

Communication from Public

Name: Barrington Pacific, LLC
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Comments for Public Posting: Testimony re: CF20-0146 Fire Sprinklers for Residential High-Rise Buildings is attached.

Date: August 3, 2021

To: Honorable Public Safety Committee
200 N. Spring St., Los Angeles, CA 90012

From: Barrington Pacific, LLC
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RE: CF20-0146 Fire Sprinklers for Residential High-Rise Buildings

In October 2013, the Barrington Plaza Property (BPP) experienced a fire, even though the property was fully compliant with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes. In 2013, BPP discussed adding sprinklers and other fire and life safety measures with the Fire Department, Department of Building and Safety and Housing & Community Investment Department. Eventually, BPP rebuilt the fire damaged area in accordance with existing applicable codes for residential properties built between 1943 and 1974 - because there was no path available for significant discretionary fire and life safety upgrades.

In January of 2020, BPP experienced a second fire; once again the property was fully compliant with all applicable building, fire, and life safety codes. This fire resulted in the death of a resident. BPP hopes that this Committee and the City Council will refuse to tolerate any further delay and will empower the Fire Department, following a fire in a high-rise residential building, to identify and require enhanced fire and life safety protocols for buildings to implement during reconstruction. This will prevent BPP and others from ever again being forced to rebuild a fire damaged building in accordance with older fire and life safety codes.

Since the January 2020 fire, BPP, LAFD, and LADBS have been in continuous conversation and have developed multiple technical paths forward to safely add fire sprinklers, upgrade fire alarm panels, pressurize stairways, upgrade smoke detectors and fire alarms, and add additional fire and life safety equipment (e.g. emergency power, fire pumps, on-site water storage, etc.). The time and efforts spent by LAFD and LADBS have been focused and impressive; all that is left is for the City to provide the leadership necessary to make these technical improvements a reality.

The two aforementioned fires, and similar instances in other communities within the City, regularly lead to City Council motions requesting reports, yet time and again there is no meaningful action. In August 2004, a fire in a residential high-rise in Koreatown led to Council File 04-1672 which identified that residential high-rises built between 1943 and 1974 required no sprinklers and sought input from multiple City Departments on how to increase safety within those buildings. That motion was terminated in 2007 for lack of action.

In August 2017, Council File 04-1672-S1 was introduced again citing potential problems with the lack of any requirements for fire sprinklers in residential high-rise buildings built between 1943 and 1974. The action that came out of this motion was for LAFD to review and examine all 55 residential high-rises that fall into this criteria. LAFD Action Plans were drafted for each high-rise to deal with the fact that they did not have sprinklers and a historical profile for each building was created detailing its specific past fire history. This was a herculean effort spearheaded by LAFD that received no further action from the Council.

Today, this Committee has another opportunity to create a path for moving forward. Instead of the same formulaic response, involving continued assessments and a feasibility study as recommended in the July 30, 2021 report, this Committee can recommend to the City Council that LAFD be empowered to identify and require the installation of enhanced fire and life safety measures in high-rise residential buildings being reconstructed following a fire.

The July 30, 2021 report also summarizes the 55 buildings and presents cost estimates that might apply to new construction (without regard to any existing conditions) but have no link to the actual costs, construction parameters, and construction timelines associated with upgrading 50+ year old buildings. Simply put, the construction estimates in the LAFD report are incorrect. They assume the scope of construction is limited to water storage tanks, fire pumps, supply pipes for water systems, and standpipes - a scope that is wholly incomplete.

In BPP's conversations with LADBS and LAFD, a series of additional elements would need to be repaired, replaced, or added anew in order to upgrade the fire and life safety systems. These elements include fire control panels, dedicated standby power, LAFD Connection and Pressure Reducing Valves, fuel tanks for diesel fire pumps, manual pull boxes at the stairwells on each floor, an updated fire alarm control panel (which may trigger additional requirements), and system smoke detectors. This list, far more extensive than the items listed in the LAFD report, considers the *known* items required to upgrade a structure like Barrington Plaza. A separate substantial list of additional upgrades is likely to be added once the walls are opened and the work begun.

The deficiencies in the quoted costs are not surprising given the complicated nature of creating cost estimates for buildings constructed over a span of 31 years (the period between 1943 and 1974). During this time, different architectural and structural designs, construction materials and fire and life safety methods were likely utilized in each of the 55 buildings. To add further complexity to estimating upgrade costs, consideration must be given to the individual fire and life safety upgrades and protections that buildings *may* have implemented already. There is simply no cookie cutter approach for implementing modern day fire and life safety solutions in all 55 buildings; any report purporting to provide for one is not practical or usable.

The cost and impact of work to upgrade fire and life safety systems can be extraordinary and a blanket approach defies implementation. BPP knows that the implementation cost exceeds \$150 million to install the fire and life safety modifications desired by LAFD and LADBS at Barrington Plaza since LAFD work triggers additional LADBS work. It is no wonder that most other similarly situated building owners oppose a blanket process, recognizing that no one size fits all. The only way to make progress toward safer buildings is to empower LAFD, on a building-by-building basis, to require upgrades as conditions provide the opportunity. Certainly, reconstruction following a major fire (like the one at BPP) has provided that opportunity.

Our City needs to take action today and not merely “kick the can” and continue the unproductive task of review and research. LAFD and LADBS have identified solutions that can be implemented today at Barrington Plaza. BPP proposes that a third recommendation be added to the list for consideration today by the Public Safety Committee:

Recommendation #3:

Following a major fire at any one of the aforementioned 55 buildings, and in keeping with the historical profile established for each building, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) shall utilize the powers granted to them by the Los Angeles Building Code (LABC) and the Los Angeles Fire Code (L AFC) to issue an Order to Comply identifying enhanced fire and life safety protocols for the building to implement during reconstruction.

Please do not continue to delay in implementing a solution. Following a fire, high-rise residential buildings need a path to be upgraded with enhanced fire and life safety systems. California is no stranger to fires and their incidence is increasing. The building collapse in Florida is a stark reminder that delay costs lives. BPP hopes the City and its leaders feel the same way and will make it a priority to achieve this goal.