

PPCC Policy Statement – Housing Density Bills and Public Safety

This policy statement is made with reference to the package of housing bills now set for suspense hearing on June 18 in the State Senate Appropriations Committee, including SB 902, 1085, 1120 and 1385. It is also intended to apply to any future proposed legislation which may, directly or indirectly, seek to increase density in our low-density residential communities.

Taken together, these bills would erode local land use and zoning control and allow denser development in residential areas, either by streamlining CEQA and other approvals, allowing cities to bypass voter initiatives, and/or mandating or providing incentives for up-zoning to create more housing. *None of the bills contains an unconditional exemption for parcels located in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).* As a result, this proposed legislation presents a clear danger to public safety in VHFHSZ neighborhoods.

Pacific Palisades is a community of about 25,000 located in the wildland-urban interface in the foothills of the Santa Monica mountains within the City of Los Angeles. All of the Palisades is located in the VHFHSZ. We have only two primary routes of ingress and egress and many of our hillside streets are narrow and winding. The increased density called for by these bills will exacerbate crowded conditions on our roads and put lives and property at risk.

Pacific Palisades has experienced and will continue to face the serious threat of wildfires and resulting mandatory evacuations. The Los Angeles Fire Department advises that the brush-fire season is now year-round. Substantial wildfires have already taken place in Los Angeles County this year. Our residents were recently under mandatory evacuation orders during the dangerous 2019 Getty fire, and many were required to evacuate during the Palisades fire, also in 2019. During mandatory evacuations, swift access is needed for emergency vehicles as well as for the thousands of residents who are forced to flee their homes. Such access will be compromised by the increased density – more population – called for by the proposed bills.

Pacific Palisades Community Council (PPCC)¹ therefore urges the members of the Senate Appropriations Committee (and if the bills move forward to a floor vote, all other Senators) to oppose these bills unless they are amended to provide for a **clear, unconditional exemption** for VHFHSZ areas.²

PPCC Executive Committee, June 15, 2020

¹ Acting through its Executive Committee, pursuant to PPCC Bylaws Article V.3(B), as the full PPCC board has been unable to meet during the coronavirus pandemic: <http://pacpalicc.org>. This policy statement is fully consistent with past PPCC positions, including its opposition SB 50: <http://pacpalicc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/LetterSenatorRulesSB50R.pdf>. See also our recent letter opposing SB 902: <http://pacpalicc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PPCC-EC-Letter-re-SB902Appropriations.pdf>.

² Two of the bills at this point contain no VHFHSZ exemption (SB 902 and 1085); two others (SB 1120 and 1385) either directly or indirectly reference a conditional exemption set forth in Government Code Section 65913.4(a)(6)(D). That section contains an “exception to the exception,” allowing streamlined land use approval for development within the VHFHSZ that complies with “fire hazard mitigation measures.” But even if a structure is built to be fire-resistant (*i.e.*, with fire hazard mitigation measures), a duplex or fourplex on a VHFHSZ parcel (which could also include *additional* dwelling units in the form of ADUs that are permitted *by right*) will still add density (more dwelling units, more people living there). This in turn means many more people will need to flee during wildfire evacuations (whether or not the structures themselves are fire-resistant), clogging our narrow streets and making already-difficult evacuations – not to mention the difficulty of getting fire equipment into the area – even more difficult, thus risking to an even greater degree than is already present the lives and safety of residents and firefighters alike. References to the conditional VHFHSZ exemption contained in Sec. 65913.4(a)(6)(D) should be stricken and replaced with an unconditional exemption.