

Council File: 19-0603

City Building Code Fire District 1 Expansion / California Department of Forestry / Fire Protection Very High Fire Severity Zone / City High Wind Velocity Zone / Ordinance

The Encino Neighborhood Council strongly opposes Council File 19-0603. We recommend that the City of Los Angeles vote against this measure. The measure will increase construction and housing costs significantly with no commensurate public safety benefit.

The Blumenfield-Rodriguez measure seeks to expand the Fire District 1 designation. The Fire District 1 designation is unique to Los Angeles, and was first created over 100 years ago to address issues of insurability in buildings constructed before the advent of modern construction techniques and sprinkler systems. The designation severely restricts the type of construction, building materials, and lot setbacks in affected zones. The proposed ordinance uses density as a proxy for wildfire risk, and would give any neighborhood with a density above 5000 people per square mile, the Fire District 1 designation.

The change in acceptable building materials does not align with the statewide California Building Code and will preclude the adoption of new building materials and processes, specifically mass timber. Mass timber has the potential to revolutionize building economics by supplanting more expensive steel and concrete construction methods while providing extreme fire resistance and earthquake resistance.

The City of Los Angeles should promote innovation in building more efficiently and cost effectively, not arbitrary material mandates. This measure represents a cynical attempt by the concrete industry to capture the regulatory process to guarantee a market for their products.

To build vibrant and thriving communities in accordance with our shared values, we must expand our access to housing centered on mass transit. This proposal stands in opposition to these goals by banning Type IV (heavy timber) and V (wood-frame) construction of larger projects in areas with 5,000 or more residents per square mile and conflicts directly with the setback allowances in Transit Oriented Communities established by Measure JJJ.

Additionally, the Department of Building and Safety report estimates building costs would increase 10.6% to 47.1% if this ordinance is enacted, reducing the financial feasibility of housing projects citywide.

The Encino Neighborhood Council urges the City Council to vote no on this measure.

Sincerely,