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AB 1294 – Universal Applications for Home Building

SUMMARY

California faces a severe housing shortage, which has been worsened by our famously complicated bureaucracy and red tape. The first step to building housing is the filing of a formal “housing application” to local governments, requesting permission to build your project and providing the planning department with the information they need, theoretically, to review it. California currently has a patchwork of wildly varying housing application forms, the requirements of which can sometimes add months or even years to a project’s development time.

AB 1294 creates a single, universal application for home building that all California cities and counties must accept. This bill simplifies the housing approval process by setting clear requirements for a complete application, removing unnecessary local pre-application steps, and ensuring a more efficient process for housing developers.

BACKGROUND

California faces a severe housing shortage, worsened by inconsistent and complicated local permitting rules. While state laws like the Permit Streamlining Act and Housing Accountability Act aim to speed up approvals, many cities still impose extra requirements that cause delays. Some require expensive studies, engineering-level drawings, or multiple meetings before a planning application can even be considered complete. These added steps slow down projects and increase costs, making it harder to build housing.

EXISTING LAW

Currently, local governments have wide discretion in determining what makes a housing application “complete.” This leads to huge differences in permit processing times, with some cities approving applications in 30 days while others take months or even years. Although state law allows developers to submit a preliminary application for housing development proposals, a standardized full application for planning review does not yet exist.

PROBLEM

Developers must navigate a maze of different rules in each city’s planning department, leading to unnecessary delays and higher housing costs. In some places, just getting an application accepted requires expensive reports and outreach efforts, which can add tens of thousands of dollars and years of delay to projects. These bureaucratic hurdles make it easier for cities to discourage, delay, or reject projects, contributing to California’s housing crisis. The lack of a uniform process also allows cities to manipulate housing approval timelines, making it difficult for developers to effectively use certain state housing laws.

SOLUTION

AB 1294 creates a universal application for home building that every city and county must accept, adding clarity and consistency to the housing approvals process. Key provisions include:

- **Statewide Standardization:** A single application format that can be used everywhere.



- **Clear Completeness Criteria:** Identifies exactly what information is needed, preventing arbitrary delays.
- **No Extra Pre-Application Rules:** Cities cannot require unnecessary steps like extra studies or meetings before accepting an application.
- **Processing Protections:** Prevents delays or rejections based on requests for density bonuses or state-granted incentives.

SUPPORT

Abundant Housing Los Angeles (Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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