

MOTION

PLANNING & LAND USE MANAGEMENT

The State of California and the City of Los Angeles continue to face an ongoing housing production challenge and housing affordability crisis. The combination of low vacancy rates, exclusionary zoning, high rents, housing discrimination, restrictive building codes, high land values, and slow permitting is worsening our housing and homelessness crisis. Recent devastating wildfires that have severely impacted the region are contributing to additional market pressures on existing rental stock, as displaced homeowners will now enter the local rental market.

The City should examine innovative, dynamic, and responsible approaches to speed housing production. Jurisdictions like the City and County of San Diego, the City of New York, and the City of Bellflower, among others, have made great advancements in permit streamlining and project approval processes through the use of programs like self-certification. Self-certification programs are voluntary programs to expedite the issuance of building permits without reducing a building’s integrity and still adhering to life and safety requirements.

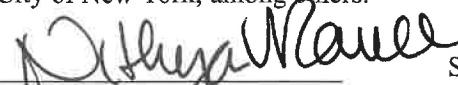
Self-certification programs also benefit the jurisdictions that offer them by reducing the workload on plan check professionals, allowing them to focus more on the complex projects that require their attention. Today, more than half of all permits requiring plan check in Los Angeles are for single-family home remodels, additions, and new construction. More than a quarter are for commercial projects, including interior remodels. Many of these would be eligible for self-certification in other jurisdictions and could be as well in Los Angeles.


Self-certification programs allow registered industry professionals to bypass the normal plan review process and, depending on the scope of the project, get approval for permits in one to five business days. Self-certification is typically limited to relatively simple projects such as non-structural commercial interior improvements, single family home construction, and low-rise buildings with straightforward building systems. This program is only available to state-licensed architects and engineers with multiple years of experience who agree to accept full responsibility in ensuring a proposed project’s architectural, structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, energy, and accessibility requirements are compliant with all relevant state and local building and zoning codes, rules, and regulations; ongoing onsite construction management and regulatory inspections; and completing and signing off all self-certification documents as a licensed professional. In some jurisdictions, participating professionals must attend and successfully complete self-certification training classes offered by that respective city or county.

As an oversight mechanism, jurisdictions still require complete sets of stamped construction plans to be filed prior to permit issuance, and inspections are conducted as usual. In addition, jurisdictions reserve the right to conduct random inspections and audits of permits under the program as frequently as determined necessary to verify proper project completion and self-certification, and can also require remedial work when it is discovered that work was not done in conformance with the applicable codes. If a project is found to be in non-compliance with the program and applicable building codes, the self-certification approval may be revoked and the contractor, engineer or architect may be deemed ineligible to utilize the self-certification program moving forward, alongside other penalties.

While the City of Los Angeles has an Express Permits Program operated by the Department of Building and Safety for specific project types that do not require plan check, a broader self-certification Program can allow for more flexibility, more project types, and bypasses the immediate role of the Building and Safety’s plan review process since the Licensed Professional accepts full responsibility in assuring the building plans are compliant with all California codes and local ordinances.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council instruct the Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety and Los Angeles City Planning Department, with the assistance of any other relevant departments, to report back within 30 days with options for a Citywide self-certification program to directly or indirectly expedite permits for residential, commercial, and mixed-use development. The report should study existing programs, including from the City and County of San Diego, the City of Bellflower, and the City of New York, among others.

PRESENTED BY: 
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SECONDED BY: 



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