

## **Background: How Did We Get from A to Z?**

Measure A was enacted in 1973 to address concerns about preserving Victorian homes and to block a massive bay-fill residential development on Bay Farm Island. It's been a contentious issue in Alameda politics ever since and has created a significant fault line in Alameda elections.

This year, we not only have City Council candidates lined up on both sides of the issue, but also an up-or-down vote on the measure itself in the form of an effort to repeal it called Measure Z.

Much of what is being said about the November ballot item to repeal Measure A--now enshrined as Article 26 in the city charter – is from a position of strong advocacy for or against. This Q&A provides an unaligned look at the pros and cons.

**1. What exactly does Article 26 do?** Article 26 prohibits the construction of “multiple dwelling units” in Alameda and caps development at 21 homes per acre, effectively prohibiting large apartment complexes and restricting residential lots to two homes. This limits land value and reduces the incentive for development of multi-family homes.

**2. Would repeal of Article 26 endanger Alameda’s Victorians and other pre-WWII housing stock?** Not necessarily. In the years following the enactment of Measure A, Alameda added protections for vintage homes and strengthened design review. A repeal of Article 26 would increase the value of the land on which vintage homes sit. Future City Councils could weaken protections to enable development.

**3. Would repeal of Article 26 result in large apartment complexes replacing single family homes not otherwise protected by historical and design review?** Not without further City Council action. Alameda has zoning regulations that restrict the building of multi-family homes in areas zoned for single-family residences and, to comply with Article 26, also in areas zoned for multi-family residences. Measure Z would allow the current and future City Councils to change the zoning anywhere in Alameda, but does not itself change the zoning. A variety of conditions, such as a growth in jobs or the desire to increase Alameda’s tax base, could increase the financial incentives to rezone areas of Alameda to accommodate more housing, especially in commercial districts.

**4. Has Article 26 kept developers from building multi-family homes in Alameda?** No. About every eight years Alameda must exempt a limited number of areas from Article 26 restrictions to meet state requirements for affordable homes. Alameda complies by zoning these areas for multi-family homes and then issuing permits to developers who apply.

**5. Has Article 26 kept Alameda from meeting state goals for additional homes?** No. Alameda has used state exemptions and city waivers to meet state goals for the total number of new homes built. Nonetheless, Alameda has failed to meet state goals for affordable homes because available subsidies are inadequate. Repeal of Article 26 would allow developers to build a few more affordable homes with available funding, but still far fewer than needed to meet state housing goals.

**6. Would repeal of Article 26 increase the availability of affordable housing in Alameda?** Advocates of repeal see it as a first step towards increasing the availability of affordable housing, but by itself it will not suffice. Repeal would allow developers to build more homes, 15 to 25% of which would need to be affordable. While that would increase the number of affordable homes, it would increase the number of

market rate homes more, generating high-income population growth. That disproportionate growth, in turn, would spur business activity requiring more workers who need affordable housing, eventually worsening the shortage. Equitably increasing the supply of affordable housing requires subsidies that Measure Z does not address.

**7. Would repeal of Article 26 increase the economic and cultural diversity of Alameda?** This is hard to say. Many factors -- including restrictive covenants and redlining practices -- have created geographic segregation within the city and suppressed representation of low-income people. Article 26 has contributed to geographic segregation by prohibiting or restricting affordable multi-family developments for nearly 50 years and prioritizing more expensive single-family housing, but is not the sole factor.

**8. Why then is repeal of Article 26 even necessary?** For one, it's inconsistent with state law as illustrated in Answer 4 above. But the main argument in its favor is that repeal would provide the city flexibility that it doesn't currently have to approve multi-family developments. This could result in reducing the cost and complexity of creating more housing at all economic levels.

**9. Why is there opposition?** Those opposed to repeal are concerned that future City Councils could change zoning to allow large developments in order to increase housing availability and affordability. They want the restrictions enshrined in the city charter to restrict that flexibility and require that only the electorate as a whole make any changes.

**10. What's the problem with multi-family residential developments that don't endanger current single-family homes?** The concerns are two-fold: (1) that large-scale apartment or condominium developments would harm the small town feel of Alameda, and (2) that increased density would result in significant traffic congestion on the island.

**11. How realistic are those concerns?** It depends on whom you ask. Proponents of repeal feel those concerns can be addressed by tight city controls on future developments and traffic mitigation measures; opponents don't believe that's possible.

**12. Have proponents of repeal indicated where multi-family homes would be built in the absence of Article 26?** Not specifically. A new general plan is being developed for the city that will change zoning in the absence of Article 26 to allow more multi-family developments. City leaders have talked about locating multi-family homes on Park and Webster streets and allowing shopping centers to build homes over parking lots, but nothing has been decided. The public will have an opportunity for input on the Alameda General Plan at a number of public forums over the next few months: see [alameda2040.org/engage](http://alameda2040.org/engage).

**Summary on Measure Z.** Regardless of the rhetoric on both sides, it essentially boils down to this: should the current and future City Councils be given the ability to decide whether multi-family projects provide a net benefit to the community? If you trust their judgment, a "yes" vote would give them that flexibility. If you don't, then a "no" vote would maintain the status quo.

**More Info.** For more info on both sides of this issue:

- [Vote Yes on Z: For an Inclusive, Affordable, and Livable Alameda](#)
- [Keep Alameda a Lovely Place for All: No on Z](#)
- [Pros & Cons on Measure Z by LWV of Alameda](#)
- [Full Text of Measure Z](#)