

Senate Bill 50, the More HOMES Act of 2019 currently in the state's appropriations committee, was front and center at the May 14 meeting of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber's Advocacy Council.

Authored by Senator Scott Wiener of the 11th Senate District, SB 50, the More "Housing, Opportunity, Mobility, Equity, Stability" Act of 2019 allows for building housing near existing job centers and public transportation hubs, and also includes strong protections against displacement for renters and vulnerable communities in those areas. The bill aims to relieve the acute housing shortage and affordability crisis in California cities.

Vincent Ma of the Solano Transportation Authority and Fairfield's Interim City Manager Sean Quinn provided an overview of the bill, which was unanimously supported by Solano County's board of supervisors but opposed by the League of California Cities.

Ma explained that SB 50 was first introduced in the last legislative year and focused on larger cities such as San Francisco and San Jose. A similar bill, SB 4, had urban provisions included and in this legislative year, the two bills merged to create the current SB 50.

SB 50 would have the largest impact on county's where population is above 600,000. Solano County is under 600,000 are the Fairfield/Vacaville train station and the Vallejo ferry building. The bill will not impact Suisun City's train station because Suisun City's population is less than 50,000.

If passed, cities with populations over 50,000 – such as Vallejo and Fairfield – must grant "Equitable Community Incentive" to a jobs-rich or transit-rich housing project located within a half mile of a major transit stop, with a minimum density of 20 units an acre in these suburban communities. It also allows current existing buildings near a transit station to build one additional floor. The thought behind this, Ma said, is that it will encourage housing around these transit areas. Those housing projects – such as lofts or apartments – would also likely appeal to Bay Area commuters and millennials.

However, there is one major component of SB 50 that concerns Quinn. Anywhere else in those cities above 50,000, emphasis will be placed on projects that will bring duplexes, triplexes or fourplexes to the community. A proposed developer would also not be able to demolish an existing house, but could potentially take a current single-family home and subdivide it with smaller additions.

This concerns Quinn for several reasons. First, these potential units would not be operated by a professional property management company. Also, there is no clear definition in the bill of what defines a housing unit. If a current single family home is subdivided, would residents share a common area, like a kitchen or living room? None of this is addressed in the bill, he said.

Even with those concerns, he feels confident SB 50 will pass. There is a lot of interest and energy tied to housing and making it more affordable.

The advocacy committee will draft a letter for the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber's board of director's review and approval.