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OSAMA YOUNAN, P.E.
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December 5, 2016

Honorable City Council
201 North Spring Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Sharon Dickinson, Legislative Assistant, Planning and Land Use Management Committee

RE: RESPONSE TO MOTION (BLUMENFIELD – WESSON FOR HUIZER) RELATIVE TO DAVINCI APARTMENT COMPLEX FIRE – COUNCIL FILE # 14-1688-S2 AND 16-1165

This report is in response to the motion dated December 12, 2014 by Council Member Bob Blumenfield, 3rd District regarding the DaVinci Apartment Complex Fire. The motion requires the Department of Building and Safety (LADBS) prepare a report with recommendations to address a series of questions stemming from the fire.

The following is the response from the Department of Building and Safety addressing the questions raised in the motion:

1. At what size, does wood-frame no longer make sense for residential buildings?

The Los Angeles Building Code (LABC) which is based on the California Building Code, allows a wood frame apartment building, with properly rated fire walls and fire sprinklers, up to 5 stories and 65 feet high. In addition, this type of building can be built over a one story Type I building as long as the overall building is not more than six stories and 75 feet high. In the past decade, many buildings have been built with this type of construction. Wood-frame buildings should not be allowed to exceed the aforementioned limits.

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?

LABC Code Section 510.2 does allow an office building with wood construction up to 6 stories high above a one story Type I building as long as the overall height is limited to 85 feet high.

3. Wood is a fire hazard in high occupancy buildings, therefore, why does the city permit large residential projects to be built with wood?

Unprotected wood is fire hazard. However, the code requires wood to be treated with fire retardant chemicals and wrapped into fire resistance drywalls when wood is used in more than three-story high building. This construction type has been in use for many years.

4. Should there be a housing density limit that will trigger the use of steel, and better fire separation between units?

Please refer to the answer to question five below.

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?

LABC Code Section 503.1 already limits the number of stories and floor area that can be built using wood construction. For example, a wood apartment building with fire sprinklers can be built only up to 2 stories in height with 14,000 sq. ft. maximum per story. If a wood apartment building with fire sprinklers is wrapped with 1 hour fire rated construction, the allowable floor area increases to 24,000 sq. ft. per floor and allowable number of stories to three stories. In both cases, if the building exceeds the aforementioned limits, the building is required to be internally separated by 2-hour rated fire barriers to increase the fire life safety.

An apartment constructed using only steel can be of unlimited height, number of stories and sq. ft. and unlimited floor area.

LABC already has provisions that limit the housing density.

6. Should the height limit for wood-framing construction be reevaluated?

LABC already limits non-rated wood building to 40ft., one-hour rated wood building to 50 ft. and fire treated wood building to 65ft. maximum height limit.

7. What explains the intensity of the fire at the DaVinci apartment complex? This is particularly troubling because the apartments were being built to house hundreds of people.

The DaVinci apartment complex was under construction and did not have any fire resistive capacity. The building did not have any fire sprinklers nor were all walls wrapped with required fire rated material. Therefore, the fire spread very quickly.

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?

The city can require more extensive security measures for the building under construction:

- Minimum number of security staff based on the floor area of the building
- Fences around construction area with an alarm system
- Surveillance video cameras based on the size of the building

Please direct any questions regarding this report to Steve Ongele, Assistant General Manager, at (213) 482-6703. Should you need my assistance, please contact me at (213) 482-6800.

Sincerely,



FRANK M. BUSH
General Manager

- c: Raymond Chan, Deputy Mayor
Roberto Mejia, Chief Legislative Analyst
Jason Killeen, Senior Administrative Analyst II, City Administrative Office