

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REPORT relative to requiring the retrofit of all previously exempt non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings to conform to current fire code requirements for retrofitted high-rise buildings in the City of Los Angeles.

Recommendations for Council action, as initiated by Motion (Bonin - Koretz - Blumenfield - Rodriguez):

1. INSTRUCT the Los Angeles Fire Department and Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, with the assistance of the City Attorney and the Los Angeles Housing and Community Investment Department, to report with a plan and process to require residential high rise buildings, built between 1943 and 1974, to retrofit and install sprinkler systems, similar to City requirements for earthquake retrofits with said report to include:
 - a. Recommended options for implementation.
 - b. A timeline for implementing the program, including phases and milestones.
 - c. An assessment of all buildings and prioritization of the most vulnerable buildings.
 - d. Requirements for privately owned buildings and corporately owned buildings.
 - e. Considerations for tenant protections and owner rights.
 - f. Considerations of Rent Stabilized Ordinance units and issues around them.
 - g. A general overview of the costs associated with these types of retrofits.
2. INSTRUCT the City Administrative Officer (CAO), with the assistance of the Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA) to report in regard to financing options and the feasibility of using Federal Housing Urban Development or Federal Housing Administration loans, multifamily housing revenue bonds, state or local funds and financial tools to assist building owners in the costs of these upgrades, similar to any offered to building owners required to retrofit buildings to meet current seismic safety standards.

Fiscal Impact Statement: Neither the CAO nor the CLA has completed a financial analysis of this report.

Community Impact Statement: Yes

For:
Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council

Summary:

On September 22, 2020, your Committee considered a Motion (Bonin - Koretz - Blumenfield - Rodriguez) relative to requiring the retrofit of all previously exempt non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings to conform to current fire code requirements for retrofitted high-rise buildings

in the City of Los Angeles. According to the Motion, a major fire broke out January 29, 2020 on the 6th and 7th floors of a 25-story residential building on the Westside. The swift and heroic action of the Los Angeles Fire Department prevented a major, fatal inferno at the Barrington Plaza Apartments, which lacked a sprinkler system, despite a serious fire there less than seven years ago.

The Barrington Plaza is one of 55 residential high-rises built between 1943 and 1974 that are exempt from the city's sprinkler requirements. That exemption is dangerous, threatening the lives of residents and of the first responders seeking to save or rescue them. In 2013, a fire erupted on the 11th floor of the same building, displacing up to 150 residents and injuring two people. At that time, smoke alarms failed to alert residents of an emergency, stairwells filled with smoke, and exit doors to the roof were locked. A resident found his 2-year-old daughter and father-in-law passed out in a smoke-filled stairwell.

Even after that fire, the City did not mandate sprinklers in older residential high-rises. In the January 29 fire, 8 people were injured, including a 3-month old baby. Residents caught in the blaze fled to the roof, and one resident climbed outside onto a ledge, requiring rescue by ladder. The spread of the fire could have been halted by a fire sprinkler system, preventing further damage to building, injury to tenants, and risk to our firefighters. Previous efforts to mandate sprinkler installation in older residential high rises have failed, even as the City has required earthquake retrofitting of many smaller condos and apartment buildings. In 2018, the Los Angeles Fire Commission submitted a report (Council File No.04-1672-SI) to the Council that supported a proposed fire retrofit ordinance motion, requiring all previously exempt non-sprinklered residential high-rise buildings to conform to current fire code requirements for retrofitted high-rise buildings. The report included a Non-Sprinklered Residential High-Rise Action Plan that could be used as a roadmap by the City. After consideration and having provided an opportunity for public comment, the Committee moved to recommend approval of the Motion, as amended and detailed in the above recommendations. This matter is now submitted to Council for its consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

MEMBER VOTE

RODRIGUEZ:

O'FARRELL:

BUSCAINO:

RYU:

LEE:

ARL

9/22/20

-NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL COUNCIL ACTS-