
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 611
Author: Richardson (D), et al.
Amended: 7/14/25 in Assembly
Vote: 27 - Urgency

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE: 7-0, 4/2/25
AYES: Durazo, Choi, Arreguín, Cabaldon, Laird, Seyarto, Wiener

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 12-0, 5/6/25
AYES: Umberg, Niello, Allen, Arreguín, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Stern, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Valladares

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0, 5/27/25
AYES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
NO VOTE RECORDED: Reyes

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0, 7/17/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Planning and zoning: community plans: review under the California Environmental Quality Act

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill reenacts, as an urgency measure, provisions of law that prohibit a court from invalidating a development approval that was granted based on a community plan that meets specified criteria, if the development was approved or had a complete application prior to the community plan being invalidated.

Assembly Amendments of 7/14/25 provide that the bill applies to community plans adopted on or after January 1, 2025 and make technical changes.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Requires every county and city to adopt a general plan that sets out planned uses for all of the area covered by the plan. A general plan must include certain mandatory elements, such as a land use element that designates the proposed general distribution, general location, and extent of the uses of land; a housing element that establishes the locations and densities of housing for very low, low, moderate, and above moderate income households; and a circulation element that describes the general location of public infrastructure and facilities for the movement of goods and people.
- 2) Allows cities and counties to adopt specific plans—also known as community plans—that provide for the systematic implementation of a general plan in a particular area.
- 3) Requires, under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the state and local governments to study and mitigate, to the extent feasible, the environmental impacts of proposed projects. An agency that proposes to undertake a project that may have a significant impact on the environment must prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to study the impacts and identify measures to mitigate those impacts. An EIR may be required at many levels of planning, including the adoption of a general plan, a specific plan, or zoning ordinance, or for an individual development project.
- 4) Provides for judicial review of CEQA actions taken by public agencies, following the agency's decision to carry out or approve the project. If a court finds that a project didn't comply with CEQA, it must order the approving agency to do one of the following:
 - a) Void the CEQA decision, determination, or finding;
 - b) Suspend any or all specific project activities that could result in an adverse environmental change, until the public agency has taken any actions needed to bring the determination, finding, or decision into compliance with CEQA; or
 - c) Take specific action to bring the determination, finding, or decision into compliance with CEQA.

This bill:

- 1) Prohibits a court from invalidating, reviewing, voiding, or setting aside a development approval that was granted based on a community plan that meets specified criteria on the basis of noncompliance with CEQA, if either of the following occurs:
 - a) The development is approved before the court issues a stay, order, or writ that requires the challenged EIR or community plan update to be rescinded or set aside; or
 - b) The application for the development project is deemed complete under the Permit Streamlining Act before the court issues a stay, order, or writ that requires the challenged EIR or community plan update to be rescinded or set aside.
- 2) Applies notwithstanding the duties CEQA imposes on a court to issue a stay, order, or writ if a project does not comply with CEQA.
- 3) Applies to developments where the community plan underlying the development approval must meet all of the following conditions:
 - a) The plan was adopted by a city, including a charter city, or county for a defined geographic area within its jurisdictional boundaries;
 - b) The plan serves as the land use element for the area covered by the plan;
 - c) The plan has not been updated for more than 10 years from the date the plan was adopted or last updated, whichever is later;
 - d) The plan includes two or more transit priority areas;
 - e) The city or county that adopts the plan has adopted, on or after January 1, 2015, a circulation or mobility element as a part of the general plan;
 - f) The city or county that adopts the plan has a housing element that includes housing capacity to sufficiently accommodate its regional housing needs allocation;
 - g) The city or county that adopts the plan has adopted a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) threshold of significance for the area that presumes that projects in the area have a less than significant transportation impact, consistent with state regulations;

- h) The area covered by the plan update is located within an urbanized area, as defined in existing law; and
 - i) The city or county that adopts the plan has also adopted any required ordinances or regulations related to the designation of very high fire hazard severity zones and floodplains.
 - j) The plan was adopted on or after January 1, 2025.
- 4) Provides that the bill does not:
- a) Affect or alter the obligation for the approval of a development project that is consistent with an approved community plan to comply with CEQA; or
 - b) Limit an action to challenge the approval of a development project that is consistent with an approved community plan.
- 5) Applies its provisions to a development project commenced on or before January 1, 2036, states that it is an urgency statute, and includes findings and declarations to support its purposes.

Background

City of Los Angeles Community Plans. The City of Los Angeles's Land Use Element of its general plan comprises 34 Community Plans that contain the guiding goals and principles for how each plan area should grow. Currently, 28 of those 34 plans are at least 10 years old, and the oldest is the Chatsworth-Porter Ranch Plan, which was last updated in 1993. In 2017, the city council directed the Los Angeles Department of City Planning to update Los Angeles's Land Use Element by 2024. However, the COVID-19 pandemic paused these updates and the city only recently resumed updating them. The City is in the process of updating its community plans citywide. 14 plans are currently in the process of being updated, three of which are in the final phase of adoption.

AB 1515 (Friedman, Chapter 269, Statutes of 2019). Major land use changes can be controversial and are often litigated under CEQA. Responding to concerns that litigation during the update process could create uncertainty over whether the old community plan or the updated plan would be in effect, the Legislature enacted AB 1515, which prohibited a court from invalidating a development approval that was granted based on a community plan that meets specified criteria, if the development was approved or had a complete application prior to the community plan being invalidated. The purpose of this measure was to allow development to

proceed during the litigation process over updated community plans without fear that a court would halt projects in progress.

AB 1515 sunset on January 1, 2025. City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass wants the Legislature to reestablish the limits on invalidating approved projects that were enacted by AB 1515.

Comments

Purpose of this bill. According to the author, “SB 611 ensures the timely execution of community development projects by restoring legal protections that prevent court challenges under the CEQA from invalidating approved projects. By extending these protections until 2036, SB 611 provides certainty for developers and communities, ensuring that legally permitted projects can proceed even when broader community plans are contested. This bill is particularly critical in cities like Los Angeles, where housing shortages and homelessness remain urgent concerns. The reinstatement of these provisions aligns with California’s broader goals of increasing housing supply and streamlining development.”

Wait a minute... CEQA can be a double-edged sword: it provides opportunities for both legitimate challenges to developments that will harm the environment and for less scrupulous actors to delay projects they don’t like for completely unrelated reasons. Delays in project approval can be costly, and operating based off of out-of-date land use plans can have environmental consequences as well. For example, the CEQA regulations in place at the time many community plans in Los Angeles were adopted encouraged suburban development because city streets already have slower moving traffic than suburban arterials, but the regulations in force today encourage infill opportunities because development in urban areas results in fewer VMT.

To mitigate these issues and to allow development to proceed as the City of Los Angeles updates its community plans, SB 611 provides protection for some development approvals from being invalidated. The potential consequences of this are limited: SB 611 does not apply to ministerial projects, and any other project approvals that require discretionary review—which applies to most projects—would still have to go through a separate project-level CEQA analysis. Furthermore, SB 611 does not prevent a court from issuing an injunction that prevents the community plan from being used if the court thinks there is a real risk that the plan will result in environmental harm. On balance, the cost of delaying development may outweigh the relatively small potential unmitigated environmental impacts.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/14/25)

City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass (Sponsor)

California Apartment Association

California Association of Realtors

California Building Industry Association

City and County of San Francisco

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/14/25)

Livable California

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0, 7/17/25

AYES: Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Addis, Alvarez, Berman, Boerner, Gallagher

Prepared by: Anton Favorini-Csorba / L. GOV. / (916) 651-4119
8/14/25 16:22:55

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