded to census tract. San Diego Municipal Code sections 132.0401 through 132.0404, 132.0501 through 132.0505, and 132.1301 through 132.1306. City of San Diego Planning Department memorandum of July 15, 2022. San Diego Unified School District enrollment data.

Universe, and why two tract counts appear. Household measures cover the 311 census tracts within the City of San Diego that carry the household characteristics this report uses. Production rates use a wider denominator of 322 tracts, because production counts construction rather than households and a tract can build homes without meeting the household screen. Every geography here therefore carries two tract counts. Coastal San Diego is 60 tracts on the household universe and 62 on the production universe. The Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone is 51 and 53. Both numbers in each pair are correct, they are different instruments, and they are not meant to agree. Every figure names which one it uses.

Geographies, kept distinct. Three appear in this report and they are not the same. Community planning areas are the City's own neighborhood boundaries. The Coastal San Diego is a sixty-tract grouping created for this analysis and is not an official boundary. The Coastal Height Limit Overlay Zone is a City zoning geography defined in the Municipal Code. Every figure names which one it uses.

Production records, and how they were matched. Production comes from the City's Housing Element Annual Progress Report filings to the State, geocoded to census tract. Of the records in scope for the current cycle, 99.987 percent matched a tract. Two did not, and both are above-moderate-income accessory dwelling units roughly seven miles inland, outside every geography this report examines.

Permitted and completed. Production figures are permitted homes unless a figure says otherwise. Where completions appear, a home counts toward a cycle because the project's own permit was issued in that cycle, not because construction happened to finish inside the cycle window. Completions attributed to permits issued before 2018 fall outside this data's permit-tracking window and are reported as their own category rather than dropped.

Below the regional median. This is an income category defined by the State, not a synonym for deed-restricted affordable housing. The category is broader, and a home can fall inside it without carrying any restriction on its price or its term. Where a home named in this report is deed-restricted, the report says so.

Rates built on small counts. Where a rate rests on a single-digit number of homes, the count appears beside it. La Jolla's below-market production rate rests on seven homes, and a single ordinary project would move it substantially.

Figures for the year 2000. These are harmonized to current census tract boundaries and are fractional before rounding, so a percentage change will not always reproduce exactly from the rounded counts as displayed.

Dollar figures are nominal. No dollar figure in this report is adjusted for inflation. Ratios that divide one 2000 figure by another, such as the price-to-income multiple, are unaffected by that. Percentage changes in income, rent and home value between 2000 and the current period are nominal changes and should be read as such.

Margins of error. Changes reported here are tested against the Census Bureau's 90 percent margins of error, aggregated across constituent tracts as the root sum of squares. Where a change does not clear its own margin, this report says so and states what the data supports instead of the change. Two properties of those margins are worth stating plainly. The 2000 endpoint is Census 2000 SF3, the long-form sample, so it carries its own sampling error and every margin given here is a floor rather than a ceiling. And harmonizing 2000 figures to current tract boundaries introduces a further uncertainty that cannot be characterized from this data at all; its only knowable property is that it widens these intervals rather than narrowing them.

Verification. Every figure here was checked against the database independently of the writing, and no figure was checked by the same pass that produced it. Where a check found a figure that could not be reproduced, or a comparison whose basis was not stated, the correction was made at source and the figure re-derived before it appeared in this report.