

The Honorable Councilmember Blumenfield
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

May 12, 2017

Re: Comments to the letter from The Los Angeles-Ventura Chapter of The Building Industry Association of Southern California regarding Motion (Blumenfield – Wesson for Huizar) Council File #14-1688-S2 and 16-116

Dear Councilmember Blumenfield:

This letter is provided by **Build With Strength** which is a *Coalition of the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association* and is in response to the letter sent to you on January 9, 2017 by The Los Angeles-Ventura Chapter of the Building Industry Association of Southern California, Inc. (BIA-LAV).

Over the years, and especially with high profile fires such as the Da Vinci apartment complex and Oakland warehouse, it has become increasingly apparent that building materials used in today's structures are critical in preventing a full scale fire and withstanding other man-made or natural disasters. The application of insulated concrete forms in the construction of 3-5 story buildings is recognized as a safer alternative to conventional wood framing in those structures. Consider:

- Unlike softwood lumber, concrete will not burn. Unlike steel, it does not soften and bend. It can take on temperatures exceeding well over 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Solid concrete Insulate Concrete Forms (ICF) walls can sustain as much as four hours of extreme fire exposure--typical wood-frame walls generally do not exceed a one-hour fire rating.
- First responders overwhelmingly support construction with ICFs due to much higher structural integrity of the overall building and the greatly reduced risk of collapse

Your current motion is just the beginning in the effort to make the City of Los Angeles' building codes the strongest in the nation. Currently, the City of Los Angeles lags far behind many cities including the City of New York and Chicago. As a growing local and national coalition looking to support your efforts and protect the integrity of our buildings, we encourage you to consider strengthening building codes to meet and exceed those of the model cities listed above, as well as be a leader across the United States in protecting the personal safety of all residents from all walks of life and varying income levels.

Responding directly to the (BIA-LAV) letter received by you on January 9, 2017.

- 1) Wood construction is a more economically-viable solution. Economics should not be used when valuing a human life and their personal safety. To that end, using a more solid material that includes concrete and steel will provide strength for the building and long-term insurance premium reductions that benefit the building owner with lower monthly expenses. Using materials like concrete during construction means having a structure that lasts longer and reduces overall lifecycle costs by at least 5% to 8%. Additionally, concrete requires very little maintenance, saving developers and investor's money over the long term. During this time where there is a need for housing for all income levels we should not lose sight of safety in constructing buildings versus lower quality and less safe materials.

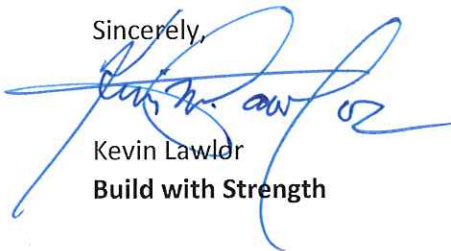
- 2) We must put our trust in the International Code Council (ICC) to determine the highest levels of safety. The ICC is an organization that provides minimum safety standards for building construction. The City of Los Angeles should not be satisfied with a minimum standard for anything. The City lead by the City Council should be a leader especially in building code standards and be at the forefront with cities like New York and Chicago.

- 3) Steel construction is not proven to be safer than wood construction in a fire. The truth is that a combination of steel and concrete structure are a much safer and longer lasting alternative than a building made out of wood. While it's obvious that wood structures can be compromised by fire, they are also exposed and weakened by termites, dry-rot and other elements which make wood less safe than concrete and steel. There is also the consideration of earthquakes, in which concrete and steel offer demonstrably superior safety and reliability.

Wood remains a vital material for many projects, and certainly has a role to play moving forward. However, when considering long-term durability, safety, fire-resistance and lower expenses over the life-time of a building, a combination of concrete and steel is in a class of its own. It's no coincidence that the longest standing structures across the world are made of concrete and reinforced with steel or a metal product.

Thank you for allowing us to provide comments to you and your colleagues.

Sincerely,



Kevin Lawlor
Build with Strength



M A T S E N F O R D D E S I G N
A s s o c i a t e s , I N C .

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Dear Councilmember Blumenfield:

I'm writing this letter to relate my experience relative to some of the comments on the motion noted above. My main point would be that cold-formed steel framing should never be lumped into the same light frame structural category as dimensional lumber framed buildings.

I am a professional engineer in the Milwaukee Wisconsin metro area. My firm designs building structures of all types around the country, including California. We design in virtually all structural systems and materials including wood, concrete, masonry and steel, as well as cold-formed steel, and we are particularly well versed in light frame construction.

Regarding the comment on building materials not being the problem with the code as it relates to this issue, Any logical person would have to disagree. Different materials and their commonly employed systems have had significantly varying restrictions ever since the building codes were developed. This has of course been for good reason.

On the related comment about trusting the ICC on these code provisions – as they currently exist: the problem is that since at least 2006, some of the older code restrictions have been loosened, and liberal local interpretations have sometimes become matter of course. The overall result has been massive light wood frame buildings (as much as 375% larger in footprint than previously allowed, and much taller including the typical podium storeys below). **They have simply become hazardous.**

May 3, 2017

As far as steel not being safer than wood – this is entirely nonsense. The record across the country of recent years speaks to this by itself. Systems other than wood framing are not fuel for the fire, and typically light dimensional lumber cannot char to any extent required to help it resist a significant blaze. Its that simple.

Wood framing certainly has a role as an inexpensive structural system, but I believe it's best use is in single and two family homes, and smaller isolated commercial structures. Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick W. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick W. Ford, P.E.