

# LA ordinances advance, would ease zoning laws for homeless

By Lila Seidman  
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**A** Los Angeles City Council committee voted unanimously to advance two proposed ordinances that aim to fast track housing for the homeless by easing zoning restrictions and avoiding public input for what the planning department called "unique projects."

One ordinance being drafted by the city attorney's office allows some developments that house homeless people to circumvent several zoning laws, unit caps, environmental review and parking requirements and bypass community comment and public hearings.

The other ordinance allows motel owners to temporarily convert rooms into homeless housing, also by easing zoning restrictions. Motel owners struggling to fill rooms could contract with county-funded programs to house the homeless and avoid having to bring their properties up to zoning regulations.

"This is the backbone to our strategy to get more housing," Councilmember Bob Blumenfeld said at the hearing on Tuesday. Many supporters of the ordinance to bypass zoning laws and public input argued that the plan is what Angelenos asked for in 2016 when they voted to pass a \$1.2 billion

bond measure exclusively to build homeless housing, as well as a countywide tax increase last year to fund homeless programs.

Opponents, including several Westside neighborhood associations, said the ordinances will unfairly silence their input on what's going on in their communities, allow for environmental indiscretions and cause congestion by eliminating parking requirements.

"This is an extreme solution to cutting so-called red tape," said Jamie Hall, an attorney with Channel Law Group LLP, who represents neighborhood interests in Venice fighting the ordinances.

Hall said that environmental review and community input are integral to thoughtful development.

David Goldberg, a land use and real estate attorney with Armbruster Goldsmith & Delvac LLP, said that the environmental review process known as the California Environmental Quality Act, is often used tactically to delay or kill projects.

He said that the state already allows exemptions from the process for "meritorious projects."

Goldberg said the projects being fast tracked by the ordinance are for a public good, which "outweighs whatever detriment that arises from it."

Ryan Patterson of Zacks Freed-

man & Patterson PC in San Francisco said one of the developers' goals is "just to have more certainty."

The ordinance, Patterson said, supports "frontloading" projects, or requiring performance standards and design requirements to proactively address concerns rather than addressing them through an open-ended review process.

The city's comprehensive homeless strategy goal is to create 1,000 permanent housing units for the homeless per year for 10 years.

The city currently produces about 300, according to city planning assistant Cally Hardy, who provided an overview of both proposals to the Planning and Land Use Committee.

While the motel rezoning ordinance garnered less backlash, critics, including Councilwoman Nury Martinez, said it will concentrate homelessness into less affluent neighborhoods that have underutilized motels.

City lawyers and the planning department will now draft more complete versions of the ordinances, which will return to the planning committee for at least one more vote before heading to the full council.

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