
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Senator María Elena Durazo, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

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SINGLE-FAMILY AND MULTIFAMILY HOUSING UNITS: PREAPPROVED PLANS

Requires each city and county to establish a program for the preapproval of single-family and multifamily residential housing plans by July 1, 2027.

Background

The California Constitution allows cities and counties to “make and enforce within its limits, all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.” It is from this fundamental power (commonly called the police power) that cities and counties derive their authority to regulate behavior to preserve the health, safety, and welfare of the public—including land use authority.

Cities and counties use their police power to enact zoning ordinances that shape development, such as setting maximum heights and densities for housing units, minimum numbers of required parking spaces, setbacks to preserve privacy, lot coverage ratios to increase open space, and others. These ordinances can also include conditions on development to address aesthetics, community impacts, or other particular site-specific considerations. Zoning ordinances and other development decisions must be consistent with the city or county’s general plan.

Local governments have broad authority to define the specific approval processes needed to satisfy these considerations. Some housing projects can be permitted by city or county planning staff “ministerially” or without further approval from elected officials, but most large housing projects require “discretionary” approvals from local governments, such as a conditional use permit or a change in zoning laws. This process requires hearings by the local planning commission and public notice and may require additional approvals, such as design review.

Preapproved plans. In an attempt to increase standardization and predictability in housing approvals, there has been increased interest at the local and state level in “preapproved” plans for housing development, particularly in the context of accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Several local governments, including the City of Encinitas and the City of San Jose, have voluntarily established programs where they make available plans for ADUs that homeowners can use to build an ADU without commissioning an architect and with less review at the local level.

Building on existing ADU laws, AB 1332 (Juan Carrillo, 2023) required cities and counties to develop a program for the preapproval of ADU plans by January 1, 2025. Under this program, anyone can submit plans for preapproval, and the city or county must review them based on existing state ADU and building code standards. The city or county may charge the same permitting fees as they would for a regular ADU application to review submittals for ADUs requesting preapproval. Once approved, the city or county must post these plans on its website,

along with the applicant's contact information (though the agency isn't responsible for its accuracy). Applicants can also request removal of their ADU plans if they no longer wish to participate in the program. Cities or counties are also allowed to include their own preapproved ADU plans or ones approved by other local governments in California in the preapproved plan program, since the same ADU standards apply statewide. If a city or county receives an application for a detached ADU using a preapproved or previously approved plan from the current building code cycle, the local government must approve or deny the permit application within 30 days, without discretionary review.

Pew study of preapproved plans. In May 2026, the Pew Charitable Trusts released a report on preapproved plans.¹ The report reviewed preapproved plan programs adopted by municipalities across the United States and interviewed local officials and builders on their experiences with preapproved plans. The report found that while fewer than 50 cities and counties outside of California (which mandates preapproved ADU programs) had published anything related to preapproved plans, in jurisdictions that had adopted them:

“Homebuilders benefit from meaningfully reduced approval times and fewer delays, especially in cities with streamlined permitting, and direct cost savings on architecture and engineering services... Preapproved plans reduce builders' overall development costs by about 1%-2%... Cities benefit through improved land utilization, with more homes on less land, and more infill projects—homes in already developed areas that can use existing infrastructure... The process of implementing a preapproved plan program also offers cities an opportunity to coordinate and refine their entire permitting process, which often spreads across multiple isolated departments.”

The researchers found that use of preapproved plans by builders varies. At the high end, the City of South Bend, Indiana, which has published preapproved plans since 2023, has seen 223 units permitted. Hawaii County, Hawaii, and Seattle, Washington, have seen similar numbers of units built through their preapproved plan programs. Portland, Oregon, on the other hand, has seen only one preapproved ADU built since 2024. The report indicates that low uptake in some jurisdictions might be due to a desire for residents to use their own bespoke plans or a lack of time savings for a developer if reviews other than by the planning or building department are still required.

The author wants to expand the ADU preapproval program to other types of housing.

Proposed Law

Assembly Bill 748 requires each city and county to establish a program for the preapproval of single-family and multifamily residential housing plans by July 1, 2027, for buildings containing up to 10 units.

Under this program, cities and counties must accept submissions of plans for preapproval. Cities and counties must approve or deny these applications for preapproval based on established state and local housing regulations. They may also charge applicants the same permitting fees they would for standard housing unit approvals when reviewing and approving a preapproved plan.

¹ Pew Charitable Trusts, “Preapproved Building Plans Help Cities Improve Housing Affordability.” 13 May 2026.

An application for preapproval must include a statement by the applicant that the applicant has sufficient authority, license, or ownership interest in the plan to submit the plan for preapproval and have it posted by the city or county.

Once approved, local agencies must post preapproved single-family and multifamily residential housing plans on their websites. AB 748 provides that this posting does not constitute an endorsement of the applicant or approval of their specific housing unit application. Agencies must also post the applicant's contact information, as provided by the applicant. A local agency must remove a preapproved housing plan from its website within 30 days if the applicant requests its removal.

AB 748 also allows cities and counties to develop and preapprove their own plans for inclusion in the program, and to voluntarily accept or admit additional plans at higher densities in other zoning districts into the preapproved housing plan program, using their discretion. A local agency does not have to post a preapproved single-family or multifamily residential housing plan that is not submitted by an applicant.

The bill excludes from the preapproval program single-family or multifamily residential housing plans for intended for use in master-planned communities, planned unit developments, or similar large-scale developments that involve subdividing land for multiple new housing units.

A city or county must ministerially approve or deny an application for a single-family or multifamily residential housing unit that uses a preapproved housing plan within 30 days of receiving a completed application, if the lot meets the soil conditions, topography, flood zone, zoning regulations, and design review standards for which the preapproved plan was originally designed.

The bill also requires cities and counties to include in their annual progress report to the Department of Housing and Community development the number of units approved using a preapproved plan by April 1, 2030, for the following cities and counties:

- Counties with a population of fewer than 250,000;
- Cities within those counties; and
- Cities with a population of fewer than 25,000.

All other cities and counties must begin reporting two years earlier—by April 1, 2028.

AB 748 includes findings and declarations to support its purposes.

Comments

1. Purpose of the bill. According to the author, “AB 748 streamlines the approval process for both single-family and multifamily housing by requiring local agencies to establish pre-approved housing plan programs. Under the bill, large jurisdictions would be required to develop these programs by July 1, 2027, while small jurisdictions would have until January 1, 2029. By providing homeowners and developers with a standardized set of housing models to choose from, the bill not only accelerates post-disaster rebuilding but also facilitates the construction of new housing statewide. This standardized and predictable approval pathway cuts through bureaucratic red tape, reduces costs, and removes delays that often prevent housing from being

built. By making it easier to rebuild and create new homes, AB 748 increases overall housing supply, supports faster community recovery, and helps ensure more families can access stable, affordable places to live.”

2. Volunteers, not hostages. In 2023, the Legislature directed cities and counties to adopt preapproved plans for ADUs. That requirement became effective on January 1, 2025. Accordingly, it is unclear how successful this effort has been, and what pitfalls have arisen in jurisdictions that didn’t adopt the program voluntarily. Following that effort, AB 748 requires all cities and counties to develop a program to preapprove standardized designs for certain types of development, regardless of whether there is demand for such a program within their jurisdiction. In examining preapproved plan programs, the Pew Charitable Trust identified significant variation in the success of this program. For example, officials in Cupertino, CA, reported very few applications for preapproved ADUs, which they attributed to the desire for homeowners to design their own bespoke projects. Others have seen a few hundred units built to date. As a rule, the jurisdictions in the study that saw success from preapproved plans adopted these programs voluntarily. Those cities and counties may be friendlier to development than those that didn’t. It is unclear whether mandating that cities and counties adopt preapproved plan programs will lead to significant new building of preapproved homes.

3. Little boxes all the same? California’s communities are diverse, not just across jurisdictions, but within jurisdictions, each often with unique community characteristics. Currently, housing projects are generally considered individually on a site-by-site basis, allowing for specific design and impact considerations. Cities or counties must approve or deny an application for these projects ministerially—meaning without discretionary review—within 30 days if the application includes a preapproved plan. Some cities are concerned AB 748’s short timeframes for review and limitations on the ability of local governments to review projects individually could affect the safety of structures built using these plans. However, AB 748 allows cities and counties to specify the soil conditions, topography, flood zone, zoning regulations, and design review standards for the preapproved plan. The ability to specify these conditions gives cities and counties significant latitude over where preapproved plans may be used and how they fit into their communities.

4. Step one. AB 748 requires all cities and counties to develop a program for preapproved single and multifamily dwellings. The program must accept submissions for preapproved plans. The bill also allows, but does not require, cities and counties to develop their own preapproved plans. However, not all local governments may receive submissions of plans for preapproval, such as cities or counties with smaller populations or that see little development. AB 748 does not specify what the program requires if no submissions are received by the date they must have a program. But the bill does provide that local agencies are not required to post preapproved plans that are not submitted by an applicant, so they won’t have to pay to develop their own preapproved plans if none are submitted. Absent further direction, it is unclear what a local government must do to comply if no one submits a plan.

5. Charter city. The California Constitution allows cities that adopt charters to control their own “municipal affairs.” In all other matters, charter cities must follow the general, statewide laws. Because the Constitution does not define municipal affairs, the courts determine whether a topic is a municipal affair or whether it is an issue of statewide concern. AB 748 says that its statutory provisions apply to charter cities because the lack of housing is a matter of statewide concern.

6. Mandate. The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local governments for the costs of new or expanded state mandated local programs. Because AB 748 adds to the duties of local officials, Legislative Counsel says the bill imposes a new state mandate. AB 748 disclaims the state's responsibility for providing reimbursement by citing local governments' authority to charge for the costs of implementing the bill's provisions.

7. Related legislation. AB 748 is virtually identical to AB 1206 (Harabedian, 2025), which the Committee approved on a 5-2 vote. AB 1206 was held in the Senate Appropriations Committee. Additionally, AB 748 is modeled after AB 1332's preapproved ADU program. It borrows the provisions from that law and applies them to buildings containing 1 to 10 residential units with the following differences:

- AB 748 prohibits the preapproval program from applying to plans intended for use in projects that require subdivision, while AB 1332 did not;
- AB 748 gives cities and counties six months to develop the program, while AB 1332 gave them one year; and
- AB 748 includes protections for architects to ensure that their designs are not used without permission, while AB 1332 did not; and
- AB 748 does not prohibit local governments from requiring qualifications for submission of ADU plans, while AB 1332 included this prohibition.

8. Coming and going. The Senate Rules Committee has ordered a double referral of AB 748: first to the Committee on Local Government to hear issues related to local approval processes, and second to the Committee on Housing.

Assembly Actions

Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee:	11-0
Assembly Local Government Committee:	8-0
Assembly Appropriations Committee:	15-0
Assembly Floor:	75-0

Support and Opposition (6/12/2026)

Support: Abundant Housing Los Angeles
 Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles
 Bay Area Council
 California Council for Affordable Housing
 California Council for Affordable Housing (CCAH)
 California Yimby
 Calrha
 Casita Coalition
 Eastside Housing for All
 Faith and Housing Coalition
 Fieldstead and Company, INC.
 Habitat for Humanity California
 Spur
 Student Homes Coalition

The Two Hundred for Homeownership
Zillow Group

Opposition: City of Carlsbad
City of Pico Rivera
City of San Marcos
City of Santa Clarita
City of Thousand Oaks

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