

Why All the Fuss Over SB 1818?

SB 1818, a California state law adopted in 2004 that took effect in 2005, is an ill-conceived attempt to create more affordable housing in California.

SB 1818 is a one-size-fits-all approach. It overlays density everywhere — across entire cities — without regard for:

- The sufficiency of infrastructure, particularly transportation infrastructure, to adequately support it.
- The character of neighborhoods, including whether the scale and aesthetic of proposed projects are compatible with existing neighborhoods.
- The loss of existing affordable housing, including rent-controlled and rent-stabilized housing.

Recognizing these issues, some cities and counties in California have made it more challenging for SB 1818 projects to be undertaken. Among other things, they require developers to demonstrate the economic necessity of incentives to achieve affordable housing objectives.

Burbank, Glendale, Long Beach, Santa Monica and Los Angeles County, among other jurisdictions, require project applicants to account for their requested incentives. Los Angeles City does not.

Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County Supervisor, recognized these issues when the City of Los Angeles was drafting its implementation ordinance in 2007. Said Yaroslavsky: “[The draft ordinance] invites developers to decimate current zoning protections under the guise of providing affordable housing.” Specifically, he was referring to allowances that would not otherwise have been permitted by the city’s zoning, specific plan, historical overlay or adopted height-limit ordinances.

Yaroslavsky also predicted at the time that the density bonus ordinance would likely reduce rather than increase the supply of affordable housing in the city, “exactly the opposite of the stated intent of the law. It will also insure that expensive, market rate units will be built at the expense of units that serve the city’s most economically vulnerable renters.”

LA Neighbors United supports affordable housing, including planned, manageable density, with projects that are neighborhood compatible and supported by infrastructure.

A Note About Development Incentives Under SB 1818

While the state mandates certain levels of density *bonuses*, the granting of development *incentives* to support affordable projects is a discretionary exercise. In other words, local governments may deny requested incentives or scale them back, on several grounds. ###