

**The New York Times** | <https://nyti.ms/2hEvhd4>

---

U.S.

# California Today: Housing Fight Hits San Diego

Mike McPhate

CALIFORNIA TODAY DEC. 14, 2016

*Good morning.*

*(Want to get California Today by email? Sign up.)*

The fight for more housing has a new war room in San Diego.

Increasingly, even well-off professionals are finding they can no longer afford to live in the San Diego area. In October, the county's median home price was the highest in a decade — \$507,500 — according to CoreLogic, a data analysis company.

Part of the problem, housing experts say, is simply a shortage of units that is driving demand. As the number of San Diegans has risen, new housing construction has failed to keep pace.

And one reason for the lack of construction? The residents of San Diego.

In many cases, housing proposals fail because residents pressure officials to reject them on the grounds that they would spoil neighborhood character.

About six months ago, frustration over San Diego's inability to lift its housing stock led to the formation of Housing You Matters, a coalition that includes business, building and environmental organizations.

The group has raised about \$50,000 toward its mission to break the housing impasse through research and advocacy. Mary Lydon, the group's project consultant, said everybody needs to step back and think about the big picture.

"We have to come up with a story that connects the dots of where great cities are headed and what you need to have to be competitive," she said.

Housing You Matters appears to represent San Diego's first formal organization of so-called Yimbys — an acronym for "Yes in My Backyard" and a wordplay on Nimby, or "Not in My Backyard."

For now, its numbers are in the dozens, much fewer than with longer established efforts in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The San Diego advocates say they are challenging an attitude that flared during a recent housing battle in Poway, about 20 miles from downtown San Diego.

A project was proposed to build 22 units of affordable housing for veterans on a vacant lot in town.

At an emotional hearing on Nov. 15, several residents attested to their admiration of veterans, but many also denounced the plan. It would be an eyesore and a traffic nightmare, they said.

“Are we going to have any open land left in Poway?” Tom Scott, a 40-year resident, asked the City Council. “Or are we going to build on it?”

The project was rejected with a 3-to-2 vote.

Many of San Diego’s Yimbyes are millennials who say they’re fed up with spending upward of 40 percent of their income on housing.

“The older people, they already have their house,” said Chance Shay, 28, who became a father last year. “Now that they have their homes, they’re saying, ‘Hey, I don’t want a bunch of other houses built. I like my green space.’”

The debate seems likely to grow more heated.

By 2050, the San Diego region is expected to add nearly a million people who will drive demand for an additional 330,000 housing units, according to government data.

Ms. Lydon noted that much of that population growth is expected to come from families within the region. “So, these are our children,” she said. “We have to figure out how to house them.”

## California Online

- Gov. Jerry Brown asked President Obama to ban new **offshore drilling** in California. [The Associated Press]
- “I’ll give you everything I’ve got”: **Darrell Steinberg** was sworn in as Sacramento’s mayor. [Sacramento Bee]

- Topping the agenda in Wednesday's meeting between Donald J. Trump and **tech leaders**? Jobs, jobs and more jobs. [The New York Times]
- A 73-year-old man in the early stages of dementia was **fatally shot** by a Bakersfield police officer. [Los Angeles Times]
- Using edible materials, a **California start-up** has found a way to extend the life of produce by as much as five times. [The New York Times]
- Google's **self-driving car** is ready to take the wheel. [The New York Times]
- East Bay officials advanced a stadium project that **Raiders** fans hope will sway the team to stay in Oakland. [San Francisco Chronicle]
- **Alan Thicke**, who portrayed the reassuring father on the television sitcom "Growing Pains," died at 69. [The New York Times]
- Review: "**Rogue One: A Star Wars Story**" masquerades as a tale of rebellion, but its spirit is pure Empire. [The New York Times]
- Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling aren't professional dancers, but it doesn't matter. "**La La Land**" celebrates the amateur. [The New York Times]

## And Finally ...

Tucked along a bank in the Sacramento River Delta is the only surviving town in the United States to have been built by and for Chinese.

The tiny town of Locke was established in 1915 after the arrival to the delta of thousands of Chinese laborers hired to reclaim the flood lands for agriculture. Many stayed to make their lives working the crops.

In its heyday from the 1920s to the '40s, Locke was home to several hundred Chinese.

On weekends, however, the population would swell as high as 2,000 as visitors came to indulge in the town's gambling halls, brothels, speakeasies and opium dens.

On a recent Saturday, I took a walk down Main Street with James Motlow, a resident and one of the authors of a collection of oral histories on the town, "Bitter Melon: Inside America's Last Rural Chinese Town."

The street stands essentially as it did in the old days, he said.

But the two-story clapboard buildings are now crumbling and mostly empty, except for a handful of shops. The Star Theater, which once showcased Chinese opera, is leaning precariously to one side.

Mr. Motlow said old-timers recounted wild scenes that would unfold on weekend nights: "There were people everywhere," he said. "There were girls on these balconies. There was food. There was gambling, huge amounts of money."

Locke was also a sanctuary. Anti-Chinese violence was widespread in California at the time.

In a 1983 interview published in "Bitter Melon," Bing Fai Chow, a longtime delta resident, recalled the hostility: "We never dared to walk on the streets alone then — except in Locke. This was our place."

It's unclear whether Locke will survive. Over the decades, the population has dwindled to roughly 90 people. Fewer than 10 are Chinese.

A foundation set up in 2004 is working to preserve historical structures, Mr. Motlow said.

But, he added, the town's history as a den of vice has also created some ambivalence.

"It's a question falling upon the Chinese community of, what do they want for this town?" he said. "In a lot of ways Locke symbolizes an amazing success story. But for a lot of others it symbolizes what they don't want to be remembered for."

*California Today goes live at 6 a.m. Pacific time weekdays. Tell us what you want to see: [CAtoday@nytimes.com](mailto:CAtoday@nytimes.com).*

*The California Today columnist, Mike McPhate, is a third-generation Californian — born outside Sacramento and raised in San Juan Capistrano. He lives in Davis. Follow him on Twitter.*

*California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and attended U.C. Berkeley.*

---

# The New York Times

Truth. It's hard to find.  
But easier with 1000+ journalists looking. Subscribe to The Times.

Basic  
\$2.75/week  
Billed as \$143 every year  
Get basic

### Basic Digital Access Includes:

Access to NYTimes.com and all NYTimes apps

Unlimited article access, anytime, anywhere

Learn more ►

### All Access

\$3.75/week

Billed as \$195 every year

### Get All Access

Includes everything in Basic, plus:

Times Insider Access, including behind-the-scenes stories, exclusive events, podcasts, and e-books

1 complimentary digital subscription to give anyone you'd like

Learn more ►

### Home Delivery

+ All Access

\$6.93/week

Billed as \$360 every year

### Get Home Delivery

Includes everything in All Access, plus:

Customized delivery options such as Sunday only, Fri.-Sun., weekday delivery, or daily delivery

The weekly Sunday magazine and monthly T Magazine

2 complimentary digital subscriptions to give anyone you'd like

**Learn more** ►

\*Home delivery price based on Sunday delivery.  
Prices vary based on delivery location and frequency.

© 2017 The New York Times Company