

INLAND EMPIRE OUTLOOK

A Public Policy Journal
Fall 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:

2026 Video Voter Guide	2
IE Sales Taxes Inch Up	7
RC Combats Fentanyl Deaths	11
Montclair, Ontario, Upland Housing	17

Image under license from Adobe Stock

We begin this issue of the *Inland Empire Outlook* with an overview of the 14 statewide measures on the California ballot this fall. The Rose Institute produced a short background paper and video with non-partisan analysis of each measure. This is a wonderful project for our student researchers, helping them understand direct democracy in California and giving them the opportunity to dig deep to analyze each measure, while producing a valuable public education product.

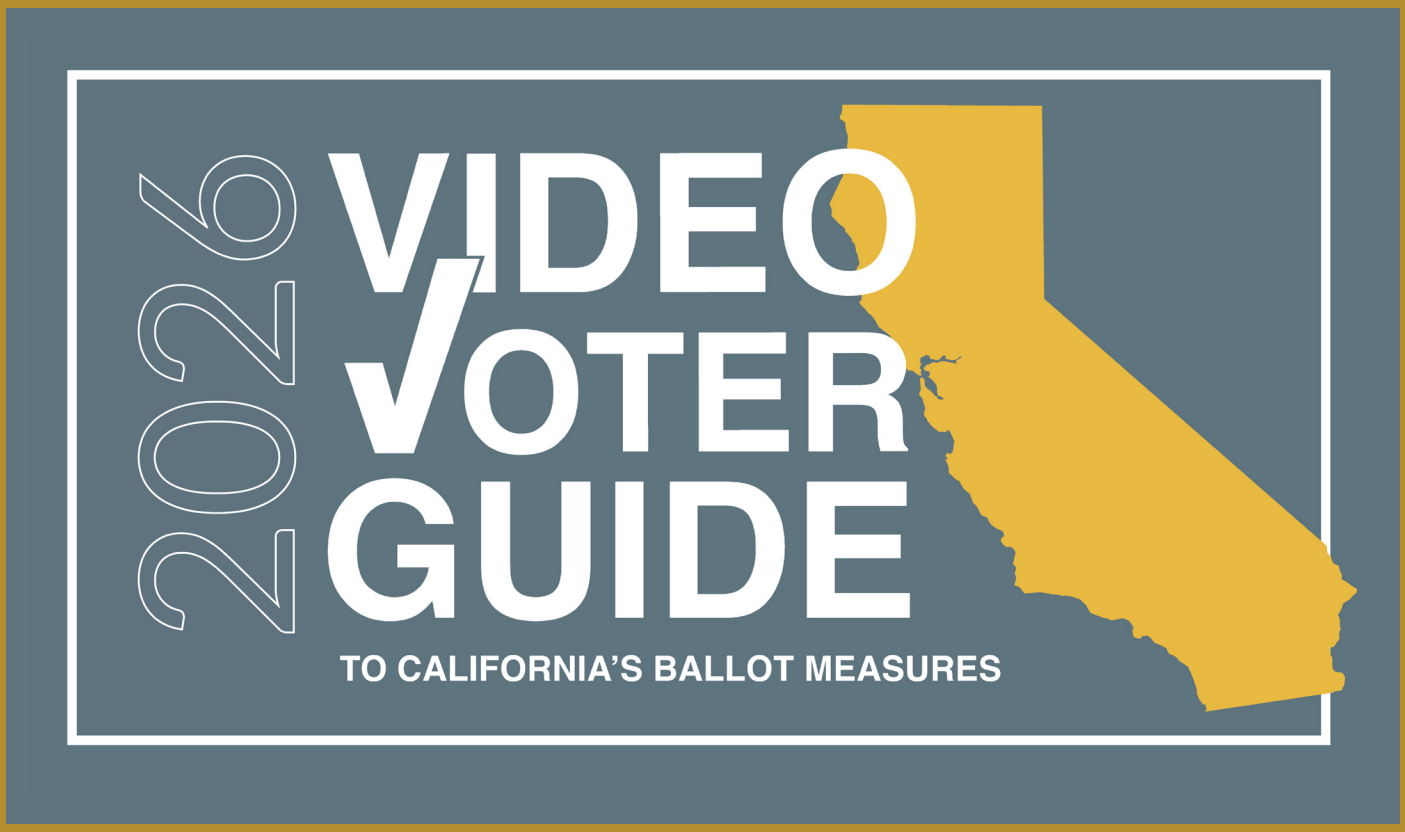
Our second article briefly examines sales tax measures on the ballot in Riverside County and San Bernardino County. Sales tax rates in both counties have consistently been lower than in Los Angeles County, where the average combined sales tax rate is 10.83%; it is 8.47% in Riverside County and 8.24% in San Bernardino County. County-wide increases in both counties, as well as increases in six cities, were on the ballot this November. Final election results are still pending, but six of the eight measures look to be on their way to passing. Even with the increases, Inland Empire rates would remain far below those in Los Angeles County.

Our third article looks at the multi-pronged approach the Riverside County District Attorney is taking to combat fentanyl-involved deaths. Like many communities across America, Riverside County experienced an alarming rise in fentanyl-involved deaths beginning in 2019. That trend sharply reversed in 2024 and continues downward. The Riverside County District Attorney credits this drop to an approach integrating law enforcement, awareness, addiction treatment, and emergency response.

Like in many regions in the state, housing costs in the Inland Empire have sky-rocketed over the past 20 years as demand far out-paced supply. Cities that border Los Angeles County are hit especially hard. Our final article examines how three of them - Montclair, Ontario, and Upland – are responding and their progress toward meeting their Regional Housing Needs Assessment targets.

We hope you find this edition of *Inland Empire Outlook* a useful guide. Please visit our website, www.RoseInstitute.org, for information on more Rose Institute research.

Rose Institute
of State and Local Government
Claremont McKenna College



by Toby Forster '29

Californians voted on fourteen statewide ballot propositions on November 3, 2026, tying second for the most ballot measures of any state this year. The Secretary of State will not certify the election results until December 11, 2026, but one week after election day, seven of the measures were ahead in the vote count.

The Rose Institute of State and Local Government produced its 2026 Video Voter Guide to help voters understand the ballot propositions. The nonpartisan project explains each proposition with an educational video and a written backgrounder. Both make clear what a "yes" or "no" vote means, present the main arguments from proponents and opponents, and identify the key supporters and opponents. The guide is available at roseinstitute.cmc.edu.

There are two ways for measures to reach the California ballot: legislative referral or petition. Five of this year's fourteen (Propositions 1, 2, 4, 5, and 43) were placed on the ballot by the legislature. The other nine (Propositions 3, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, and 45) qualified by petition. The number of signatures required is calculated based on the turnout in the most recent gubernatorial election and depends on the type of measure. Organizers of an initiative statute needed signatures equal to 5% of the votes cast for governor in 2022, or 546,651. Organizers of a constitutional amendment needed 8%, or 874,641. Both figures are lower than in 2022, which was based on the 2018 gubernatorial election, reflecting the decline in voter turnout from 2018 to 2022.

The 14 measures fell into four broad categories. Six concerned taxes and the state budget: Proposition 2 would raise the cap on the state's rainy-day fund, Proposition 3 would make permanent the high-income tax rates approved in 2012, Proposition 40 would impose a one-time 5% wealth tax on billionaires, and Propositions 41, 42, and 43 would restrict how new taxes are enacted or spent. Props 2, 3, and 42 likely passed. Three address housing and development: Proposition 1 authorizes an $11.25 billion affordable housing bond for income-qualified groups; Proposition 37, a $25 billion revenue bond program for middle-income homebuyers; and Proposition 45, an optional expedited environmental-review track for certain projects. Of these, Props 1 and 37 likely passed. Two concern health care and research:

Proposition 38 would authorize an $8.4 billion immunology research bond, and Proposition 44 would require nonprofit clinics to spend 90 percent of revenue on direct healthcare services. Prop 38 likely passed, while Prop 44 did not. Finally, three deal with elections and government: Proposition 4 would allow public financing of campaigns, Proposition 5 would remove the replacement question from recall ballots, and Proposition 39 would require voter identification. As of this writing, Prop 39 was likely to fail, with Prop 4 slightly behind and Prop 5 very slightly ahead.

It is worth noting that three of the measures were interrelated and at cross-purposes. Proposition 40, the "Billionaire Tax," was designed to impose a one-time tax on high-net-worth individuals. Propositions 41 and 42 were meant to block that tax. Voters appear to have rejected the Billionaire Tax by voting down Prop 40 and passing Prop 42. Prop 41 seems likely to fail.

Toby Forster, a sophomore at Claremont McKenna College, led a team of eleven undergraduate research assistants to draft and produce all fourteen videos and backgrounders. Director of the Rose Institute Ken Miller, Professor Shanna Rose, and Professor Emeritus Joseph Bessette directed the project, with Rose Institute alumna Jessica Jin providing graphic design and video production by Elise London.

Watch the videos and read the backgrounders at roseinstitute.cmc.edu. ♦

TAXES & BUDGET



Strengthens State Rainy Day Fund

Proponents: California Democratic Party • Governor Gavin Newsom • Attorney General Xavier Becerra • LA Chamber of Commerce • League of Women Voters of California

Opponents: California Republican Party • Reform California • California Chamber of Commerce

Status: PASSING



Makes permanent existing voter-approved income tax rates for high-income Californians

Proponents: California Democratic Party • California Teachers Association • California Nurses Association • Community College League of California • California Professional Firefghters • AFSCME California • SEIU California State Council

Opponents: California Republican Party • California Taxpayers Association • Family Business Association of California • California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce • Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association • Reform California

Status: PASSING



Imposes a one-time fve percent wealth tax on California billionaires

Proponents: Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW) • California Democratic Party • U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I) • U.S. Rep. Ro Khanna (D) • Former gubernatorial candidate Tom Steyer (D) • California Federation of Labor Unions • California Nurses Association

Opponents: California Republican Party • Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) • Gubernatorial candidate Xavier Becerra (D) • Gubernatorial candidate Steve Hilton (R) • California Teachers Association • California Medical Association • Planned Parenthood Afliates of California • Sergey Brin, Co-founder of Google

Status: FAILING

TAXES AND BUDGET



Restricts New Special Taxes by Requiring Audits and Performance Reviews and Denying Exemption from State Spending Cap

Proponents: California Chamber of Commerce • California Taxpayers Association • California Society of Certifed Public Accountants • California Republican Party • Tom Hayes, former Auditor General of California • Steve Westly, former California State Controller • Sergey Brin, co-founder of Google and founder of Building a Better California • Reform California • Building a Better California (top sponsor of the "Yes on 41" Committee)

Opponents: California Democratic Party • Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW)

Status: FAILING



Prohibits Enactment of New Taxes on Asset Ownership and Retroactive Taxes

Proponents: California Republican Party • California Taxpayers Association • California Small Business Association • Sergey Brin, Google Co-Founder • Eric Schmidt, Former CEO of Google • Reform California • California Chamber of Commerce

Opponents: California Democratic Party • US Senator Bernie Sanders • Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW)

Status: PASSING



Requires a Two-Thirds Vote to Approve Local Special Tax Initiatives

Proponents: Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association • California Taxpayers Association • California Small Business Association • Family Business Association of California • California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce • Reform California • California Republican Party

Opponents: California Democratic Party • State Assemblymember Buffy Wicks (D-14) • Evolve California • Sierra Business Council • California Professional Firefighters • Nurse Alliance of SEIU California • California School Employees Association • California State Association of Counties • League of Women Voters of California • California Teachers Association

Status: FAILING



Image under license from Adobe Stock

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT



Authorizes Bonds for Affordable Housing Programs

Proponents: California Democratic Party • Governor Gavin Newsom (D) • ACLU California Action • League of California Cities • California-Hawaii NAACP State Conference

Opponents: State Assembly Member David Tangipa (R-8), Reform California

Status: PASSING

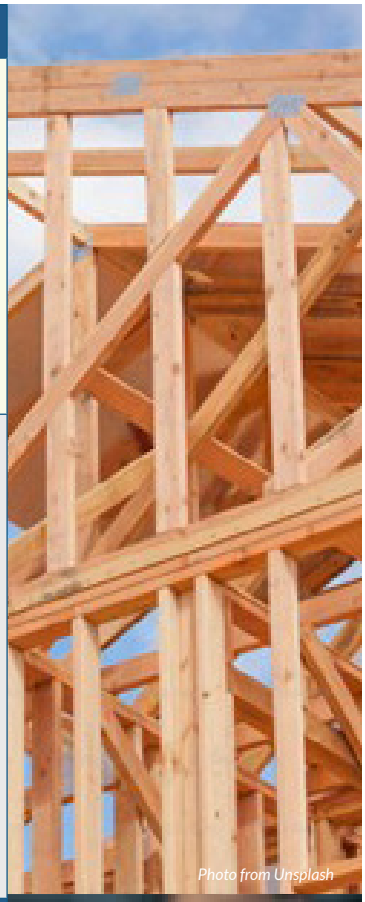


Creates Loan Program for Middle-Income Buyers of Qualifed New Homes

Proponents: Former California Assembly Speaker and Senate Majority Leader Robert Hertzberg (D) • Gubernatorial Candidate Xavier Becerra (D) • California State Treasurer Fiona Ma (D) • California Democratic Party • United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, California Association of Realtors • California Chamber of Commerce

Opponents: Reform California • League of Women Voters of California

Status: PASSING


Photo from Unsplash

HEALTH CARE AND RESEARCH



Funds Immunology and Immunotherapy Research in California

Proponents: Gary K. Michelson, co-founder of the California Institute for Immunology and Immunotherapy • Meyer Luskin • Californians for Immunology Research and Cures • ALS Association • Alzheimer's Association
• California Democratic Party • California Republican Party

Opponents: Dr. Robert M. Kaplan, Stanford University School of Medicine • League of Women Voters of California • *Orange County Register* Editorial Board

Status: PASSING



Requires Community Health Clinics to Spend 90% of Revenue on Program Services

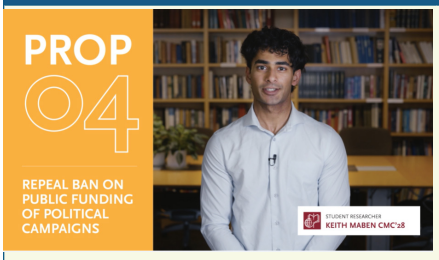
Proponents: Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW West) • Californians for Responsible Healthcare

Opponents: California Democratic Party • California Republican Party • California Chamber of Commerce • California Hospital Association • Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California • Reform California

Status: FAILING


Photo from Unsplash

ELECTIONS AND GOVERNMENT



Repeals California's Ban on Public Financing of Election Campaigns

Proponents: California Democratic Party • League of Women Voters of California • American Civil Liberties Union of California • California Common Cause • Represent. US

Opponents: California Republican Party • California Taxpayers Association • Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association • Reform California

Status: **FAILING**



Changes Recall Election Process for Statewide Officers

Proponents: Former State Senator Josh Newman (D-29) (author) • State Assemblymember Isaac Bryan (D-25) • Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis (D) • California Democratic Party • League of Women Voters • California Common Cause

Opponents: California Republican Party • Senate Minority Leader Brian W. Jones (R-40) • Assemblymember Joe Paterson (R-5) • Election Integrity Project California, Inc. • Reform California

Status: **PASSING**



Amends the California Constitution to Require Voters to Present Government-Issued Identifcation to Vote

Proponents: State Assemblymember Carl DeMaio (R-75) • California Republican Party • Reform California • Californians for Voter ID • Former California Secretary of State Bill Jones (R) • Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association

Opponents: U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D) • Gubernatorial Candidate Xavier Becerra (D) • California Democratic Party • American Civil Liberties Union • Common Cause • League of Women Voters of California • Californians for Voting Rights • California Teachers Association • SEIU California

Status: **FAILING**





Photo licensed under Adobe Stock

IE Sales Taxes Inch Up

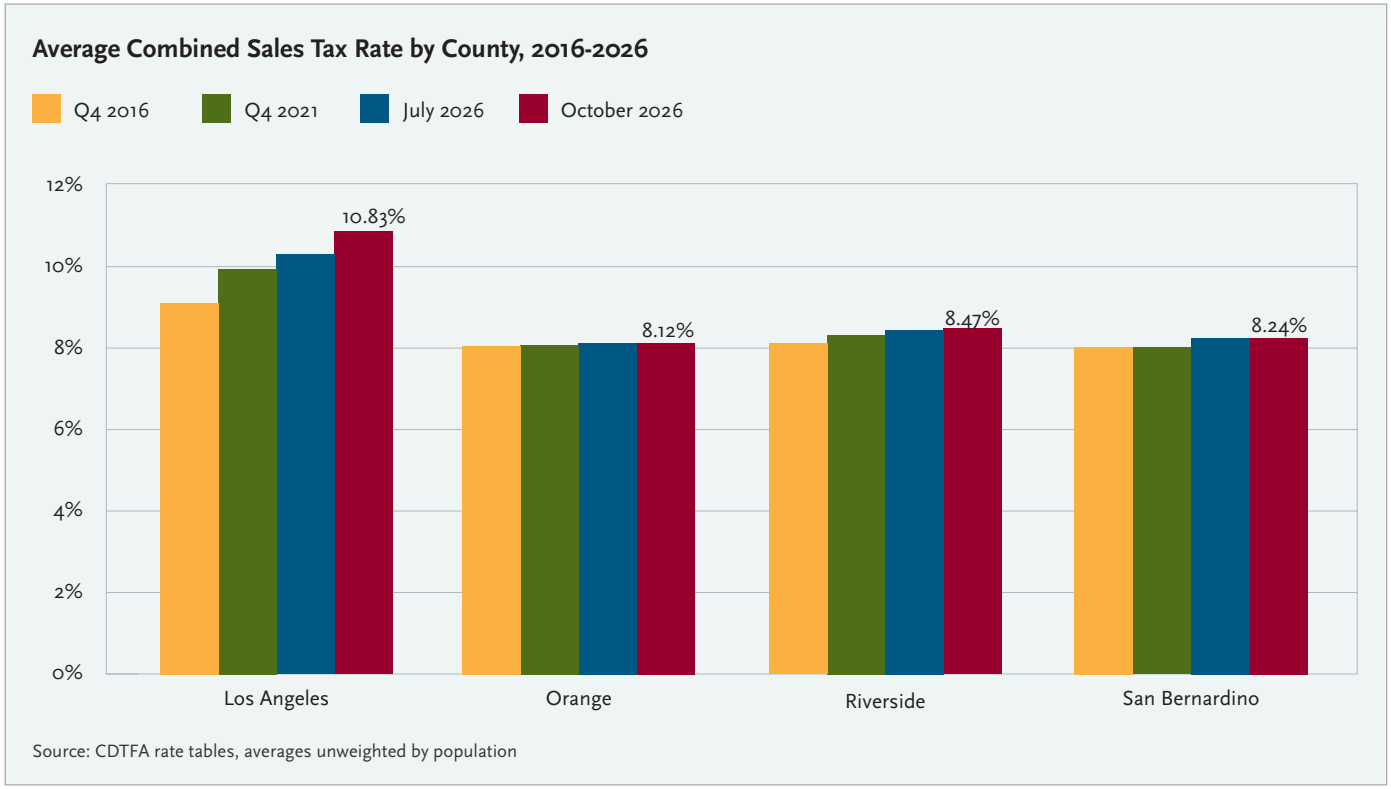
by Keith Maben ’28

Affordability was the top issue on Californians’ minds ahead of the midterm elections, and sales taxes are a considerable part of the price that residents pay on everyday purchases. Costs and taxes have risen across the state, but not evenly. In Southern California, the clearest dividing line runs along the Los Angeles County border. Residents of the Inland Empire pay significantly lower sales tax rates than their neighbors in L.A. County. On November 3, voters decided whether to maintain that gap, or to push the Inland Empire’s rates higher. The Secretary of State will not certify the election results until December 11, 2026, but one week after the election, six of the eight IE sales tax measures were ahead in the vote count.

Sales taxes are assessed on retail purchases of goods such as clothing, electronics, furniture, and cars. Sales of groceries, prescription medication, housing, and many services are not taxed. The statewide base rate is 7.25%, with anything above that base needing to be a voter-approved “district” tax. When counties and cities ask voters to approve an increase, the jurisdiction that levies it keeps all the revenue.

The Inland Empire and L.A. County have taken diverging paths. In 2016, the average sales-tax rate was 9.09% in L.A. County, 8.10% in Riverside County and 8.02% in San Bernardino County. Since then, L.A. County’s rates have grown more than three times as fast as either Inland Empire county: Riverside County’s average has risen by 0.62 points and San Bernardino County’s by 0.47 points, while L.A. County’s average has risen 1.99 points.

Today, the average combined sales tax rate is 10.83% in L.A. County, compared to just 8.47% in Riverside County and 8.24% in San Bernardino County. The highest rate anywhere in the Inland Empire is 9.25%, in Palm Springs and Cathedral City in Riverside County. This is lower than the lowest rate in L.A. County, 10.25%, by a full point.



Much of the difference comes from countywide tax increases, which have been far less prevalent in the Inland Empire. Both Inland Empire counties levy a single countywide 0.5% tax for transportation: Riverside County's Measure A, approved in 1988, and San Bernardino County's Measure I, approved in 1989. Together with the 7.25% statewide base rate, they set the Inland Empire's 7.75% floor. L.A. County, by contrast, has a floor of 10.25%. This reflects six countywide tax increases, three of which were approved in the last decade.

These diverging rates have a tangible impact on what consumers pay, and are easiest to see in large purchases. For instance, a Rancho Cucamonga (7.75%) resident who buys a $50,000 car pays $3,875 in sales tax. A City of Los Angeles (10.25%) resident pays $5,125 in sales tax on the same car. A resident in Palmdale (11.75%), with the highest sales tax rate in Southern California, would pay $5,875. Living across the county line would yield up to a $2,000 savings in the final purchase price.

Earlier this year, elections reinforced this pattern. L.A. County governments placed far more sales tax increases on the ballot than their Inland Empire counterparts, and voters approved each one. Of the 14 local sales tax measures decided between March and June in Southern California, 11 were in L.A. County, and all 11 passed. The Inland Empire had just three. Two failed, and only one, a one-point increase in Perris, passed.

This November was a robust test of whether the Inland Empire will keep diverging from L.A. County, or whether it will follow its lead. Eight of the 16 sales tax measures on the region's ballots were in the Inland Empire. This includes six city increases in San Bernardino County (Ontario, Chino Hills, Highland, Adelanto, Twentynine Palms and Grand Terrace) and two extensions of the existing half-cent countywide transportation taxes.

In preliminary results as of November 10, voters in the Inland Empire were more supportive of sales tax measures than those in L.A. County. Inland Empire voters were approving both countywide extensions, with about 70% support in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Four of the six city increases in the Inland Empire were passing, three with over 55% of the vote. L.A. County voters, who approved all 11 of their measures earlier this year, were less receptive this November. Only three of the five measures were ahead, including the City of Los Angeles's Measure FD.

Notably, however, the Inland Empire rates are so far below L.A. County's that the gap remains nearly as wide after the election. If the four winning increases hold, San Bernardino County's average would rise by 0.14 points, to 8.38%, while Riverside County's would stay at 8.47%. L.A. County's two winning increases, in the City of Los Angeles and San Gabriel, would push its average to 10.85%, still roughly 2.4 points above both Inland Empire counties. ♦

Sales Tax Measures on the ballot in November 2026, with Preliminary Results

Jurisdiction	County	Measure	Proposal	Rate If Approved	Preliminary Result (as of 11/10/26)	Yes % (as of 11/10/26)
City of Los Angeles	Los Angeles	FD	+0.5%	10.75%	**Passing**	53.7%
San Gabriel	Los Angeles	PS	+1%	12.0%	**Passing**	59.3%
Diamond Bar	Los Angeles	Q	+1%	11.25%	**Failing**	46.1%
Hermosa Beach	Los Angeles	HB	+0.5%	10.75%	**Failing**	42.8%
Cudahy	Los Angeles	OK	Extend existing 0.75% tax	No change	**Passing**	80.13%
Orange	Orange	I	+1.0%	8.75%	**Passing**	59.55%
San Clemente	Orange	M	+1.0%	8.75%	**Failing**	36.9%
Santa Ana	Orange	N	Extend existing 1.5% tax	No change	**Passing**	66.51%
Ontario	San Bernardino	H	+0.5%	9.25%	**Passing**	53.82%
Chino Hills	San Bernardino	J	+1.0%	8.75%	**Failing**	49.68%
Highland	San Bernardino	E	+1.0%	8.75%	**Passing**	59.6%
Adelanto	San Bernardino	P	+1.0%	8.75%	**Passing**	68.3%
Twentynine Palms	San Bernardino	G	+1.0%	8.75%	**Passing**	60.7%
Grand Terrace	San Bernardino	N	+1.0%	8.75%	**Failing**	46.0%
San Bernardino County	San Bernardino	I	Extend existing 0.5% tax	No change	**Passing**	68.9%
Riverside County	Riverside	A	Extend existing 0.5% tax	No change	**Passing**	70.5%

Sources: Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, "Measures Appearing on the Ballot," November 3, 2026 General Election (final, September 11, 2026); Orange County Registrar of Voters, "Assigned Measure Letters, November 3, 2026"; San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters, "November 3, 2026 General Election – Measures"; Riverside County Registrar of Voters, "November 3, 2026 General Election."

Bibliography

Ballotpedia. "Los Angeles County, California, Measure A, Sales Tax Measure (November 2024)." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://ballotpedia.org/Los_Angeles_County,_California,_Measure_A,_Sales_Tax_Measure_(November_2024).

Ballotpedia. "Los Angeles County, California, Measure ER, Sales Tax Increase for Health Services Measure (June 2026)." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://ballotpedia.org/Los_Angeles_County,_California,_Measure_ER,_Sales_Tax_Increase_for_Health_Services_Measure_(June_2026).

Ballotpedia. "Los Angeles County, California, Sales Tax, Measure M (November 2016)." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://ballotpedia.org/Los_Angeles_County,_California,_Sales_Tax,_Measure_M_(November_2016).

California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. "California City & County Sales & Use Tax Rate Information." Accessed October 1, 2026. https://cdtfa.ca.gov/taxes-and-fees/sales-use-tax-rates.htm.

California Department of Tax and Fee Administration. "Historical Tax Rates in California Cities & Counties." Accessed September 19, 2026. https://cdtfa.ca.gov/taxes-and-fees/archive-rates.htm.

City of Highland. "Measure I." Accessed November 2, 2026. https://www.highlandca.gov/368/Measure-I.

Coleman, Michael. "Local Revenue Measure Results, June 2026." CaliforniaCityFinance.com. Final results, July 3, 2026. https://californiacityfinance.com/Votes2606final.pdf.

Kerstein, Seth. *Understanding California's Sales Tax*. Sacramento: Legislative Analyst's Office, 2015. https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/finance/sales-tax/understanding-sales-tax-050615.aspx.

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. "Local Return." Accessed November 2, 2026. https://www.metro.net/about/local_return_pgm/.

Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk. "Measures Appearing on the Ballot, November 3, 2026 General Election." Final, September 11, 2026. https://content.lavote.gov/docs/rrcc/documents/final-measures-appearing-on-the-ballot-9-11-2026.pdf.

Maben, Keith. "Rising Rates: How Local Measures Have Reshaped Sales Taxes in Southern California." Rose Institute of State and Local Government, October 2026. https://roseinstitute.cmc.edu.

Orange County Registrar of Voters. "Assigned Measure Letters, November 3, 2026." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://ocvote.gov/elections/assigned-measure-letters-november-3-2026.

Public Policy Institute of California. "PPIC Statewide Survey: Californians and Their Government." September 2026. https://www.ppic.org/pdf/ppic-statewide-survey-californians-and-their-government-september-2026.pdf.

Riverside County Registrar of Voters. "November 3, 2026 General Election." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://voteinfo.net/november-3-2026-general-election.

Riverside County Transportation Commission. "Commission Places Transportation Funding Renewal on November Ballot." June 10, 2026. https://www.rctc.org/press-release/commission-places-transportation-funding-renewal-on-november-ballot.

San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters. "November 3, 2026 General Election – Measures." Accessed September 20, 2026. https://elections.sbcounty.gov/elections/2026/1103/measures/.



Image licensed from Adobe Stock

Riverside County Combats Fentanyl Deaths

by Dhriti Jagadish '27

Like many communities across America, Riverside County experienced an alarming rise in fentanyl-involved deaths beginning in 2019, with the 133 deaths that year — six times higher than the 22 deaths in 2018. The following four years saw steady increases, peaking at 583 deaths in 2023. This trend abruptly reversed with fentanyl-involved deaths dropping dramatically to 354 in 2024 and 283 in 2025 — a 51% drop from the 2023 peak (see Figure 1).

Riverside County credits this drop to its interventions — specifically, the creation of a multidisciplinary committee focusing on law enforcement, awareness, addiction treatment, and emergency medical response, among others. In its 2024-2025 biennial report, the Riverside County Office of the District Attorney (DA) claimed that it was "leading the way" in these efforts by, for example, being among the first in the state to charge fentanyl suppliers with homicide if their dealings result in death.

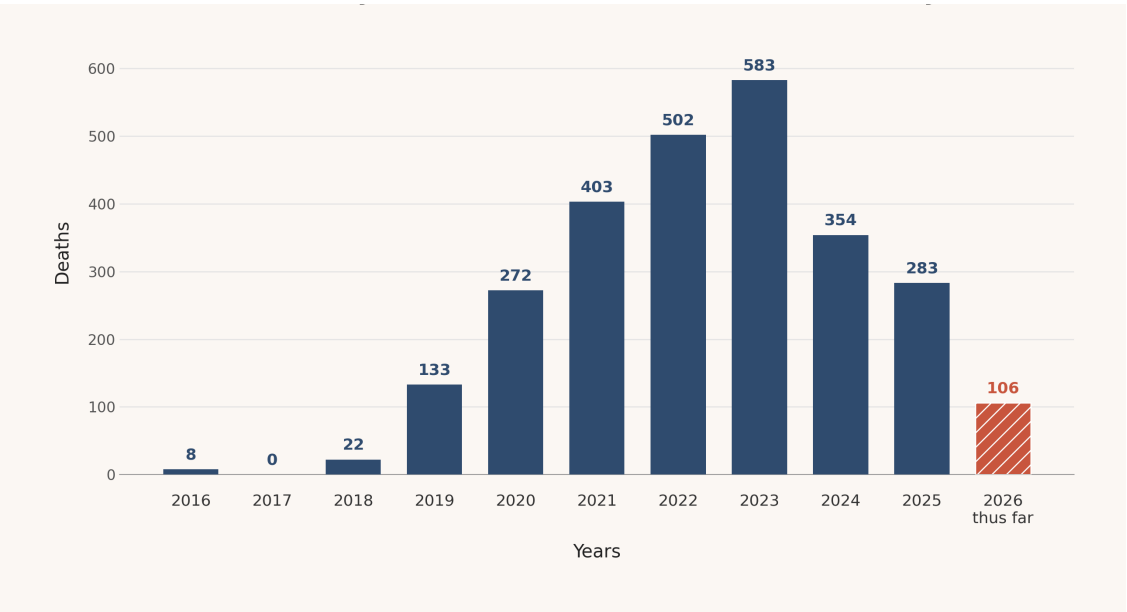
It is important to note that Riverside County's surge in fentanyl fatalities is consistent with California's trends, as the state experienced a fentanyl-involved fatality increase of around 345% from 2019 to 2023 (Figure 2). Nationally, the rise was much smaller, with the United States experiencing an increase of around 100% in the same period. However, just as the nation saw a decline in fentanyl-involved fatalities in 2024 and 2025 — with the Brookings Institution observing a 50% reduction in deaths between June 2023 and August 2025 — so too did several California counties, including Riverside. Other forms of deadly overdose, such as meth-involved deaths, also fell in Riverside.

Led by Republican district attorney Mike Hestrin since 2015, Riverside has long been recognized for its "tough-on-crime" policies. A September 2026 report by the Marshall Project and CalMatters found that Riverside County is the most likely in California to hand down death sentences, with Riverside handing down 11 of the 25 death sentences since Governor Gavin Newsom's 2019 death penalty moratorium. Additionally, Hestrin vocally opposed Proposition 47 — which reclassified certain non-violent, low-level offenses from felonies to misdemeanors — and Proposition 57 — which increased parole opportunities for felons convicted of nonviolent crimes and sought to reduce the number of juveniles tried as adults.

In a December 2021 press release, Hestrin explained a three-pronged fentanyl reduction effort necessitating "education," "prevention," and most notably, "prosecution." The release announced that in February 2021, the DA had charged Joseph Michael Costanza, a 21-year-old from Eastvale, with second-degree murder as well as additional charges related to the sale and possession of fentanyl and the bodily harm it caused. Costanza's supply of fentanyl-laced M30 pills had killed 18-year-old Angel Vazquez and harmed a 16-year-old in October 2020. Costanza's case was among the first of its kind in California.

The Riverside DA filed Costanza's second-degree murder charge as a "Watson murder," based on the landmark state case People v. Watson (1981), which involved an intoxicated driver causing a fatal crash. The California Supreme Court ruled that intoxicated drivers who cause the death of another can be charged with second-degree murder for acting with "implied malice." The prosecution must prove that a defendant possessed knowledge that driving under the influence is dangerous, but nevertheless consciously disregarded this knowledge. Similarly, a fentanyl dealer is "aware that they are selling a deadly drug," Hestrin argued, and they "have no regard for human life. This is murder."

Figure 1. Fentanyl-Involved Deaths in Riverside County



Source: 2016 - 2022: Riverside County District Attorney's Office, Biennial Report 2024–25 (Riverside, CA: Riverside County District Attorney's Office, 2025), https://rivcoda.org/biennial_report_24_25; 2023 - 2026: Riverside County Overdose Data to Action (RODA) Dashboard, County of Riverside, accessed October 27, 2026, https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/2e218186cfa54ffc977712df92e33d14/page/Page?draft=true&org=CountyofRiverside&views=Fentanyl-Overdose-Deaths%2CSheriff-Department%2CType-of-Drug-by-Year.

It was only in August 2023, however, that Riverside — and California — saw its first murder conviction for a fentanyl-involved death, with the court sentencing a Temecula man, Vincente David Romero, to 15 years to life in prison for knowingly supplying 26-year-old Kelsey King with fentanyl. Though prosecutors argued that Romero knew that the pill he supplied contained fentanyl, his defense attorney argued that Romero had tried to seek help for King — behavior not consistent with knowing the danger of fentanyl beforehand. At the time of the verdict, it was the first of 23 active fentanyl-involved murder cases in Riverside to go to trial.

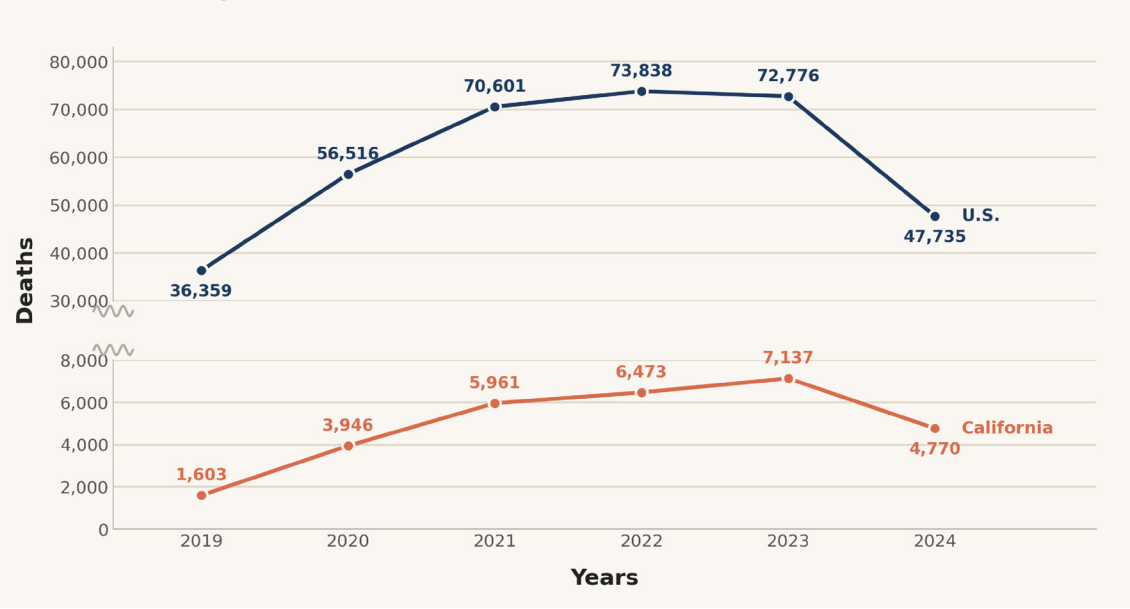
From 2021 to 2025, the Riverside DA filed more than 40 homicide charges for fentanyl-involved deaths, but only successfully convicted two defendants as of December 2025. In a press release after the second conviction, the DA's Office cited the prosecution's "high burden of proof," noting that California has only seen 10 fentanyl-involved murder convictions. Here lies the challenge of fentanyl-involved prosecutions: It is difficult to prove, as Romero's defense attorney tried to demonstrate, that a person dealing fentanyl acted with "implied malice."

Prosecutors accept the "implied malice" burden because existing California law is silent on the matter of drug-induced homicide (DIH). Though federal prosecutors can charge someone for distributing Schedule I or II drugs that result in death — a charge that carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 20 years — California has no such law. By the fall of 2025, two-thirds of states had introduced DIH laws and adjacent provisions and New York's Republican Congressman Mike Lawler had introduced a bill to add "attempted murder" to fentanyl trafficking charges. California remained an outlier.

The Watson murder charge for fentanyl dealing, even with its limitations, is a workaround in a California hesitant to use punitive measures to combat overdose deaths. In the 2023-24 legislative session, at the height of the fentanyl epidemic, four of seven fentanyl prevention bills related to increasing punishments for dealing; three of the four failed to advance in the legislature. In April 2023, lawmakers similarly declined to advance the bipartisan SB 44, or "Alexandra's Law," named for Riverside County resident Alexandra Capelouto who overdosed on a counterfeit pill. SB 44, like the failed SB 350 from the 2021-22 legislative session, would have required judges to warn convicted fentanyl dealers that they could face homicide charges if they sold drugs that caused death.

SB 44 intended to tighten a prosecutor's claim of "implied malice"; by mirroring the "Watson advisement" used in DUI cases, fentanyl dealers whose supply kills could not claim that they had no knowledge of the danger. Though SB 44 failed, Hestrin and his office supported Proposition 36 in 2024, which — along with increasing penalties for fentanyl trafficking and imposing stricter sentences for drug dealing involving firearms — included SB 44's Watson warning. The Proposition passed with over two-thirds of voters in favor. Alongside prosecutions under California law, the DA also referred cases to the United States Attorney's Office. As of July 2025, the DA had referred 12 cases for federal prosecution.

Figure 2. Fentanyl-Involved Deaths in California and the United States



Source: California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard, California Department of Public Health, accessed October 30, 2026, https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/ODdash/?tab=CA; Heather Saunders, Nirmita Panchal, and Robin Rudowitz, "Opioid Overdose Deaths: National Trends and Variation by Demographics and States," KFF, February 24, 2026, https://www.kff.org/mental-health/opioid-overdose-deaths-national-trends-and-variation-by-demographics-and-states/.

Despite these efforts, it remains unclear whether DIH prosecutions lower fentanyl-involved deaths. Briefs published by several left-leaning advocacy groups such as the Drug Policy Alliance, Broken No More, and Fair and Just Prosecution — as well as an analysis conducted by a senior fellow at the right-leaning R Street Institute — argue that DIH laws may increase overdose deaths by discouraging 911 calls, especially when many dealers are friends of overdose victims and are often subsidizing their own addictions.

A June 2026 meta-analysis of eight studies suggests that the effects of DIH laws remain limited, but consistently indicate negative impacts to public health, largely by discouraging calls to 911. In fact, a 2023 study disproved — and led to the retraction of — a 2022 paper that claimed that county-level opioid overdoses significantly declined after the enactments of drug-induced homicide laws.

Given these limitations of DIH laws, it is worth considering other interventions Riverside has pursued. In a report on the national decline in fentanyl-involved deaths, Brookings Institution researchers cite epidemiologist Nabarun Dasgupta who credits the decline to lower barriers for drug treatment, increased distribution of naloxone, fentanyl shipment restrictions, cartel arrests, as well as heightened law enforcement at the US-Mexico border, among eight total factors — none of which include the criminalization of local dealing and subsequent prosecution.

The Riverside DA opted for a multi-pronged approach that also considered the interventions Brookings found effective. As part of the "prevention" prong, Hestrin cited the efforts of the DA's Bureau of Investigations, namely those who oversee the Gang Impact Team (GIT). Staffed by officials from the DA's Bureau, Homeland Security Investigations, the United States Marshals Service, several city police departments, and other authorities, the GIT received statewide attention in June 2022 for seizing 40,000 fentanyl-laced M30 pills and five kilograms of powdered fentanyl — a stash worth $1.5 million. That December, the GIT, working with the United States Postal Service, seized 18.5 kilograms of illegally shipped fentanyl.

With its proximity to the US-Mexico border, Riverside County has also relied on coordinating with US Customs and Border Protection. In September 2024, Hestrin testified before the House Judiciary Committee on the open-border crisis, wherein he applauded the seizure efforts of Border Patrol agents but demanded stronger border policies be enacted to shut down the I-15 drug corridor and other entries into Riverside County. Just recently, in October 2026, Border Patrol seized 51 pounds of fentanyl in Murrieta along Interstate 15, Riverside's drug corridor leading to the border.



Public service announcement on a billboard on Interstate 15 | Source: Riverside County District Attorney's Office FaceBook

The Riverside DA also coordinated fentanyl awareness and education programs, suggested to be effective by the November 2025 HEALing Communities study. In October 2023, Hestrin's office successfully sponsored SB 46, which required individuals convicted of a controlled substance offense to complete a treatment or education program. The DA's communications head was responsible for the County's 2022 "Faces of Fentanyl" campaign, which featured a 30-second public service announcement that received 892,242 impressions and a view-through rate of 98%. In August 2026, in compliance with AB 2429, the county's Board of Education expanded Faces of Fentanyl to include free educational materials for Riverside school districts.

Meanwhile, other county departments, such as the Emergency Services Department and the Riverside University Health System, focused on health-related interventions, were tasked by the County to improve naloxone distribution, create interventions for those at risk of fentanyl use, and increase access to outpatient clinics offering opioid-addiction medications.

Granted, researchers continue to disagree about the efficacy of these fatality prevention interventions. A January 2026 Science report attributed declines in fentanyl-involved death to a supply shock in the fentanyl trade, theorizing the cause to be China's restriction of the flow of precursors to Mexico. Charles Lehman, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, has been skeptical of this theory — and also of harm-reduction efforts, distribution of naloxone and opioid-addiction medication, and Biden-era border crackdowns as playing a significant role in lowering fatalities. Though Lehman acknowledges the respite created by this fentanyl "drought," he argues that US authorities are unsure of its cause, warning that the supply could very well resurge.

Riverside County and its Office of the District Attorney have much to celebrate with regards to the steep decline of fentanyl-involved fatalities, as well as the reduction of other forms of drug overdose. The DA's efforts, involving cooperation with other County departments and federal authorities, as well as legislative advocacy, exemplifies the multifaceted nature of overdose prevention interventions. Initial research on the effectiveness of punitive approaches, however, is not definitive that prosecution of drug-induced homicides is the most effective prong of the DA's strategy.

As experts continue to deliberate on matters of efficacy, the Riverside County DA exemplifies the willingness required of local authorities to attempt and iterate multiple interventions. ♦

Bibliography

Broken No More. "Not in Our Name." Accessed October 30, 2026. https://broken-no-more.org/not-in-our-name/.

California Department of Public Health. "California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard." Accessed October 30, 2026. https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/ODdash/?tab=CA.

Carroll, Jennifer J., Leah Bevis, Taleed El-Sabawi, Mary Figgatt, Nabarun Dasgupta, Leo Beletsky, Amy J. Leiberman, Ashleigh Dennis, and Corey S. Davis. "A Discussion of Critical Errors in a Longitudinal Study on the Deterrent Effect of Drug-Induced Homicide Laws on Opioid-Related Mortality across 92 Counties and the District of Columbia in the United States." *World Medical & Health Policy* 15, no. 4 (2023): 587–612. https://doi.org/10.1002/wmh3.570.

Carroll, Jennifer J., Dmitri Fisher, and Bayla Ostrach. "The Public Health Impacts of Drug-Induced Homicide Laws: A Community-Engaged Scoping Review." *Health Justice* 14, no. 1 (2026): 41. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-026-00419-y.

Caulkins, Jonathan P. "HEALing Communities Study Results, Questions and Implications." *Addiction* 121, no. 2 (February 2026): 222–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/add.70273.

Chammah, Maurice, and Jill Castellano. "Gavin Newsom Could Reshape the U.S. Death Penalty, but It's Politically Risky." *CalMatters*, September 10, 2026. https://calmatters.org/justice/2026/09/newsom-california-death-penalty-decision/.

Corkery, Michael. "California Prosecutors Filing Murder Charges in More Fentanyl Deaths." *New York Times*, March 14, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/14/us/california-murder-fentanyl-overdose.html.

County of Riverside. "New Faces of Fentanyl Curriculum Warns Riverside County Students of Deadly Drug during Health Class." August 18, 2026. https://rivco.gov/news/new-faces-fentanyl-curriculum-warns-riverside-county-students-deadly-drug-during-health-class.

County of Riverside. "Riverside County Overdose Data to Action (RODA) Dashboard." Accessed October 27, 2026. https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/2e218186cfa54ffc977712df92e33d14/page/Page?draft=true&org=CountyofRiverside&views=Fentanyl-Overdose-Deaths%2CSheriff-Department%2CType-of-Drug-by-Year.

Dasgupta, Nabarun, Colin Miller, and Adams Sibley. "Are Overdoses Down, and Why?" Opioid Data Lab. September 18, 2024. https://www.opioiddata.org/are-overdoses-down-and-why/.

Drug Policy Alliance. "Drug-Induced Homicide Laws." August 2024. https://drugpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/DPA-DIHLawFactSheet-InDesign-Interactive.pdf.

Fair and Just Prosecution. "Drug-Induced Homicide Prosecutions." July 2022. https://fairandjustprosecution.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FJP-Drug-Induced-Homicide-Brief.pdf.

Finkle, Carly. "(In)justice in Riverside: The Case for Change and Accountability." ACLU of Northern California, December 1, 2021. https://www.aclunorcal.org/publications/injustice-riverside-case-change-and-accountability/.

La, Lynn. "Showdown on California Fentanyl Bills." *CalMatters*, April 28, 2023. https://calmatters.org/newsletters/whatmatters/2023/04/california-fentanyl-legislature/.

Lehman, Charles F. "The Real Reason for the Drop in Fentanyl Overdoses." *The Atlantic*, January 20, 2026. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/2026/01/opioid-overdose-decrease-fentanyl-china/685683/.

Luna, Itzel. "$1.5 Million Worth of Fentanyl Powder Seized by Gang Investigators in Riverside County." *Los Angeles Times*, June 21, 2022. https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-06-21/1-5-million-worth-of-fentanyl-powder-seized-by-gang-investigators-in-riverside-county.

McKenna, Stacey. "Why Laws That Equate Drug Distribution to Murder Are Counterproductive." R Street Institute, September 29, 2025. https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/why-laws-that-equate-drug-distribution-to-murder-are-counterproductive/.

Midgette, Greg, and Peter Reuter. "Exploring the Sources of the Decline in US Drug Overdoses." Brookings Institution, August 6, 2026. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/exploring-the-sources-of-the-decline-in-us-drug-overdoses/.

Nixon, Nicole. "Why Fentanyl Bills Are Stalling in the California Legislature." *CapRadio*, April 18, 2023. https://www.capradio.org/articles/2023/04/18/why-fentanyl-bills-are-stalling-in-the-california-legislature/.

People v. Watson, 30 Cal. 3d 290 (1981). https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/1111967?ln=en&v=pdf.

Riverside County Board of Supervisors. "Item 2.13: Receive and file updates from the Board of Supervisors Ad-Hoc Multidisciplinary Committee on Fentanyl Response." July 1, 2025. https://media.rivcocob.org/proceeds/2025/p2025_07_01_files/02.13001.pdf.

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. *Biennial Report 2022-23*. Riverside, CA: Riverside County District Attorney's Office, 2023. https://rivcoda.org/da_publications#docaccess-e009dd055dae07fea475f090e8c80c00d4becd398790bde948cd57a9601e2030

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. *Biennial Report 2024–25*. Riverside, CA: Riverside County District Attorney's Office, 2025. https://rivcoda.org/biennial_report_24_25.

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. "DA Hestrin Announces Murder Charge Filed against Alleged Drug Dealer Who Sold Fentanyl-Laced to Drug Victim." February 22, 2021. https://rivcoda.org/news/da-hestrin-announces-murder-charge-filed-against-alleged-drug-dealer-who-sold-fentanyl-laced.

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. "Fentanyl Dealer Sentenced for Murder." December 5, 2025. https://rivcoda.org/fentanyl_murder_sentence.

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. "Guest Blog: District Attorney Mike Hestrin Talks about the Fentanyl Drug Crisis." December 7, 2021. https://rivcoda.org/news/guest-blog-district-attorney-mike-hestrin-talks-about-fentanyl-drug-crisis.

Riverside County District Attorney's Office. "In First of Its Kind Verdict in California, Man Found Guilty in Fentanyl-Related Homicide." August 31, 2023. https://rivcoda.org/news/first-its-kind-verdict-california-man-found-guilty-fentanyl-related-homicide.

Saunders, Heather, Nirmita Panchal, and Robin Rudowitz. "Opioid Overdose Deaths: National Trends and Variation by Demographics and States." KFF, February 24, 2026. https://www.kff.org/mental-health/opioid-overdose-deaths-national-trends-and-variation-by-demographics-and-states/.

Symon, Evan. "Counties across California Saw Massive Drops in Overdose Deaths in 2024." *California Globe*, June 26, 2025. https://californiaglobe.com/fr/counties-across-california-saw-massive-drops-in-overdose-deaths-in-2024/.

"21 U.S. Code § 841 – Prohibited Acts A." Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School. Accessed October 30, 2026. https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/21/841.

U.S. Congress. House. Committee on the Judiciary. "The Biden-Harris Border Crisis: California Perspectives." 118th Cong., 2nd sess., September 6, 2024. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-118hhrg56700/html/CHRG-118hhrg56700.htm.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "U.S. Border Patrol Agents Seize over 51 Pounds of Fentanyl along I-15." October 10, 2026. https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/us-border-patrol-agents-seize-over-51-pounds-fentanyl-along-i-15.

Vangelov, Kasey, Keith Humphreys, Jonathan P. Caulkins, Harold Pollack, Bryce Pardo, and Peter Reuter. "Did the Illicit Fentanyl Trade Experience a Supply Shock?" *Science* 391, no. 6781 (2026): 134–36. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aea6130.



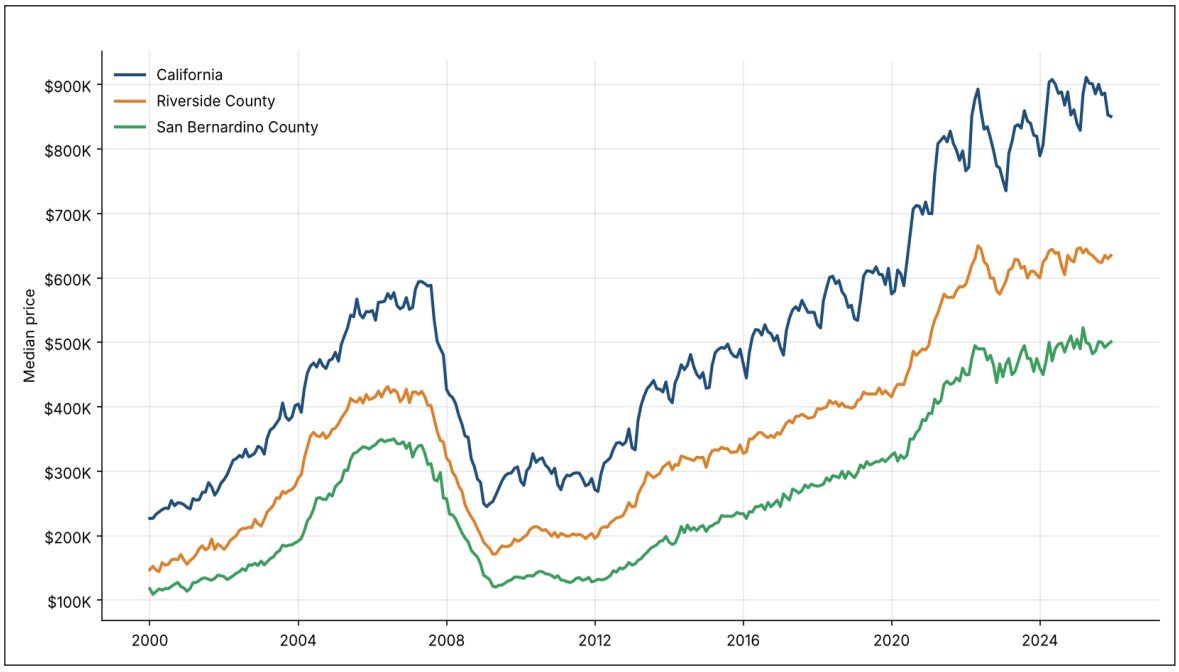
Image under license from Adobe Stock

Montclair, Ontario, Upland Housing

by Alex Bishop '27

The Inland Empire (IE) is one of many regions in California where housing and affordability issues have become widespread. Its population has swelled from 3.2 million in 2000 to 4.7 million today, nearly a 50% increase. Demand for housing has grown at an even more rapid pace, pushing the median price of a detached home up 331% in Riverside County, from $226,870 to $635,632, and up 325% in San Bernardino County, from $117,881 to $498,000 (Figure 1). The increase in both IE counties outstripped the 275% increase statewide.

Figure 1. Median Price of Existing Detached Homes, 2000-2025



Source: "Historical Housing Data," California Association of Realtors, accessed November 5, 2026, https://www.car.org/marketdata/data/housingdata.

This change has put IE cities on the frontline of the fight over affordability and housing policy in California. In particular, the cities on the border of Los Angeles County are squeezed between the enduringly high costs and high demand of the L.A. economic catchment area and the more recent boom in the IE.

California's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) is a critical part of both local housing planning and development cycles in California and in generating publicly available housing data. RHNA is a state-mandated eight-year process wherein the state assesses housing needs in every region, and then requires counties and municipalities to submit plans to meet those needs. In particular, RHNA requires governments to plan to produce housing that is affordable at several different levels of income, classified as very low, low, moderate, and above moderate. These income levels correspond to below 50% area median income (AMI), between 51-80% AMI, 81-120% AMI, and 120+% AMI, respectively. To meet their RHNA requirements, cities must identify sites of appropriately zoned (or to-be-rezoned) vacant or underutilized land which could be developed or redeveloped to meet its allocations. Every city and county is required to prepare Annual Progress Reports (APRs) to assess its progress towards meeting its planned housing capacity as dictated by its RHNA assessment.

The 5th RHNA cycle began in 2013 and ended in 2021, while the 6th cycle began in 2021 and will end in 2029. Thus, the last decade is evenly split between the last five years of the 5th cycle and the first five years of the 6th. The 6th RHNA cycle has been very different from the 5th, largely due to changes in state law reflecting policy changes from Sacramento 2013 to 2021. The 5th cycle was initiated in the middle of the recovery from the 2008 financial crisis, in a period when housing was not yet seen as in crisis. As such, 5th cycle RHNA allocations were relatively modest. By the time of the 6th cycle, the affordability crisis in California had driven significant changes in attitudes towards housing. One consequence of this was that 6th cycle RHNA targets were adjusted significantly upwards. RHNA allocations for Montclair and Upland more than tripled, while Ontario's nearly doubled (Table 1).

Table 1: 5th vs. 6th Cycle RHNA Allocations

		Very Low	Low	Moderate	Above Moderate	Total
Montclair	5th Cycle	164	114	125	294	697
	6th Cycle	698	383	399	1,113	2,593
Ontario	5th Cycle	2,592	1,745	1,977	4,547	10,861
	6th Cycle	5,640	3,286	3,329	8,599	20,854
Upland	5th Cycle	382	260	294	653	1,589
	6th Cycle	1,584	959	1,013	2,130	5,686

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.

It should be noted that, while RHNA requires cities to plan for housing volumes and types commensurate with their RHNA allocations, it does not require cities to actually meet these planned levels of housing development. In the 5th cycle, Ontario, Montclair, and Upland basically met their total housing allocations (Table 2). However, this came disproportionately from above moderate-income housing, the only category where each city outperformed its allocation. Each of the cities failed to meet its very low and low-income RHNA targets, and only Ontario came close to meeting (~75%) its moderate-income target.

Table 2: RHNA Allocations vs. Actual Construction for the 5th RHNA Cycle

City	Very Low		Low		Moderate		Above Moderate		Total	
	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met
Montclair	164	18	114	0	125	0	294	689	697	707
Ontario	2,592	108	1,745	66	1,977	1,434	4,547	7,550	10,861	9,158
Upland	382	0	260	1	294	109	653	968	1,589	1,078

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.

For the 6th cycle, these cities appear to have slowed down (Table 3). All three could again be on track to miss their allocated low and very-low housing needs. Moreover, all three cities appear to be slowing even with their moderate and above-moderate requirements. Upland has met only about 10% of its total allocation, while Ontario has met about 26% and Montclair about 33%. With three years remaining in the RHNA cycle, however, the cities are sure to add to these numbers, and it is possible that lags in the housing planning, approval, and construction processes could lead to substantial improvements. Moreover, while these cities do appear to be significantly lagging behind their assessed needs, this is not uncommon. Statewide, only ~19% of 6th cycle need has been met, meaning that Ontario and Montclair are both outpacing statewide levels of housing permitting.

Table 3: RHNA Allocations vs. Actual Construction for the 6th RHNA Cycle through October 27, 2026

City	Very Low		Low		Moderate		Above Moderate		Total	
	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met	Planned	Met
Montclair	698	0	383	0	399	0	1,113	860	2,593	860
Ontario	5,640	30	3,286	20	3,329	0	8,599	5,412	20,854	5,462
Upland	1,584	0	959	0	1,013	221	2,130	367	5,686	588

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.



Image licensed from Adobe Stock

Over the last ten years, Ontario, Montclair, and Upland have permitted around 16,300 housing units (Table 4). Ontario has been responsible for the lion's share of these permits, making up roughly 83% of the total permitted units.

Table 4: Housing Permitting Per Year, 2016-2025

Year	Montclair	Ontario	Upland	Three-City Total
2016	39	627	103	769
2017	66	1,656	99	1,821
2018	221	1,313	0	1,534
2019	0	1,552	525	2,077
2020	11	934	127	1,072
2021	24	1,991	124	2,139
2022	376	1,176	204	1,756
2023	152	1,557	148	1,857
2024	3	799	148	950
2025	329	1,930	88	2,347
Total 2016-2025	**1,221**	**13,535**	**1,566**	**16,322**

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard

The per-capita picture is slightly more complicated (Table 5). Ontario again leads, having permitted 7.63 units per 1,000 residents per year on average; Montclair pulls ahead of Upland in per-capita terms. This is because while both cities have permitted a similar number of units over the last ten years (~1,220 for Montclair vs. ~1,550 for Upland), Upland has twice the population.

Table 5: Permits Per 1,000, 2016-2025

Year	Montclair			Ontario			Upland			3-City Ave. per Capita per 1,000
	Permits	Population	Per 1,000	Permits	Population	Per 1,000	Permits	Population	Per 1,000	
2016	39	37,850	1.03	627	167,265	3.75	103	77,305	1.33	2.72
2017	66	37,873	1.74	1,656	169,719	9.76	99	77,963	1.27	6.38
2018	221	37,888	5.83	1,313	172,202	7.62	0	78,453	-	5.32
2019	0	37,765	-	1,552	174,423	8.90	525	78,817	6.66	7.14
2020	11	37,935	0.29	934	175,699	5.32	127	79,026	1.61	3.66
2021	24	37,953	0.63	1,991	178,221	11.17	124	79,238	1.56	7.24
2022	376	37,808	9.94	1,176	180,892	6.50	204	79,248	2.57	5.89
2023	152	37,754	4.03	1,557	183,328	8.49	148	79,400	1.86	6.18
2024	3	37,747	0.08	799	185,669	4.30	148	79,698	1.86	3.13
2025	329	37,563	8.76	1,930	187,013	10.32	88	79,446	1.11	7.72
Average	122.1	37,814	3.23	1,353.5	177,443	7.63	156.6	78,859	1.99	5.55

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.



Image licensed from Adobe Stock

It is interesting to examine what housing types each city has permitted in the period 2018-2025 (2018 is the first year in which this data was collected). Upland and Ontario have permitted a balanced mix of single-family, multifamily, and Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) housing types, while Montclair has overwhelmingly permitted new 5+ unit multifamily housing developments.

Table 6: Housing Permits by Unit Type by City, 2018-2025

Unit type	Montclair	Ontario	Upland
Single-family detached	12	5,811	437
Single-family attached	0	1,626	248
Multifamily 2 to 4 units	9	66	14
Multifamily 5+ units	1,000	3,097	329
ADU	95	652	336
Total	1,116	11,252	1,364

Source: California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.

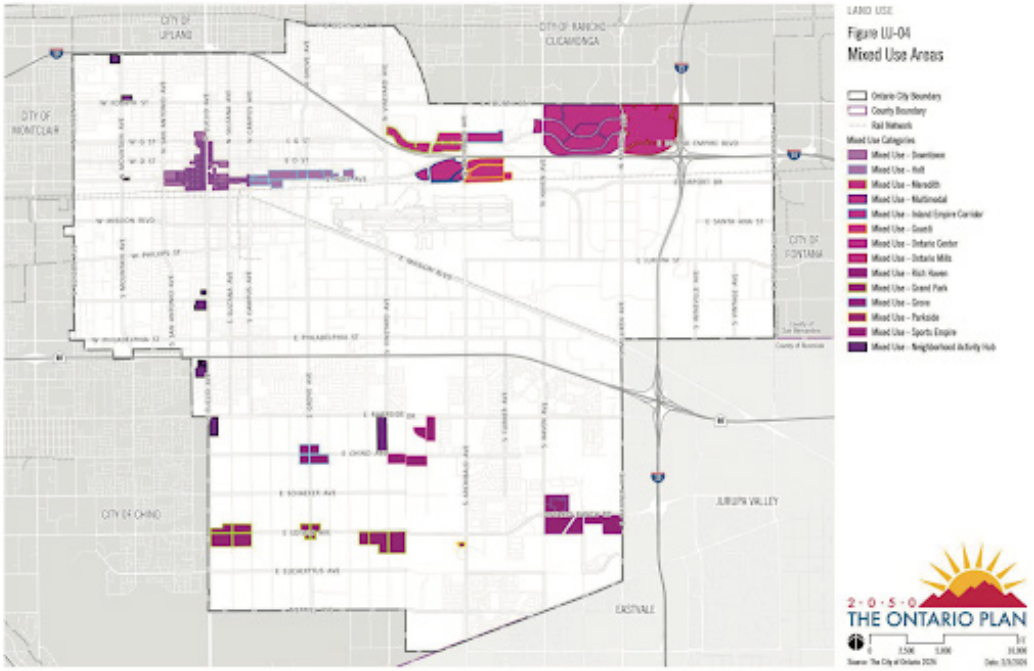
Ontario

In its 2014 housing element, Ontario proposed and implemented a number of different policies all centered around promoting development in a few specific areas. These were in downtown Ontario, as well as along Euclid, Mountain, and Holt avenues. To this end, the city rezoned several sites in these areas towards higher density or mixed use, worked with developers by issuing grants or other financial incentives, acquired land to be used for affordable development, and distributed state funding for new development. In total, these policies led to the construction of several new multifamily and apartment developments in these areas, including two income-restricted low- and very-low-income housing developments. However, this only accounted for a fraction of Ontario's total development in this period, and the city's subsequent housing element shows that little of the proposed affordable developments in these areas materialized.

In addition, Ontario permitted a substantial level of development in the New Model Colony/Ontario Ranch region in the south of the city over the course of the 5th cycle. This is a large area of historically agricultural land which Ontario annexed in 1999. It has been redeveloping this land into primarily single-family developments over the last 27 years. In the 5th cycle, these developments alone accounted for roughly half (~4,500 units) of Ontario's total housing development.

In the 6th cycle, the city maintained its focus on developing and redeveloping the downtown, Euclid, Holt, and Mountain Avenue areas (Figure 2). Several of the identified sites in these areas had also been identified for development in the 5th cycle, but were not developed. Ontario also continued to develop new housing in the Ontario Ranch area. Much like the 5th cycle, a significant portion, possibly the majority, of all new development in Ontario over the 6th cycle has come in the Ontario Ranch area. These corridor-oriented building plans have led to little new construction, but there has been relatively substantial new development in the city's mixed-use development zones in the northeast of the city. In total, however, Ontario's housing permitting has continued at roughly the same pace from the 5th cycle, making it difficult for the city to attain the more aggressive 6th-cycle targets.

Figure 2: Ontario's 6th -Cycle Mixed-Use Areas

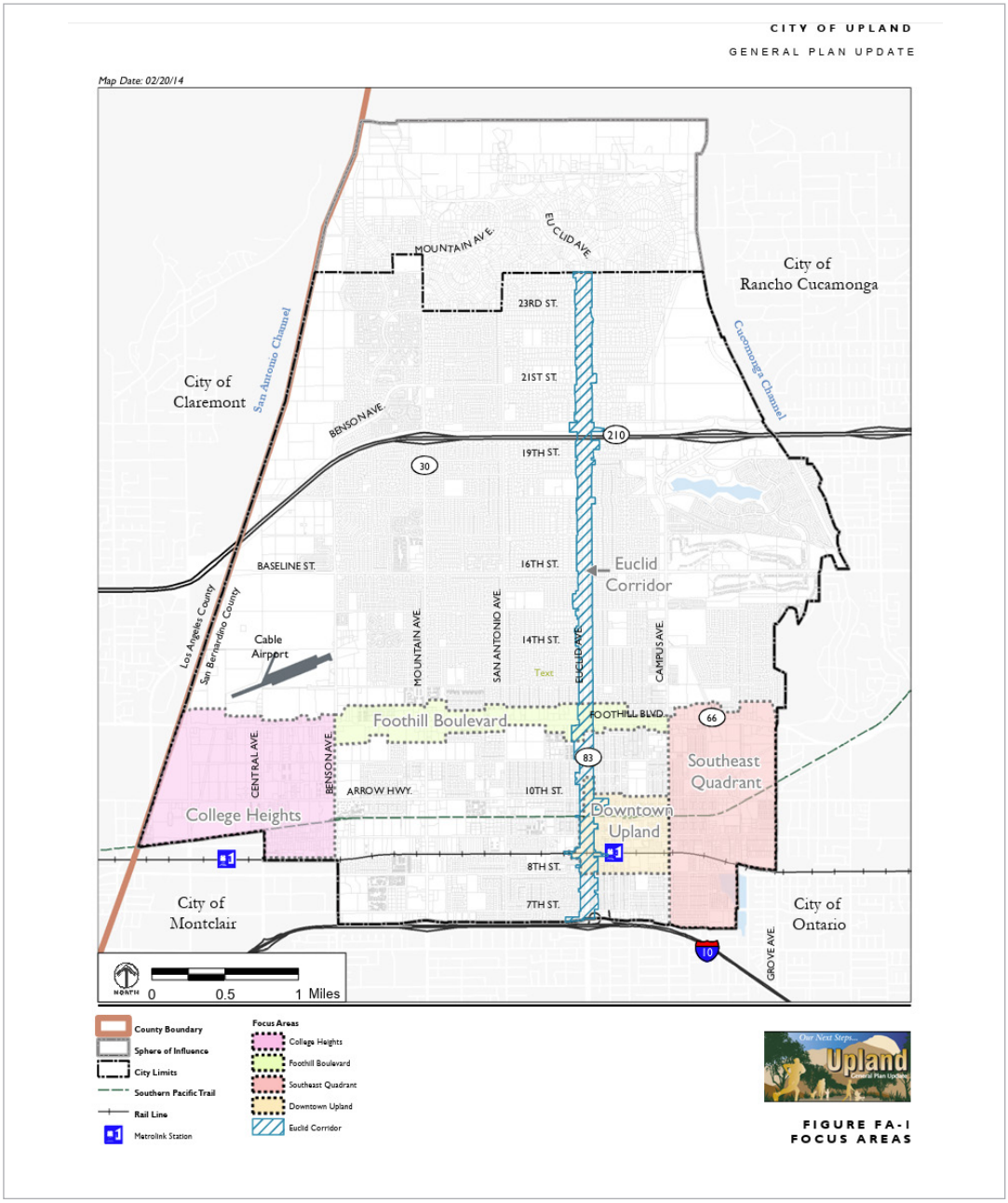


Source: City of Ontario. The Ontario Plan: Policy Plan, Housing Element Technical Report. Adopted March 2022, revised August 2022. https://content.ontarioca.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/HE%20Adopted%2020220821%20Clean_0.pdf.

Upland

In its 2014 housing element, Upland proposed concentrating development in a small number of specific plan areas, and in three general plan areas (Figure 3). These areas were located across the city. The majority of new development came in the relatively undeveloped west of the city, either in the "College Heights" general plan area or within the specific plan areas in that portion of the city (Figure 4). Some additional development occurred in the Colonies specific plan area. There was relatively little development in the downtown, southeast quadrant, or Foothill Boulevard areas.

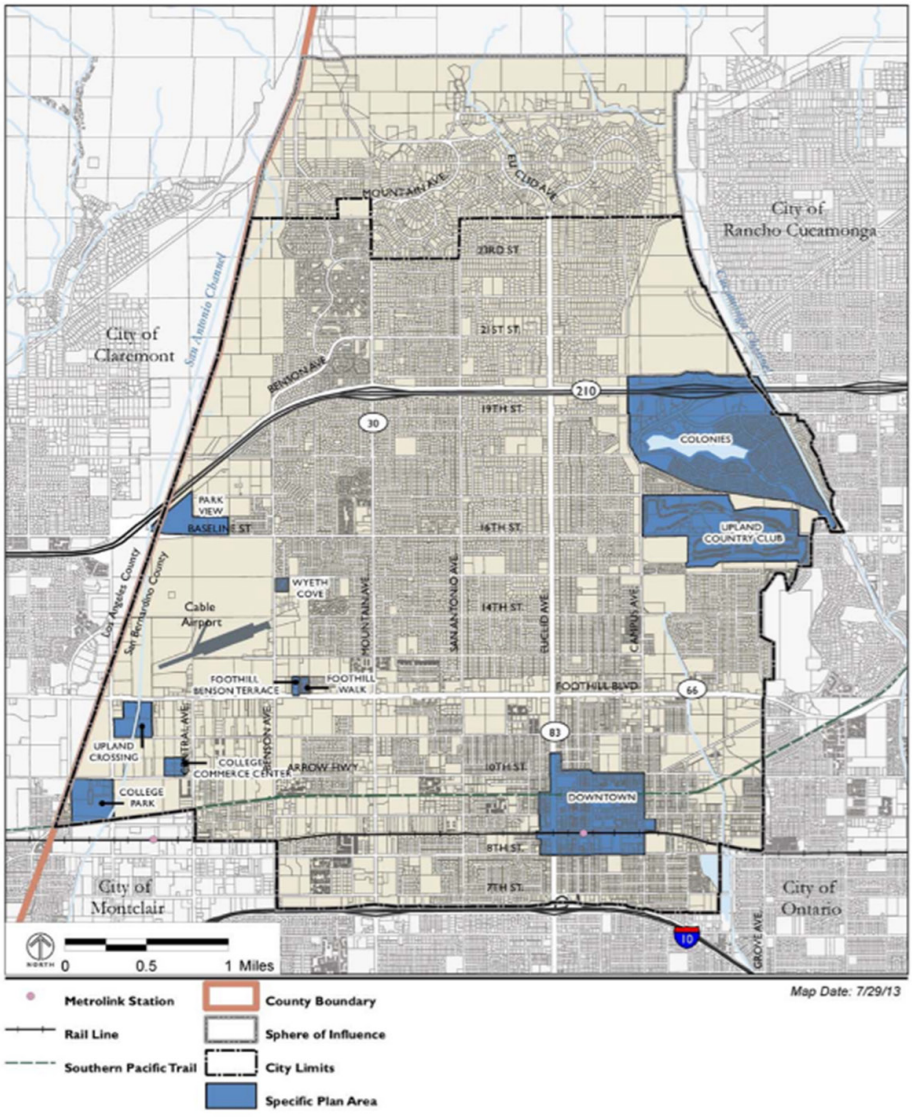
Figure 3: Upland's General Plan Areas



Source: City of Upland. "Focus Areas." Part 3 of City of Upland General Plan, pp. FA-1–FA-8. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.uplandca.gov/Documents/Development%20Services/Planning/General%20Plan%20Zoning%20Codes%20and%20Maps/02_Focus%20Areas%20Element.pdf.

Despite higher RHNA allocations, Upland has not significantly improved its pace of development in the 6th cycle. Like Ontario, Upland's policies and planning did not substantially change from the 5th to the 6th cycle. Upland's 6th-cycle planning does include a more substantial focus on ADU development, reflected by the fact that ADUs make up roughly a quarter of Upland's housing development in the 2018-2025 period. Upland has continued to permit new developments at roughly the same rate as in the 5th cycle, putting it on pace to substantially undershoot its 6th-cycle RHNA allocation.

Figure 4: Upland's Specific Plan Areas



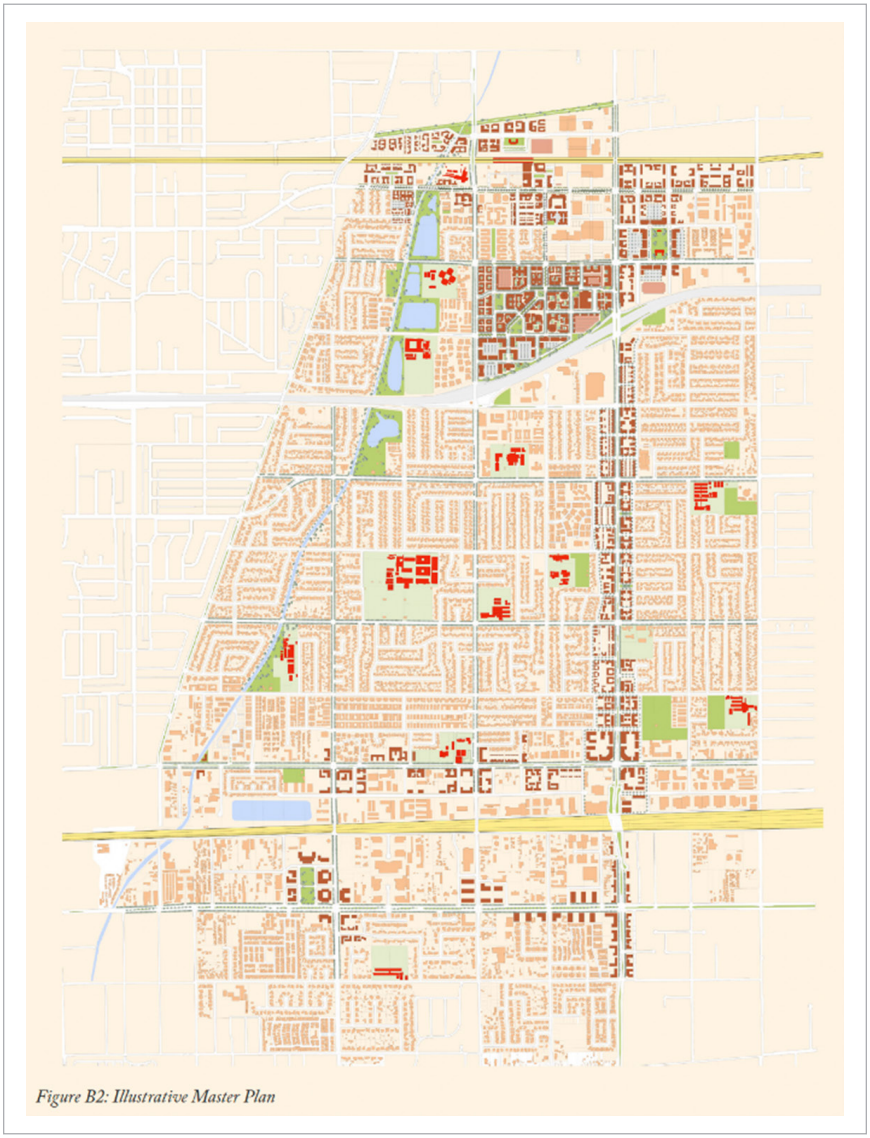
Source: City of Upland. General Plan Housing Element, 2013–2021. Adopted January 27, 2014. California Department of Housing and Community Development. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-elements/docs/upland_5th_adopted022814.pdf.

Montclair

In its 2014 housing element, Montclair proposed focusing development along a few key areas: the Holt Avenue and Mission Boulevard corridors in the south of the city, and in the northern "downtown" portion of the city (Figure 5). The first two saw little development during the 5th cycle. The northern "downtown" portion, however, has been the site of the vast majority of new housing development in Montclair over the last ten years. To this end, Montclair reduced parking requirements, permitted lot consolidations, and developed specific plans (sets of planning/design guidance to facilitate development) to assist development in the downtown Montclair area. This region is the site of substantial ongoing development.

For the 6th RHNA cycle, Montclair proposed a relatively aggressive redevelopment policy. This dates back to 2006, with the creation of the North Montclair Downtown Specific Plan (NMDSP) intended to create a "downtown" area in north Montclair centered around Montclair's transit center. Since then, Montclair has adopted progressively more ambitious plans for the redevelopment of northern Montclair, as well as along the city's main thoroughfares. It is broadly this policy of intentional, high-density, transit-oriented development which allowed Montclair to meet its 5th-cycle RHNA goals, and helped it outpace some of its peers in the 6th cycle. This may still not be enough for Montclair to reach its 6th-cycle RHNA allocation, but it does mean that Montclair continues a relatively impressive pace of permitting, given its small size and built-out nature.

Figure 5 Montclair Master Plan



Source: City of Montclair. Housing Element 2021–2029 (6th Cycle). Adopted December 2024; certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. In "General Plan & Housing Element." City of Montclair. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.cityofmontclair.org/general-and-specific-plans/.

In the 5th cycle, Ontario developed the majority of the housing of these three cities. More than half of that new housing came from the Ontario Ranch property in the south of the city. This massive area of basically undeveloped land represented a far easier development modality than those available to Upland and Montclair, which did not have major tracts of empty land that could easily be turned into low- and medium-density suburban developments. Despite being the most built-out of the three cities, Montclair is the only one that produced more housing in the 5th cycle than it was required to by RHNA. At the same time, Montclair permitted essentially no new housing at moderate or lower affordability levels, while both Upland and Ontario did manage some development in these tranches.

Montclair, Ontario, and Upland have pursued a variety of strategies towards developing new housing over the last ten years. What has worked best for all of these cities is designating relatively underdeveloped sections of the city and structuring zoning, planning, and policy to encourage large-scale development in those areas, typically through the policy architecture of the specific plan. This has led to substantial new housing in the Ontario Ranch area, in Montclair's nascent downtown, in the northeast Ontario mixed-use development, and in western Upland. Development in all these areas was guided by the use of specific plans. All three of these cities have struggled much more with redeveloping already built-up areas (such as the downtowns of Upland and Ontario), though this has fostered some new development. The approach of designation and rezoning scattered parcels across the city for development or redevelopment— which is a strategy all three cities employed across both RHNA cycles to meet their allocations—has had a relatively low success rate, as evinced by the fact that many of the same parcels were identified for this purpose in both the 5th and 6th cycle. ♦



A new accessory dwelling unit under construction in a residential backyard. | I*mage under license from Adobe Stock*.

Bibliography

Allen, David. "Tiny Montclair Embraces Urban-Density Housing near Transit and Mall." *Press-Enterprise* (Riverside, CA), February 15, 2026. https://www.pressenterprise.com/2026/02/15/tiny-montclair-embraces-urban-density-housing-near-transit-and-mall/.

California Association of Realtors. "Historical Housing Data." Accessed November 5, 2026. https://www.car.org/marketdata/data/housingdata.

California Department of Housing and Community Development. "Annual Progress Reports – Data Dashboard and Downloads." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-open-data-tools/apr-dashboard.

———. "Housing Element Annual Progress Report (APR) Data by Jurisdiction and Year." California Open Data. Last updated October 2, 2026. https://data.ca.gov/dataset/housing-element-annual-progress-report-apr-data-by-jurisdiction-and-year.

———. "Projected Housing Needs – Regional Housing Needs Allocation." Building Blocks Guide. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-element/building-blocks/projected-rhna.

California State Auditor. *California Department of Housing and Community Development: Increased Support Is Critical for Local Jurisdictions to Complete Timely Housing Plans*. Report 2024-109. Sacramento: California State Auditor, January 15, 2026. https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2024-109/.

City of Montclair. *Housing Element 2014–2021*. Final, adopted February 3, 2014. https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/montclairca/uploads/2021/03/Housing-Elements.pdf.

———. *Housing Element 2021–2029 (6th Cycle)*. Adopted December 2024; certified by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. In "General Plan & Housing Element." City of Montclair. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.cityofmontclair.org/general-and-specific-plans/.

———. *Montclair 2020 General Plan*. Adopted December 2024, City Council Resolution No. 24-3461. In "General Plan & Housing Element." City of Montclair. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.cityofmontclair.org/general-and-specific-plans/.

City of Ontario. *City of Ontario Policy Plan: Land Use Element. Figure LU-04*. Adopted August 16, 2022. "Mixed Use Areas." https://content.ontarioca.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/Figure%20LU-04%20Mixed%20Use%20Areas.pdf.

———. *The Ontario Plan: Policy Plan, Housing Element Technical Report*. Adopted October 15, 2013. California Department of Housing and Community Development. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-elements/docs/ontario-5th-adopted110113.pdf.

———. *The Ontario Plan: Policy Plan, Housing Element Technical Report*. Adopted March 2022, revised August 2022. https://content.ontarioca.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/HE%20Adopted%2020220821%20Clean_0.pdf.

City of Upland. "Focus Areas." Part 3 of *City of Upland General Plan*, pp. FA-1–FA-8. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.uplandca.gov/Documents/Development%20Services/Planning/General%20Plan%20Zoning%20Codes%20and%20Maps/02_Focus%20Areas%20Element.pdf.

———. *General Plan Housing Element, 2013–2021*. Adopted January 27, 2014. California Department of Housing and Community Development. https://www.hcd.ca.gov/housing-elements/docs/upland_5th_adopted022814.pdf.

———. *General Plan Housing Element, 2021–2029*. Revised February and May 2024. Adopted September 23, 2024, City Council Resolution No. 6801. https://www.uplandca.gov/Upland_CLEAN_HEU_Adopted%209.23.25.pdf.

Realtor.com. "Housing Inventory: Median Listing Price in California [MEDLISPRICA]." Retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Updated October 1, 2026. https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEDLISPRICA.

———. "Housing Inventory: Median Listing Price in Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA (CBSA) [MEDLISPRI40140]." Retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. Updated August 7, 2026. https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/MEDLISPRI40140.

Southern California Association of Governments. "Regional Housing Needs Assessment." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://scag.ca.gov/rhna.

TeamCalifornia. "Inland Empire Regional Data." Data from Esri, September 9, 2026. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.teamca.org/ca-opportunity/regional-data/p/item/1530/inland-empire-regional-data.

U.S. Census Bureau. "City and Town Intercensal Population Totals: 2010–2020." Page last revised November 5, 2024. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/intercensal-2010-2020-cities.html.

———. "City and Town Population Totals: 2020–2025." Page last revised May 26, 2026. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-total-cities-and-towns.html.

Inland Empire Outlook



Authors, from left: Keith Maben '28 , Alex Bishop '27, Toby Forster '29, and Dhriti Jagadish '27

Photo credit: SARAH CHAVEZ '29

STUDENT AUTHORS

Alex Bishop '27
Dhriti Jagadish '27
Keith Maben '28
Toby Forster '29

EDITORIAL STAFF

Kenneth P. Miller, JD, PhD
Director

Bipasa Nadon, JD
Assistant Director

Joseph Bessette, PhD
Faculty Advisor

Marionette S. Moore
Administrative Coordinator and Layout

About the Rose Institute

The Rose Institute of State and Local Government was founded at Claremont McKenna College in 1973. Its mission is to enhance the education of students at CMC, to produce high quality research, and to promote public understanding of issues of state and local government, politics, and policy, with an emphasis on California. The Institute collects demographic, economic, and political and public opinion data and produces objective, non-partisan analyses that inform policymaking throughout the state. It also provides a civil forum for leaders across the political spectrum to discuss and debate public policy issues. The Institute is led by expert faculty and staff who collaborate with a team of approximately 30 students from the Claremont Colleges on all aspects of its research program.

To receive issues of this publication electronically and news from the Rose Institute, please e-mail us at roseinstitute@cmc.edu.

Learn more about us at https://roseinstitute.cmc.edu.

Rose Institute
of State and Local Government
Claremont McKenna College