

# How Communities Can Codify Their Redevelopment Recommendations

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In communities undergoing redevelopment where political leadership resists community input, getting a government to codify amendments to zoning laws, redevelopment plans, or other land use policies is difficult—but not impossible. The key is to force political accountability through legal, procedural, and organizing pressure. Here's how communities can move from advocacy to legal enforceability:

## 1. Understand the Legal and Procedural Framework

To make any change legally binding, the community must operate within the mechanisms that produce enforceable law or policy:

- Zoning ordinances and general plans are adopted and amended through public hearings and city council votes.
- Specific plans must go through an approval process involving the planning commission and the city council.
- All of these are governed by California's Planning and Zoning Law, CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), and sometimes by state housing mandates.

## 2. Formalize Your Community's Proposals

To be taken seriously and legally, your recommendations should be:

- Written as proposed language
- Include policy justifications
- Develop a "People's Alternative Plan" or "Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)" proposal

## 3. Push for Legal Codification via These Channels

### A. Public Hearings and Planning Commission

- Submit written public comments with your proposed amendments
- Demand inclusion in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) review process

### B. City Council Advocacy

- Lobby city council members to sponsor your amendments

### C. Ballot Initiative or Referendum

- Ballot Initiative: Propose zoning or land use laws directly
- Referendum: Collect signatures to put a new law to a public vote or repeal it

### D. Litigation or Legal Threat

- Challenge via CEQA lawsuits, fair housing law, or disparate impact claims
- Partner with legal advocacy groups

#### 4. Institutionalize Community Voice

- Push for charter or municipal code changes requiring:
  - Community advisory boards
  - Mandatory equity or displacement impact assessments
  - Codified community benefit requirements

#### 5. Build Power and Political Pressure

- Organize neighborhood associations, tenant unions, and faith groups
- Track votes and publicize decisions
- Run or support candidates
- Partner with media outlets

#### 6. Engage Regional and State-Level Oversight

- File complaints with California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)
- Ask state legislators to investigate
- Seek regional bodies (like SCAG) review

#### Summary Table: Legal Pathways to Enforceability

Strategy	What It Achieves	Tools Needed	Difficulty
City Council Amendment	Codifies your policies into law	Lobbying, proposal writing	Medium-High
Ballot Initiative	Bypasses council, creates law directly	Legal help, signature campaign	High
CEQA Litigation	Forces environmental and equity analysis	Legal allies, community standing	Medium
Community Benefits Agreement	Legal contract tied to development	Developer leverage, organizing	Medium
Charter/Ordinance Change	Creates permanent rules for equity input	Legal drafting, public pressure	High

Referendum	Repeals bad council decisions	Legal support, fast organizing	High
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