Date of Hearing: April 9, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Matt Haney, Chair
AB 1294 (Haney) – As Amended March 17, 2025

SUBJECT: Planning and zoning: housing development: standardized application form

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to create a standardized housing entitlement application that all local governments must accept. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Provides that an application for a housing entitlement shall be deemed complete once a developer pays any permitting fees and provides the following information to the local government where approval is being sought:

   a) Identification of whether the proposed project is located within any of the following (if applicable):

      i) 1,000 feet of a military installation;

      ii) Beneath a low-level flight path or within special use airspace, as defined in Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21098; and

      iii) An urbanized area as defined in Government Code (GOV) Section 65944.

   b) All of the following information required to submit a preliminary application under SB 330 (Skinner), Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019 pursuant to GOV 65941.1:

      i) Site location details, including parcel numbers, legal description, and site address (if applicable);

      ii) Existing uses on the site and any major physical alterations to the property;

      iii) A site plan with building locations, elevations showing design, color, and materials, and massing, height, and approximate square footage;

      iv) The proposed land uses by number of units and square footage for residential and nonresidential development, per the applicable zoning ordinance;

      v) The proposed number of parking spaces;

      vi) Any proposed point sources of air or water pollutants;

      vii) Any species of special concern known to occur on the property;

      viii) Whether any portion of the property is located within:

         (1) A very high fire hazard severity zone;

         (2) Wetlands;

(3) A hazardous waste site;

(4) A special flood hazard area;

(5) A delineated earthquake fault zone; or

(6) A stream or other resource subject to a streambed alteration agreement.

ix) Any known historic or cultural resources on the site;

x) The number of proposed below-market-rate units and their affordability levels;

xi) The number of bonus units and any incentives, concessions, waivers, or parking reductions requested under Density Bonus Law;

xii) Whether approvals under the Subdivision Map Act are requested (e.g., parcel map, tentative map, condominium map);

xiii) The applicant's contact information and, if applicable, property owner consent;

xiv) For projects in the coastal zone, identification of any:

(1) Wetlands;

(2) Environmentally sensitive habitat areas;

(3) Tsunami run-up zones; or

(4) Public access uses.

xv) The Number of existing residential units to be demolished and their occupancy status;

xvi) A site map showing streams or other resources subject to a streambed alteration agreement, and an aerial site photograph of environmental site features subject to public agency regulation; and

xvii) The location of any recorded public easements, such as storm drains, water lines, and other public rights of way.

c) A survey of the property stamped and signed by a licensed surveyor or a licensed civil engineer;

d) Detailed floor plans of the proposed project. If unit layouts are substantially similar across floors, a single sample floor plan may be submitted to satisfy this requirement;

e) A vertical architectural section drawing;

f) A proposed roof plan;

g) A proposed preliminary landscaping plan; and

h) If the project involves a subdivision, lot merger, lot line adjustment, certificate of compliance, or other permit under the Subdivision Map Act or a related local ordinance, the application must include the information required by the city or county's compiled application list under GOV Section 65940. However, this does not apply if requesting such information is otherwise prohibited.

2) Prohibits an agency from requiring application items other than those specified in 1), and requires agencies to prove that any additional information they request is actually permitted.

3) Prohibits a local government from requiring any of the following to deem a housing entitlement application submitted pursuant to 1), complete:

   a) Any mandatory preapplication submissions, meetings, reviews, public outreach, or application submittal appointments;

   b) Any additional approvals or determinations by city or county officials or departments;

   c) Any technical studies or plans, including, but not limited to, traffic studies, trip generation studies, transportation demand management plans, geotechnical studies, arborist reports, noise studies, air quality impact studies, stormwater management plans, or a phase I environmental assessments;

   d) Any information solely required for the local government to review postentitlement phase plans related to physical construction (e.g., structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire safety, or accessibility plans);

   e) A list or depiction of the jurisdiction's own development standards;

   f) Any requirement that limits which architects, engineers, or consultants an applicant can use to prepare the whole, or part of, the application, unless otherwise required by state law; or

   g) Any requirement that the applicant proves the project complies with local development standards.

4) Requires the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to develop a standardized application for housing entitlement including all of the information listed in 1), and exempts the development of the application from the rulemaking process of the Administrative Procedures Act.

5) Requires local governments to post the standardized housing entitlement application developed by HCD in on their internet websites.

6) Requires all local governments to accept the standardized application for housing entitlement developed by HCD in 4), without requiring the submission of any other forms unless they're related to a requested permit or entitlement under the Subdivision Map Act.

   a) Prohibits local governments from imposing a penalty or an additional fee, processing requirement, or submittal requirement as a consequence of an applicant using the standardized application form described in 4);

b) Allows a local government to determine the number of copies of application documents that must be submitted, the size of architectural and engineering documents submitted, and the format that the documents must be submitted, as long as the requirements are consistent with the local governments' application requirements for applications that are not for housing entitlements, do not request information that is not permitted, and otherwise comply with state and federal law; and

c) Allows a local government to establish an application that requires the applicant to submit less information than is required in subdivision 2) for the submission of a complete application for a housing entitlement.

7) Defines a "housing development project" as a project that includes:

a) Residential units (including single-family homes);

b) Mixed-use developments where residential use meets one of the following thresholds:

i) At least two-thirds of the new or converted square footage is residential;

ii) At least 50% of the new or converted square footage is residential and the project includes at least 500 net new residential units, with no portion designated for hotels or other transient lodging (except a portion of the project may be designated as a residential hotel); or

iii) At least 50% of the net new or converted square footage is residential and the project includes at least 500 net new residential units, involves demolition or conversion of at least 100,000 square feet of nonresidential use, demolishes at least 50% of the existing nonresidential uses, and does not include transient lodging (except a portion of the project may be designated as a residential hotel).

c) Transitional or supportive housing;

d) Farmworker housing;

e) Projects with or without discretionary approvals; and

f) Projects requesting a density bonus or other housing incentives under state or local laws.

8) Defines a "housing entitlement" as any approval, permit, or entitlement necessary for a housing project, including local government approvals, ministerial approvals required before a building permit; and requests for density bonuses or development incentives.

9) Applies the provisions of the bill to all cities, including charter cities.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Establishes the Housing Crisis Act for urbanized and affected jurisdictions and the Housing Accountability Act, which:

a) Establishes a preliminary application process that allows developers to lock in, aka "vest" objective zoning, design, and subdivision standards in place at the time of the submission

date, as long as the developer submits a "complete application" within 180 days. (Government Code (GOV) 65941.1, 65589.5)

2) Establishes the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which is intended to inform government decision-makers and the public about the potential environmental effects of proposed developments. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 21000 - 21189.91)

   a) Requires the Governor's Office of Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (formerly the Office of Planning and Research) and the Natural Resources Agency to periodically update CEQA Guidelines. Once these Guidelines are adopted, they become part of the California Code of Regulations. (PRC 21083)

3) Establishes the Permit Streamlining Act (PSA), with the following provisions:

   a) Requires a local government to determine whether or not a housing application is "complete" within 30 days of submission and resubmittal; (GOV 65943) and

   b) Requires the following approval timelines once the project is done with the CEQA process:

      i) 60 days if the project is exempt;

      ii) 90 days if a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) or Negative Declaration (ND) was adopted; or

      iii) 180 days if the project requires a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR). (GOV 65950)

4) Establishes the Subdivision Map Act, which establishes the framework through which local governments regulate the division of land, including the requirement that tentative maps are approved within 50 days after CEQA clearance. (GOV 66410-66413.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS:

Author's Statement: According to the author, "home builders must navigate a maze of different application requirements across jurisdictions. Some places require expensive reports, pre-application meetings, and engineering-level drawings before even accepting an application to build. This patchwork process slows housing production and adds costs when we should be accelerating it and making it cheaper to build.

AB 1294 requires HCD to create a Universal Application for Home Building that all local governments must accept. By eliminating redundant requirements and simplifying the application process, this bill will make the housing approvals process faster, more predictable, and less costly. This bill does not take away local control, it simply standardizes the first step in the permitting process. AB 1294 will set clear expectations for what is required in an application to build housing, reduce administrative burdens, and help projects move forward efficiently. If we are serious about solving California's housing crisis, we must make it easier to say 'yes' to housing. AB 1294 will do just that."

The Housing Approval Process – Local Entitlement Stage: The process of gaining approval to build new housing in California can be arduous, unpredictable, and expensive. Under the California Constitution, cities and counties have broad authority, known as the police power, to regulate land use in the interest of public health, safety, and welfare. Local governments enforce this authority through an entitlement process, which includes both discretionary and ministerial approvals. Gaining "entitlement" is essentially a local government's confirmation that a housing project conforms to all applicable local zoning regulations and design standards.

The Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) identifies lengthy permit processing timelines and procedures as a governmental constraint to housing development. In HCD's San Francisco Housing Policy and Practice Review, the department found that procedural complexities associated with housing entitlement and permitting are "not only a barrier to entry to new development professionals pursuing [housing] projects," but they may also cause developers to exit housing markets with complex permitting ecosystems and pursue developments in neighboring jurisdictions with less complex procedural requirements instead.[1]A 2025 study found that California is the most expensive state for multifamily housing production, in part due to the long timeline it takes to go from an application to an approved project.[2] This report found that longer production timelines are strongly associated with higher costs, and the time to bring a project to completion in California is more than 22 months longer than the average time required in Texas.[3]

To address this, the Legislature has enacted various laws to streamline, expedite, and standardize the approvals process. One pivotal law is the PSA, which applies timelines to the local planning approvals process. Under the PSA, local governments have 30 days to determine whether or not a housing development proposal has submitted a "complete" application. This bill would provide that an application filed by a developer to build housing will be deemed "complete" upon payment of any permitting fees and providing all of the information outlined to a local government.

Another law that standardizes the approvals process for housing projects meeting objective standards is SB 330 (Skinner), Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019, which works in conjunction with the Housing Accountability Act (HAA) to establish a process through which developers seeking to build housing could "vest" their projects. Under this process, an applicant files a preliminary application to build housing, with specified project information, and then has 180 days to file a "complete application." If a developer files a complete application in time, the housing development gains vested rights to proceed under the rules that were in effect when the preliminary application was submitted. These rights include the vesting of objective standards such as general plans, community plans, specific plans, zoning ordinances, design review standards, subdivision standards, and any other rules, regulations, requirements, and policies of a local agency. There are some exceptions that allow new regulations to be applied in cases of health and safety concerns or to mitigate significant CEQA environmental impacts.

While SB 330 established a statewide list of requirements that a developer must submit to a jurisdiction in order to file a preliminary application, no such list currently exists for a "complete

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[1] HCD San Francisco Policy & Practice Review, Page 13. Published October 2023. Accessed from: https://www.hcd.ca.gov/policy-and-research/plans-and-reports
[2] https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3743-1.html
[3] https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3743-1.html

application" to build housing. This introduces uncertainty in the housing approvals process. In its 2025 Final Report, the California Assembly Select Committee on Permitting Reform suggested that eliminating uncertainty in the application process is one opportunity for improving our current housing approvals process. The Select Committee found that "there is still uncertainty over what it takes to have a complete application, as jurisdictions have interpreted the law differently."[4] When it comes to the application itself, jurisdictions have widely different requirements. Stakeholders interviewed by the Committee noted that some jurisdictions had particularly onerous applications, including requiring the upfront submission of studies that typically are not required until well into the development process, including during the post-entitlement phase of a project."[5] In some cases, jurisdictions require extensive studies, drawings, preapplication meeting requirements that make it difficult for a developer to submit their complete application within 180 days of filing a preliminary application, thus negating a key benefit of SB 330, the vesting provision. These onerous preapplication requirements may also deter developers from seeking to build in certain jurisdictions altogether.

This bill draws from best practices established through the SB 330 preliminary application by having HCD develop a template for a complete entitlement application for housing developments that all cities and counties must accept. The bill provides that an application for housing entitlement would be deemed complete once a developer pays the permit processing fee and provides all of the information in the HCD application to a local government. The application would require the prospective home builder to include site information, architectural drawings, environmental conditions, and materials required to process subdivision, if necessary. It does not permit local governments to require preapplication meetings, the upfront preparation of structural or mechanical drawings that are not required until the permitting stage, or extensive environmental studies as a precondition to filing an application. It also allows cities to request less information than what is included in the universal application template, but not more.

In doing so, the application established by this bill would increase certainty for developers seeking to build housing by providing them with a comprehensive and exhaustive list of information that would be required for their housing entitlement application to be deemed complete. It may also reduce barriers to entry for jurisdictions seeking to build in other jurisdictions throughout the state, as the requirements to "get in the door" would be standardized. Notably, this bill does not override any local planning, zoning, or other land use requirements. The application proposed in this bill simply establishes a universal list of materials that a local planning department may request when reviewing applications for housing development against their own local standards. It also does not bar developers from having optional preapplication meetings with the local government or neighbors surrounding the project, it just prohibits mandatory meetings.

Arguments in Support: Abundant Housing LA, the bill sponsor, writes in support: "currently, developers must navigate a patchwork of different application requirements across cities and counties, which adds unnecessary delays, costs, and uncertainty to housing projects. Some jurisdictions require expensive studies, engineering-level drawings, or multiple pre-application meetings, all before a project can even be considered. These delays can add months or even years to project timelines and tens of thousands of dollars in additional costs; expenses that ultimately get passed down to renters and homebuyers. The wide variety of requirements can discourage

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[4] https://a14.asmdc.org/select-committee-permitting-reform
[5] https://a14.asmdc.org/select-committee-permitting-reform, page 13

housing development, exacerbate our housing shortage, and make it harder for Californians to find affordable places to live.

AB 1294 addresses these challenges by creating a single, universal application for home building that all local governments must accept. By setting clear standards for a complete application, eliminating redundant pre-application steps, and ensuring that housing projects are not unfairly delayed or rejected, this bill will make the housing approval process more predictable, efficient, and cost-effective. Standardizing the application process can reduce unnecessary delays, lower costs, and ultimately help get shovels in the ground faster. These changes would create a meaningful reform."

Arguments in Opposition: None on file.

Related Legislation:

SB 330 (Skinner), Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019 established a pathway for housing developments to gain vesting rights if they file a preliminary application and then subsequently file a complete application within 180 days.

Double Referred: This bill was also referred to the Committee on Local Government, where it will be heard should it pass out of this Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Abundant Housing LA (Sponsor)
California Building Industry Association
California Business Properties Association
California Community Builders
California YIMBY
Circulate San Diego
Housing Action Coalition
Housing California
Monterey Bay Economic Partnership
SPUR
The Two Hundred

Opposition

None on file.

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