

Communication from Public

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Council File No: 19-0603

Comments for Public Posting: Dear City Council, As a candidate for LA Mayor in the 2022 Election, I am writing to urge you to oppose CF 19-0603, which would essentially ban most wooden apartment construction in Los Angeles and exacerbate our city's housing crisis by making it largely impossible to construct affordable housing. I certainly understand the importance of the need to protect housing from fire damage, especially when climate change is making wildfires stronger and more common. However, this is a misleading proposal written by the concrete lobby that is not based on science and will not make Angelinos any safer. In fact, by outlawing the completely safe construction methods used for most affordable housing, it would instead result in more homelessness, more concrete use, and drive suburbanization, exacerbating our region's carbon footprint. Wood construction has been used around the world for thousands of years. Throughout this time, it is true that many wood structures have burned down. However, fire safety science has changed dramatically in the past half century. Through the combination of fire sprinklers and protective surfacing, when a fire breaks out in a modern building, it has almost no chance of spreading. Although the LA Fire Department does not publish detailed enough data to confirm for certain, every report I could find of residential fire-related injuries or deaths in LA were either in non-sprinklered single-family homes or older apartment buildings that are not up to modern code. Even with these tragic cases, Los Angeles has the lowest rate of fire deaths of any large city in the United States, a true testament to LAFD's skill and dedication. I am concerned about this proposed change to the building code not just because it would essentially outlaw type V construction, which is often the only type of construction that is possible for affordable housing without large subsidies, but also because it will prevent the city from adopting the Federal and State IBC standards for sustainable mass timber high-rise construction and force architects in the city to continue to use environmentally disastrous concrete for taller buildings. I have been following mass timber for a number of years and am excited about its potential to make LA a more climate-friendly city by reducing our reliance on unsustainable construction materials. Extensive research has shown that mass timber buildings are just as fire-protective as concrete (because they char rather than burn)

and in some cases are actually safer than steel. However, this proposed legislation would risk banning mass timber before it is first used in the city because of how it is technically classified rather than because of any of its inherent qualities. Judging by the lobbying groups that have been promoting this change to the building code, the real reason this is being proposed is because the concrete industry wants to kill wood construction, its biggest competition. It's no wonder they feel the need to use dirty tactics rather than competing fairly. Concrete is one of the leading contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, as the chemical process it relies on releases CO₂ as a direct byproduct. In order to stop climate change, we must dramatically reduce our use of concrete, and the best way of doing that in many contexts is to replace it with wood. If the city choose to move forward with this proposed change to the building code, I am worried that the result will be more greenhouse gas emissions, more unaffordable housing, and more people forced to live on the streets. That would be a true disaster. Best, Joseph May