

City and County of
San Francisco



President, Board of
Supervisors

AARON PESKIN
市參事佩斯金

For Immediate Release
October 23, 2024

Contact: Nate Horrell
415.554.4719

Board President Aaron Peskin Calls for Sensible Density

Peskin pushing for single-stair building standards to unlock tens of thousands of units of existing zoned capacity

San Francisco- Today, Board of Supervisors President Aaron Peskin introduced legislation to set San Francisco on a path to increase new housing by building denser housing within the City's existing zoned capacity. The legislation calls for creative building code changes which will unlock thousands of medium density residential units on smaller lots by safely changing certain staircase requirements. According to architects and residential builders, changing the requirement for two staircases above three stories, as is common in most of the rest of the world, is the key to making medium density projects feasible on smaller building sites.

This legislation builds on previous legislation which President Peskin and the Board of Supervisors enacted to end single family zoning by creating fourplex and sixplex zoning in residential areas throughout the city and will provide developers the increased density and design flexibility they need to deliver more housing.

Currently, state building code requires two stairways connected by an internal hallway on any building above three stories. This unnecessary rule makes many multifamily developments [“less livable, less climate adaptive, less family friendly, less community-oriented”](#) and does not actually make residents safer.

In October 2023, California lawmakers passed Assembly Bill 835 directing the State Fire Marshall to create a report on best practices for single-stair buildings across the state, but [San Francisco does not need to wait for state action to begin to make these changes locally](#). The Department of Building Inspection can begin allowing these building types promptly by issuing something known as a bulletin of code equivalences.

“The city can take bold action now to unlock our existing zoned capacity, by allowing more flexibility within building envelopes that have long been approved. We can allow this creativity and meet our housing needs without giving up renter and eviction protections or affordability.” **said Board President Aaron Peskin**, “We need to facilitate human-scale sensible density that our city is known for.”

The resolution, which will be heard at the full Board of Supervisors on October 29th, calls on the Building, Planning and Fire departments to form a working group to propose new rules to safely allow single-stair buildings in three to six story buildings.

Planning Commission Vice President Kathrin Moore raised this policy idea during the Planning Commission’s June 4th informational hearing on state-mandated upzoning and suggested that the city must respond creatively with better ideas. Moore warned that upzoning combined with our current building codes creates “extruded elongated cubes of cumbersome sameness”, whereas modern urban housing in the rest of the world relies on “single point access (one stair)” to unlock “a treasure trove for affordable housing units on non-contiguous small sites built by small builders.”

"Single stair buildings are a known strategy for providing greater density in high quality buildings on small sites all over the world. If San Francisco is serious about building over 80,000 units of new housing this needs to be part of the solution." said **Mark Hogan, AIA, Principal, OpenScope Studio**

“Low and midrise Point Access blocks are the primary form of urban housing the world over, and have been legal in Seattle for nearly 50 years. They can unlock more affordable, more climate-adaptive, and more family-friendly housing in more of the city – supporting and enabling the same fine-grained urban scale that makes up the historic fabric of San Francisco.” added **Michael Eliason, AIA. author and architect at Larch Lab.**

###