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September 4, 2025

Los Angeles City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk City Hall, Room 395  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Attention: PLUM Committee

Dear Honorable Members:

**REPORT RELATIVE TO RECOMMENDED ZONING CODE AMENDMENTS TO SUPPORT  
SINGLE-STAIR BUILDING CODE UPDATES (CF 25-0247)**

**Summary**

At its meeting on August 12, 2025 the Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee of the City Council voted to:

1. INSTRUCT the Department of Building and Safety (DBS) and Los Angeles Fire Department, in consultation with the City Attorney and the Department of City Planning (DCP) to prepare and present a draft ordinance, including the necessary findings based on local climatic, topographical, and geological conditions, to amend the applicable provisions of the Los Angeles Building Codes and Fire Codes in order to permit the use of a single exit in residential apartment buildings up to six stories in height using the City of Seattle's policies as a model;
2. INSTRUCT the DCP to explore any recommended Zoning Code amendments that would support potential single-stair building code updates; and
3. RECEIVE and FILE the DBS reports dated June 25, 2025.

On August 20, 2025 the full City Council further amended the PLUM action to add the following instructions:

4. INSTRUCT the participating departments to consult with the State Fire Marshall, and any other state agency charged with fire / life safety responsibilities, so that their preliminary feedback can be included in the report presented to Council along with the draft Ordinance. This should be done concurrently with the Ordinance drafted and

5. REPORT BACK on the feasibility of excluding High Fire Hazard Severity Zones from inclusion of the potential Ordinance.

### **Recommendations**

As previously described in City Planning's report, dated July 23, 2025, related Zoning Code development standards may need to be further evaluated to support and incentivize more compact, visually appealing low-rise building typologies, by means of allowing single-stair construction. This report focuses on two potential Zoning Code revisions to support this type of low to mid-scale infill development, identified during an initial consultation session with design professionals; however, the Department recommends that further outreach and analysis be conducted following the adoption of the proposed single-stair Building Code amendment prior to initiating a work program that would explore future zoning code amendments.

### **Yard Standards**

The Zoning Code limits the type of improvements and extent of projections that are permitted into required yards (LAMC Sec. 12.22 C.20). Fire escapes may extend or project into any required yard but not more than four feet; and open, unenclosed stairways or balconies, not covered by a roof or canopy, may extend into a required front yard but not more than 30 inches. These width restrictions are not limited to and may exceed the requirements of the Building Code, in which the minimum width of required exit stairs is set by the occupant load. Further, proposed updates to the new Zoning Code (Chapter 1A) will allow limited unenclosed exterior stairways to encroach within a required yard (Sec. 14.1.5.A.1.d.) and considers a space to be unenclosed when its perimeter has an enclosure of less than 66.7% (Sec. 14.1.4.A.2). Aligning the yard requirements in Chapter 1 with the already adopted standards in the New Zoning Code to allow open exit stairways to be constructed within the front setback could add flexibility to facilitate the development of single-stair buildings on smaller infill lots. Open stairways can add interest, provide eyes on the street, promote healthy activity, and serve as an attractive alternative to taking the elevator, thereby saving the energy used by the building.

### **Open Space Requirements**

In Los Angeles, Zoning Code Open Space requirements for buildings of six or more residential units are often satisfied within rooftop areas above the highest floor. Under the proposed ordinance, as a safety standard, an occupied rooftop above the fifth floor would not be permitted and be limited to small private roof decks. This, in turn, would require a six-story single-stair building to meet open space requirements elsewhere on site which could constrain new development of this typology.

As currently required in the Zoning Code, usable open space must be provided at a minimum of 100 square feet for each unit having less than three habitable rooms; 125 square feet for each unit having three habitable rooms; and 175 square feet for each unit having more than three

habitable rooms (LAMC Section 12.21 G.2). An alternative approach could look to the New Zoning Code's method of calculating open space (referred to as Lot Amenity Space in Article 2, Section 2C.3.1), which is based on a percentage of a project's lot area, with additional requirements that are based on the amount of floor area contained in all the residential units on the lot. A shift to the Lot Amenity Space methodology available in the New Zoning Code for compact, infill buildings such as single-stair buildings, would have the effect of providing greater design flexibility in the placement of open space on a lot and encourage open space configurations that support future climate adaptation.

### **Next Steps**

The various technical challenges around building separations, exit pathways, and open space requirements must be explored, while also addressing concerns about fire department regulations. Upon adoption of a single-stair ordinance, increased interdepartmental collaboration and communication among plan checkers, planners, and public stakeholders will be needed to create a feedback loop to ensure that the zoning and building code regulations are working well together.

While the two recommendations listed above were highlighted during initial consultations with the design community, as a next step, through more robust community engagement and analysis through a legislative process, there may be opportunities for further refinement of the Zoning Code recommendations to support single-stair building development.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Michelle Levy in the Department of City Planning at [michelle.levy@lacity.org](mailto:michelle.levy@lacity.org).

Sincerely,



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