

# North Bay Chambers

## Legislative Priorities

Chambers from the North Bay met this spring to discuss their concerns about State-wide public policy issues and to determine which of those issues are most important to their members. The list that emerged follows.

**Housing:** The housing shortage has reached a crisis level in the North Bay and emerged as the top concern of the North Bay Chambers of Commerce. Rents and home prices continue to increase and grow out of reach of many of our citizens. While the housing shortage has been a recognized crisis for several years, the recent wildfire disaster has made it more urgent than ever. Proposals for rent control and just cause eviction laws do nothing to provide housing, reduce homelessness or provide affordable housing for renters, and experts agree that these policies exacerbate housing shortages. Home development is the most effective way to ease the cost of housing; the State needs to act immediately to stimulate the construction of new housing for all income levels.

Support is needed at the state level to encourage, mandate, or facilitate local streamlining of permitting and creating certainty in the process for developers. Most critically, CEQA amendments must finally be addressed to ensure it is not an obstacle for high density development, particularly for in-fill urban development. Greater financial benefits, including increasing tax incentives, for infill and affordable housing would also support housing development. We would like to see new regulatory requirements postponed or waived in the North Bay fire zones, including the 2020 mandate for residential solar as these new mandates increase costs for housing development. Providing financial incentives rather than mandates or exploring all-electric homes for new construction could achieve the same policy goals without making housing development more difficult.

**Transportation:** The ongoing deterioration of our transportation infrastructure is hurting our member businesses whether they depend upon shipping their goods out of the area or on tourism and in-person business. The passage of Senate Bill 1 was a big step forward which we all supported and applauded. Our focus will now be to oppose the repeal of SB1, partly by supporting Proposition 69, support the passage of Regional Measure 3, and ensuring funds are available for local roadways. We emphasize the need to complete the widening of Highway 101, the improvement/rebuilding of Highway 37, and SMART extensions to Cloverdale and Larkspur.

**Workforce:** With unemployment in Sonoma, Marin and Napa counties in the 2-3% range, businesses are increasingly struggling to find employees. This problem is closely linked to the housing crisis as it is difficult to retain and recruit employees in an area where housing is so expensive. While the cost of housing is an issue in the near term, we also believe in the importance of long-range efforts to ensure a trained and qualified workforce. We need an education system in California that is responsive to employer's needs. Ongoing support for career technical education (CTE), STEM programs, internships and on the job training at both the State and local level are key elements in ensuring the availability of the workforce of the future.

**Homelessness:** Every community in the North Bay is facing increases in those experiencing homelessness. While many communities are now following the "housing first" model, this is not a quick fix and is difficult to implement during a housing crisis. Substantial resources are needed if we are to provide housing for those in need as a first step towards helping them re-enter our communities. State action must be taken to address this issue. We would like to see State

funds available for “rehousing” as the first step to getting the homeless back into our society, increased support for local behavioral health (i.e., mental health and substance abuse) services and best practices advice to local jurisdictions to assist them in grappling with this challenge. We would also encourage state initiatives to build or repurpose housing for homeless with wrap around services.