

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS KATHRYN BARGER AND
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MAY 6, 2025

**A PILOT SELF-CERTIFICATION PROGRAM TO EXPEDITE POST-FIRE
REBUILDING**

Los Angeles County (County) continues to respond to the catastrophic impacts of the 2025 Eaton and Palisades wildfires, which resulted in widespread destruction of thousands of homes, critical public and civic infrastructure, and commercial properties and small businesses. The estimated total damage and economic loss from the two fires is between \$250 and \$275 billion. In total, more than 16,000 structures were destroyed or damaged, 37,000 acres burned, 30 lives lost, and over 1,900 businesses damaged or destroyed—disrupting 125,000 jobs.

The Eaton Fire, which severely impacted the unincorporated community of Altadena as well as the cities of Pasadena and Sierra Madre, destroyed 9,413 structures, including 6,889 residential units, the overwhelming majority of which were single-family homes. Most of these homes were located in Altadena, where the County is both the land use authority and the building official. Accordingly, the rebuilding effort in this community will require rapid, coordinated County action.

The Palisades Fire, severely impacted unincorporated communities in the Santa Monica Mountains as well as the cities of Los Angeles and Malibu, destroying 6,631 structures, including 12,495 residential units, the overwhelming majority of which were single-family homes. Around 650 of the destroyed structures were located in the unincorporated Santa Monica Mountains, where the County is both the land use authority and the building official. Accordingly, the rebuilding effort in this community will require a rapid, coordinated County action.

The unprecedented scale of devastation has been matched by the unprecedented speed of response by local, state, and federal governments to respond to the crisis. At the request of the County and State of California (State), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) brought in the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to handle debris removal for the impacted communities. The USEPA completed its mission in only 30 days, thanks to an infusion of resources from the federal government, completing its work in a third of the projected timeline.

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In addition, the USACE has cleared more than 3,300 lots and continues to increase the pace of debris removal. With almost 220 contractors in place across both burn areas, USACE is projected to complete the majority of debris clearance in 6 months, well ahead of the 12 month projected timeline. As cleared lots are turned back over to the County, the urgency among property owners to begin rebuilding grows rapidly—placing added pressure on the County’s permitting system to respond with speed and efficiency.

A March 2025 Urban Land Institute report, *Project Recovery: Rebuilding Los Angeles after the January 2025 Wildfires*, warns that “traditional plan-review processes are ill-equipped to handle this volume” and strongly recommends a self-certification track for eligible single-family projects to alleviate staff workloads and speed approvals. Across the country jurisdictions are advancing self-certification programs that enable licensed professionals to certify that building plans meet code requirements, significantly accelerating the permitting process while maintaining safety and accountability. These programs are typically limited to straightforward projects such as single-family homes and low-rise structures and allow qualified state-licensed architects and engineers to bypass traditional plan review. Professionals must accept full legal and professional responsibility for compliance with all applicable codes and standards. Self-certification does not replace oversight — local jurisdictions continue to require complete plan submittals and conduct field inspections, while retaining authority to audit submissions, require corrections, and revoke self-certification privileges when violations occur.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on Climate Action and Fire Safe Recovery Initial Recommendations recommends that if local governments utilize self-certification and/or third party verification programs for licensed architects and contractors, local governments should require mandatory completion of specialized training covering resilience/sustainability best practices (including Chapter 7A, Zone 0, fire-resistant and sustainable materials/design) and local building/zoning codes. The building departments should develop and administer training programs with existing organizations who provide accreditation for respective professionals, along with establishing procedures and oversight for the 3rd party approval process. This could expedite the permitting process and enable faster rebuilding but still ensure that resilience and safety standards are met through qualified professionals trained in our local best practices.

The County of San Diego launched a similar program in 2021. The City of New York implemented self-certification in 1995 and has seen a significant reduction in the timeline for approvals, while adopting standard auditing practices to ensure robust oversight of health and safety and code integrity.

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Faced with an extraordinary backlog of rebuild permits after the Eaton and Palisades Fires, LA County cannot rely solely on conventional plan-review processes without delaying families' return to safe, permanent housing. A well-structured self-certification program—backed by expert analyses, legal mandates, and demonstrated precedents—strikes the optimal balance between **speed**, **safety**, and **accountability**. Adopting this model will not only clear the permitting logjam but also reaffirm LA County's commitment to resilient, equitable recovery.

To initiate this effort, the Board should authorize the Department of Public Works to develop and implement a Pilot Self-Certification Program for residential rebuilds, with reporting on program effectiveness to inform potential long-term adoption.

In addition, the County Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted a motion on April 8, 2025, to create a Unified Permitting Authority for the communities impacted by the Eaton Fire. Subsequently, on April 30, 2025, in partnership with the State of California, the County announced the launch of a new artificial intelligence-driven software to aid Los Angeles County and Los Angeles City in accelerating the approval process for rebuilding permits. The software will be provided free of charge to both local governments and to users through a partnership between the state and philanthropic partners. Accordingly, the deployment of these tools to streamline the permitting process, deploy technological tools, implement self-certification, and create a centralized permitting authority will help reduce the cost of permit and plan reviews. As permit fees in the County are established as a cost-recovery mechanism, reductions in the fee structure will match the reduction in workload for County staff.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Issue the following order/regulation for the protection of life and property, including based on the provisions of Government Code section 8634: The Director of Public Works (as the County Building Official), is authorized and directed to prepare, implement, and amend a Pilot Self-Certification Program (Program) for the purpose of establishing an expedited fire rebuilding process for affected owners of eligible residential properties in unincorporated Los Angeles County (or other areas under the County Building Official's jurisdiction). Such authorization is granted by the Board notwithstanding the provisions of Title 26—Building Code—of the County Code, including, but not limited to, Section 106.5.1 thereof, and such authorization shall remain in effect until the proclaimed local emergency for the January 2025 Windstorm and Critical Fire Event (2025 wildfires) in the County is terminated by the Board, unless such authorization is revoked at an earlier date by the Board.
2. Direct the Director of Public Works to report back to the Board in writing within 120 days on the effectiveness of the Pilot Self-Certification Program, including recommendations regarding the Board's potential future adoption of a permanent county-wide program.

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I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), in collaboration with the Departments of Regional Planning, Public Works, Fire, and Public Health, to report back in writing in 30 days with a revised evaluation of the feasibility of waiving certain fees for applicable permits with the implementation of the aforementioned technological and streamlining tools.

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