

Our Glossary

Definitions of the technical, legal and civic terms used in the documents and coverage of Newport Beach's November 3, 2026 election, so voters can weigh the issues with the full picture.

CONFIRMED

an official record

STATED

someone's own claim

OUR WORDS

our plain-language explanation

Online at newportbeachcivicleader.org. Small numbers link to the sources at the end. Last updated October 5, 2026.

THE BIG PICTURE

California law requires every city to plan for new homes. The state decides how many homes each region needs, and the region divides that number among its cities. Each city then writes a housing plan (its **Housing Element**) showing where those homes could go. It changes its **General Plan** and **zoning** so they actually can. The state reviews the plan to make sure it meets the law. In Newport Beach, a Charter rule called **Greenlight** also requires a public vote on big General Plan changes, unless state law rules a vote out. Measure H grew out of the question of whether a vote was required.

A

Abuse of discretion

A finding that a decision-maker's choice went beyond what the law allows.

OUR WORDS

LOCAL EXAMPLE

On August 27, 2026, the court found the City Council "abused its discretion by placing the three initiatives on the November 7, 2028 ballot." **CONFIRMED** ¹

Accessory dwelling unit (ADU)

A small second home on the same lot as a house, such as a backyard cottage or a converted garage. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Both the City and NBSA count ADUs toward Newport Beach's state housing share.

[CONFIRMED](#) [2](#) [3](#)

Affordable housing

Homes set aside for households in the lower- or moderate-income groups, usually kept affordable for a set time by a legal agreement called a **covenant**.

[OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

State law requires the City to approve projects in its overlay with at least 20% lower-income homes by right, according to the City's July 2024 staff report. [CONFIRMED](#) [2](#)

Airport Land Use Commission override

A City Council vote to go ahead with a plan after the Orange County Airport Land Use Commission finds it inconsistent with its plan for the area around John Wayne Airport. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The Commission found the housing changes inconsistent on May 16, 2024. The City Council voted 7-0 to override that finding on July 23, 2024. [CONFIRMED](#) [5](#) [6](#)

Amicus brief

A filing by a "friend of the court": someone who is not a party in the case but, with the court's permission, offers information. [CONFIRMED](#) [7](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

In NBSA's Greenlight appeal (G065816), the Court of Appeal allowed amicus briefs from Californians for Homeownership, from the Kennedy Commission and Public Law Center (filed together), and from HCD. [CONFIRMED](#) [8](#)

Appeal

"A request to a higher court to look at a lower court's decision for possible mistakes." [CONFIRMED](#) [9](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City has two open appeals in the case over Measures P, Q and R: G067367 and G067387. [CONFIRMED](#) [10](#)

Area median income (AMI)

The middle household income for a county. Housing income levels are set as a share of it. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Orange County's 2026 area median income is \$138,600. [CONFIRMED](#) [34](#)

B

Ballot argument	Official statements for and against a measure, printed in the voter guide, plus a rebuttal from each side. CONFIRMED ¹¹
Base zoning	See Zoning.
Brown Act	California's open-meetings law for local government bodies. CONFIRMED ¹² LOCAL EXAMPLE Measure R would add Charter rules saying meetings of City "Policy Bodies," including the City Council, must be open and follow the Brown Act. CONFIRMED ¹³
Buffer	Allowing more homes than the state requires, as a cushion in case some planned sites end up with fewer homes than expected. OUR WORDS
Builder's remedy	What can happen if a city's housing plan falls out of compliance with state law. Builders of qualifying affordable housing projects can bypass the city's zoning and General Plan, and the city is "effectively prohibited from denying" the project "except in unique circumstances." CONFIRMED ¹⁴ LOCAL EXAMPLE The City's July 2024 staff report said builder's remedy projects could be approved at higher density "on any site, including those not identified as housing opportunity sites in the Housing Element." CONFIRMED ²
Buildout	The point where every allowed home has actually been built. OUR WORDS LOCAL EXAMPLE City staff said the City's environmental study assumed full buildout, as "a conservative approach." STATED ⁶
By right	Approved automatically if a project meets the written rules, with no public hearing or discretionary review. CONFIRMED ² LOCAL EXAMPLE In the City's overlay, projects with at least 20% of homes for low- and very-low-income households are allowed by right. The City says state law requires this. CONFIRMED ^{2 4}

C

California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)

The state agency that reviews every city's housing plan and decides whether it meets state law. **CONFIRMED** ¹⁵

CEQA

The California Environmental Quality Act. A state law that "requires public agencies and local governments to evaluate and disclose the environmental impacts of development projects or other major land use decisions, and to limit or avoid those impacts to the extent feasible." See also Environmental impact report. **CONFIRMED** ³⁶

Certified

Also called "in compliance." When HCD finds a city's housing plan meets state law. **OUR WORDS**

City Charter

Newport Beach's own constitution. It can only be changed by voters. **OUR WORDS**
Read it on the City's website: newportbeachca.gov/government/city-council/city-charter-municipal-code **CONFIRMED** ³⁹

D

Density

How many homes are allowed on an acre of land. **OUR WORDS**

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City's overlay allows 20 to 50 homes per acre, and up to 60 on the former Coyote Canyon landfill site. Measure H would set 20 to 50 homes per acre in all five areas. Both allow extra homes permitted by state law. **CONFIRMED** ^{4 20}

Density bonus

A state law that lets a builder add extra homes beyond the zoning limit when a project includes a share of affordable homes. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Neither the City's limits nor Measure H's limits count these bonus homes. **CONFIRMED** ^{4 3}

Development limit

See Zoning.

E

Entitlement	A city's formal approval of a development project, before building permits. OUR WORDS
Environmental impact report (EIR)	A study of how a project could affect traffic, air, noise and other things, required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). OUR WORDS LOCAL EXAMPLE For the housing plan, the City prepared a "Program" EIR covering the whole plan. CONFIRMED ⁵
Ex parte application	A request for a quick court order, made outside the regular hearing schedule. "Ex parte" means "by or for one party only." CONFIRMED ⁷ LOCAL EXAMPLE On September 11, 2026, the City filed an ex parte application about running its standalone election for Measures P, Q and R. The court denied it on September 14, finding it "appears to be based on the City's concerns regarding the expense of complying with this Court's orders. This is not irreparable harm." CONFIRMED ³³

F

Focus areas	The parts of the city the Housing Element picked for new homes. Newport Beach has five: the Airport Area, West Newport Mesa, Newport Center, Dover/Westcliff and Coyote Canyon. CONFIRMED ¹⁶
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G

General Plan	A city's long-range blueprint for how it will grow: where homes, businesses, parks and roads go. It is made up of chapters called "elements." CONFIRMED ¹⁷
Greenlight	Section 423 of the City Charter, officially titled "Protection from Traffic and Density." It requires a citywide vote on any "major amendment" to the General Plan. CONFIRMED ¹⁸ LOCAL EXAMPLE It began as a citizen initiative, Measure S. Voters approved it on November 7, 2000, and it took effect December 15, 2000. CONFIRMED ^{19 35 18}

H

HCD	See California Department of Housing and Community Development.
Homes allowed	Also called housing capacity. The number of homes the zoning allows on the sites in a housing plan. It is not the same as the number that will be built. OUR WORDS LOCAL EXAMPLE Newport Beach's overlay allows up to 8,174 new homes. Its state share is 4,845. CONFIRMED ²
Housing cycle	The eight-year period each housing plan covers. The current one, 2021 to 2029, is the "6th cycle." CONFIRMED ¹⁶
Housing Element	The chapter of a city's General Plan that plans for housing. Every California city must have one. CONFIRMED ¹⁷ LOCAL EXAMPLE The City Council adopted Newport Beach's current Housing Element on September 13, 2022. CONFIRMED ¹⁶
Housing element law	The state law that requires every city and county to plan for housing for people at all income levels. CONFIRMED ¹⁷
Housing Opportunity (HO) Overlay	See Zoning.

I

Impartial analysis	A neutral explanation of a measure, written by the City Attorney and printed in the voter guide. CONFIRMED ²⁰
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Income levels

The groups housing is sorted into, based on household income compared with the area median income. [OUR WORDS](#)

CATEGORY	HOUSEHOLD INCOME
Extremely low	30% of area median income or less
Very low	0 to 50%
Low	51 to 80%
Moderate	81 to 120%
Above moderate (often called "market rate")	More than 120%

Percentages: [CONFIRMED](#) ²¹

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Orange County's 2026 limits, in yearly household income. [CONFIRMED](#) ³⁴

CATEGORY	1 PERSON	2 PEOPLE	3 PEOPLE	4 PEOPLE
Extremely low	\$39,100	\$44,700	\$50,300	\$55,850
Very low	\$65,150	\$74,450	\$83,750	\$93,050
Low	\$104,200	\$119,100	\$134,000	\$148,850
Moderate	\$116,400	\$133,050	\$149,650	\$166,300

Low-income limits are set by the federal housing department (HUD), which can raise them where housing costs are unusually high. In Orange County, the low-income limits are higher than the county's median income. [CONFIRMED](#) ³⁴

Initiative

A law proposed by residents. Supporters collect voter signatures to put it on the ballot. [CONFIRMED](#) ²⁰

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Measure H is a citizen initiative. [CONFIRMED](#) ²⁰

Irreparable harm

Harm that could not be fixed later, for example by money or a later ruling. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

In the September 2 writ, the court found that pausing the writ during the City's appeal "would result in irreparable harm to Petitioners." [CONFIRMED](#) ²²

L

Land Use Element

The chapter of the General Plan that says what kind of development is allowed where. **OUR WORDS**

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Measure H rewrites one policy in it, Policy LU 4.4, which sets how many homes are allowed in each of the five areas. **CONFIRMED** 3 23

Local Coastal Program (LCP)

The City's plan for the Coastal Zone, the area near the coast covered by the state Coastal Act. Changes to it need the California Coastal Commission's approval.

OUR WORDS

LOCAL EXAMPLE

City staff said about 40% of the city is in the Coastal Zone. **STATED** 6

Lower income

Extremely low, very low and low income combined. **CONFIRMED** 3

M

Major amendment

Under Greenlight, a General Plan change that adds more than 100 homes, more than 100 peak-hour car trips, or more than 40,000 square feet of floor space.

CONFIRMED 18

Measure S Guidelines

The City's rules for applying Greenlight, officially Council Policy A-18, "Guidelines for Implementing Charter Section 423." **CONFIRMED** 35 24

Read them on the City's website: newportbeachca.gov/government/city-council/council-policy-manual (Policy A-18)

Minute order

"A short written summary of what happened in court, recorded in the court's official records." **CONFIRMED** 9

Moratorium

A ban or cap that stops new housing from being approved. **OUR WORDS**

N

No net loss

A state law that a city must always have enough homes allowed for the part of its state housing share that hasn't been built yet, at each income level. [CONFIRMED](#) ²⁵

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City's July 2024 staff report explains it this way: if a site in the City's inventory is approved for fewer homes than the plan counted on, or for higher-priced homes than planned, the City must show it still allows enough homes elsewhere. If it doesn't, it must zone replacement sites. [CONFIRMED](#) ²

Notice of appeal

"The document you file and serve to tell the court and the other parties that you're appealing a decision." [CONFIRMED](#) ⁹

O

Objective design standards

Building design rules that can be measured, like heights and setbacks, instead of judged, like "fits the neighborhood." [CONFIRMED](#) ²

Ordinance

A City law. It takes two votes at two separate meetings: it is "introduced" first, then adopted at a "second reading." [CONFIRMED](#) ²

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The 2024 zoning changes were Ordinance No. 2024-16. [CONFIRMED](#) ²

Overlay zone

See Zoning.

P

Petition for review

"A request asking the California Supreme Court to review a decision made by the Court of Appeal." [CONFIRMED](#) ⁹

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The Supreme Court denied the City's petition (S298609) on September 30, 2026.

[CONFIRMED](#) ¹⁰

Pipeline projects

Also called pipeline units. Housing projects already approved or in the works when a housing plan was written. **CONFIRMED** ²

LOCAL EXAMPLE

They count toward Newport Beach's state share but not against the overlay limits.

CONFIRMED ^{4 2}

Planning Commission

A City board that reviews planning matters and makes recommendations to the City Council. **CONFIRMED** ¹⁴ It has seven members, appointed by the City Council "from the qualified electors of the City." Members may not hold "any paid office or employment in the City government." **CONFIRMED** ³⁷

LOCAL EXAMPLE

It recommended the 2024 housing changes on April 18, 2024. **CONFIRMED** ¹⁴

Policy LU 4.4

The policy in the General Plan's Land Use Element that sets how many new homes the overlay allows in each of Newport Beach's five focus areas. **CONFIRMED** ²³

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Measure H would rewrite this one policy: up to 2,900 homes instead of 8,174, all for lower- and moderate-income households. **CONFIRMED** ^{3 15 20}

Precludes

Means "rules out." Greenlight "shall not apply if state or federal law precludes a vote." **CONFIRMED** ¹⁸

LOCAL EXAMPLE

In July 2024 the City Council decided state housing law ruled out a Greenlight vote on its housing plan. NBSA disputes this in a separate lawsuit. **CONFIRMED** ^{16 8}

Proponent

The person or group sponsoring a measure. **OUR WORDS**

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Measure H's proponent is NBSA, which filed the notice of intention to circulate the petition. **CONFIRMED** ¹⁵

R

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA)

Said "REE-nuh." A city's share of the new homes its region needs. HCD sets how much housing each region needs, and a regional agency divides it among cities. **CONFIRMED** ²⁶

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Newport Beach's share for 2021 to 2029 is 4,845 homes. **CONFIRMED** ¹⁶

Resolution

A formal City Council decision that usually takes effect when it is adopted.

CONFIRMED 16

LOCAL EXAMPLE

Resolution No. 2024-58, adopted July 23, 2024, was the "Option 2" decision that a Greenlight vote was ruled out. **CONFIRMED** 16

RHNA

See Regional Housing Needs Allocation.

S

Single-subject rule

A rule that an initiative may deal with only one subject. **CONFIRMED** 27

LOCAL EXAMPLE

On June 24, 2026, the court found the City "has failed to establish" that NBSA's Sunshine initiative, now Measure R, violates the single subject rule. **CONFIRMED** 28

Sites inventory

Also called housing opportunity sites. The list of specific properties a city's Housing Element names as places where new homes could be built. **CONFIRMED** 2

LOCAL EXAMPLE

In Newport Beach, a property must be on the overlay map as an "opportunity site" to use the housing overlay rules. **CONFIRMED** 4 2

Stay

"A stopping or arresting of a judicial proceeding by order of a court (e.g., a stay of enforcement of a judgment)." **CONFIRMED** 7

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City asked the Court of Appeal and the California Supreme Court to stay the September 2 writ. Both said no. **CONFIRMED** 10

Study session

A City Council meeting where City staff present projects and policy matters for discussion. The City says study sessions are "informational in nature" and that "no formal action or voting takes place." **CONFIRMED** 38

W

Workforce housing

A term the City's General Plan uses for housing near jobs for people who work locally. It is not one of the state's income categories, and the City documents we reviewed do not set an income range for it. [OUR WORDS](#) [23](#) [21](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City's 2024 General Plan change calls for "new and varied housing, including workforce housing proximate to jobs, transportation, and services" in West Newport Mesa, and "a variety of housing opportunities inclusive of workforce housing" in the Airport Area. [CONFIRMED](#) [23](#)

Writ of mandate

A court order that requires a government body or official to carry out a duty.

[CONFIRMED](#) [29](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

A writ dated September 2, 2026 requires the City to hold a November 3, 2026 election on Measures P, Q and R. [CONFIRMED](#) [22](#) [30](#)

Writ of supersedeas

A request to a higher court to pause a lower court's order while an appeal goes forward. [CONFIRMED](#) [31](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City filed one in appeal G067387. It was denied September 9, 2026. [CONFIRMED](#) [10](#)

Writ petition

A request asking a higher court to order a lower court, or an official, to do or stop doing something, usually faster than an appeal. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City's writ petitions G067333 and G067403 were denied on August 25 and September 9, 2026. [CONFIRMED](#) [10](#)

Writ return

A written report to the court on what has been done to follow a writ. [OUR WORDS](#)

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The City's "Initial Return" is dated September 28, 2026. The writ also requires a "Final Return" within 15 days after the November 3 election. [CONFIRMED](#) [32](#) [22](#)

Z

Zoning

The detailed rules that say what can be built on each piece of land: what kind of use, how tall, how close to the street, how many homes per acre and how much parking. [OUR WORDS](#)

Base zoning

Also called "underlying" zoning. The regular zoning a property already has.

OUR WORDS

Overlay zone

A second layer of zoning placed on top of the base zoning. It adds options without taking any away. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

Housing Opportunity (HO) Overlay

Newport Beach's overlay zone for new homes, created in 2024. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

LOCAL EXAMPLE

It covers the five focus areas, called HO-1 through HO-5, plus HO-6 for sites carried over from the previous housing plan. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

Development limit

The most extra homes the overlay allows in each area. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

LOCAL EXAMPLE

The Airport Area's limit is 2,577 homes. **CONFIRMED** ⁴

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23. City Council Resolution No. 2024-51, amending the General Plan Land Use Element (Policies LU 4.4 and LU 4.5). Legistar File 24-0869, Attachment B. [newportbeach.legistar.com](#)
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