

MOTION PLANNING & LAND USE MANAGEMENT

On Monday, December 8, 2014, it has been estimated that 250 Los Angeles Fire Department firefighters responded to a fire at an under construction apartment complex at 1:20 a.m., which is located at the juncture of the Harbor and Hollywood freeways in Downtown Los Angeles.

The fire destroyed the seven-story building, and while no one was injured, the damages are expected to be in the millions of dollars. In addition, adjacent buildings housing city and county offices were significantly damaged.

Several policy questions need to be addressed as a result of this massive fire, since its impacts have citywide implications as to how the city can effectuate improvements to the permitting and inspection process, to prevent future devastating damages to under construction development projects.

It has been documented that the project was being constructed with steel stairs rising three to four floors without any other floor plates or structure, much like the ruins left behind after the fire.

The tragedy of the apartment complex, raises many policy questions that need to be addressed in a report by city staff.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council instruct the Department of Building and Safety, with the assistance of the Fire Department, Planning Department, and Bureau of Engineering, and in consultation with the City Attorney, to prepare a report with recommendations to address the following policy questions stemming from the fire at the under construction apartment complex as detailed below:


1. At what size, does wood-frame no longer make sense for residential buildings?
2. Multi-family buildings consisting of 4 story and less permit wood-framing by code. However, 4 story commercial buildings are not allowed to be wood -framed. What explains this and what are the reasons?
3. Wood is a fire hazard in high occupancy buildings, therefore, why does the city permit large residential projects to be built with wood?
4. Should there be a housing density limit that will trigger the use of steel, and better fire separation between units?
5. Is a 20 or 30 unit building the maximum that should be permitted for wood-framing construction, and should this maximum criteria be codified in city codes?
6. Should the height limit for wood-framing construction be reevaluated?
7. What explains the intensity of the fire at the apartment complex, inasmuch as it went up like match sticks? This is particularly troubling because the apartments were being built to house hundreds of people.
8. What are the best policy solutions that the city can enact as to the permitting and inspection process to prevent future fires at under construction development projects?

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