

May 21, 2020

CHAIR AND PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

City of Long Beach
California

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend that the City Council find the proposed ordinance to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act and approve Zoning Code Amendment ZCA20-001 to amend Title 21 of the Long Beach Municipal Code (Zoning Code) to establish an interim motel conversion ordinance to facilitate the voluntary and non-permanent conversion of existing motels to temporary supportive or transitional housing for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness when a business operator enters into a contract with an approved Local Agency. Motels must revert to their original use upon expiration of a valid contract with a Local Agency. (Citywide)

APPLICANT: City of Long Beach,
Development Services Department
411 West Ocean Boulevard, 3rd Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802
(Application No. 2003-19)

DISCUSSION

Motels provide needed lodging for tourists and other travelers but can also result in serious negative impacts on neighboring properties and city services when an inadequate local market for rooms exists or when sufficient management controls are lacking for the facility. In October 2017, the City Manager directed the Office of Civic Innovation to coordinate an interdepartmental team to explore strategies to address nuisance activities of motel uses that affect the quality of life in the City of Long Beach (City). The team subsequently developed and tested a nuisance motel compliance plan at six select locations as part of a nine-month Citywide pilot program. At the November 13, 2018, City Council meeting, staff presented the nuisance motel Pilot Program findings along with additional solutions to address nuisance motels. One recommendation proposed by staff was an ordinance that would permit the temporary conversion of motels to transitional or permanent supportive housing modeled after a similar program adopted by the City of Los Angeles. City Council directed staff to bring back a proposal to implement a similar program in Long Beach.



In response, Planning Bureau Staff has prepared an Interim Motel Conversion Ordinance to allow for the voluntary and non-permanent conversion of motels to supportive or transitional housing. There is a need for a diversity of housing solutions to address the City's housing crisis and the varying needs of people experiencing homelessness. There are an estimated 4,000 residents in Long Beach that experience homelessness every year and nearly 60,000 homeless residents counted in the 2019 Los Angeles County homeless count. The proposed ordinance is one of several City initiatives that are intended to help address the housing needs of the City's residents.

Proposed Ordinance

The proposed ordinance amends the Long Beach Zoning Code by adding Chapter 21.65 to establish new regulations to allow existing hotels, motels, and other transient occupancy residential structures to be used for an interim period as supportive or transitional housing. The ordinance is designed to eliminate unnecessary regulatory barriers to converting motels and similar structures to interim housing uses.

The ordinance would create a ministerial approval process allowing existing transient residential structures such as hotels and motels to conduct minor interior alterations and establish a temporary change of use to supportive housing and/or transitional housing. Per the proposed regulations, the temporary change in use may not result in any substantial increase in floor area, building footprint, the number of units, or the overall building height. All units in a building must be converted to supportive housing or transitional housing use to qualify as an Interim Motel Housing Project. Any existing buildings, regardless of the permitted uses of the underlying zone or their conformance with current zoning regulations - including density, parking, use regulations or yard or setback requirements - would be eligible to be used for this purpose without needing additional planning entitlements. While the review process for proposed projects will be ministerial and thus not require a public hearing, the City will encourage business owners and their Local Agency partners to conduct community outreach during the contract development phase.

Projects would be eligible to make minor physical alterations to the interior of the existing structure, for example by adding kitchenettes to individual units or by converting existing floor area to supportive service and case management areas. Exterior enhancements will be allowed such as aesthetic improvements as well as landscaping, security improvements and fencing. In order to qualify for the conversion program, a project must include a contractual agreement between approved public and/or private providers (known as a "Local Agency") that fund and/or operate transitional and/or supportive housing and/or provide associated supportive services on-site. Business owners who seek to convert their motels to these temporary housing projects will be required to enter into a contract with these approved partners. Individual Interim Motel Housing projects may have one or more "Local Agency" partners party to these contractual agreements, in addition to the business owner.

These temporary housing uses will be permitted for the duration of valid contracts with approved Local Agency partners, and, upon expiration of such contracts, the property would be required to revert to their previous legal use, or any use allowed by the current zoning regulations. Properties would be permitted to maintain existing nonconforming rights throughout the process. While there is no minimum nor maximum contract length required, the City anticipates that most projects will

establish contracts between 5 and 15 years in length. Even with an extended contract period, annual monitoring and complaint resolution would occur during the entire contract term.

The proposed Interim Motel Conversion ordinance will create a pathway for existing buildings to be utilized for supportive housing and transitional housing, helping to promote creative, cost-effective, and expeditious strategies to expand housing solutions for persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program would also provide on-site social services and city oversight to alleviate the negative impacts currently generated by nuisance motels and assure that the housing use operates in a manner complementary to the neighboring community and consistent with community standards.

The new provisions would eliminate potential regulatory barriers that could disincentivize motel owners to participate in a motel conversion program. Furthermore, the proposed ordinance will build upon existing local efforts, such as the Everyone Home Task Force, as well as work in conjunction with the recently adopted Nuisance Motels Ordinance. While the Nuisance Motels Ordinance imposes mandatory requirements on motels that are identified as hotspots for nuisance and/or criminal activity, this policy now before the commission will be voluntary and provide an incentive for motel operators that may find their legacy business to no longer be as viable to instead convert their property on a non-permanent basis.

Background

Transitional and supportive housing are important housing types for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Transitional housing is a time-limited housing intervention that provides homeless individuals and families with the interim stability and support to successfully move into and maintain permanent housing, typically within a period of 6 to 24 months. Supportive housing provides indefinite rental assistance and supportive services to assist homeless persons achieve housing stability. Typically, both transitional housing and supportive housing incorporate supportive services such as individual case management, mental health treatment, addiction therapy and vocational training.

Hotels and motels present a unique opportunity to accommodate these housing types by reusing existing structures to respond to immediate housing needs. These buildings are structurally similar to residential buildings and have the potential to be quickly adapted to provide interim housing through publicly funded programs. In Long Beach individual rooms in motels are already used as a form of transitional housing, and there is increasing interest in converting entire properties to transitional housing and/or supportive housing so that supportive services can be better integrated on-site. Measure H, a County-wide measure to allow a quarter-cent sales tax increase to fund homeless services was approved by voters in March 2017, has expanded the availability of funding to provide rental assistance and supportive services to residents of supportive and transitional housing. County-funded programs will help facilitate the use of hotels and motels for supportive and transitional housing on an interim basis. Once properties are no longer participating in a program to provide supportive or transitional housing, they may return to their previous use.

Today, motels are sometimes used as an informal type of affordable housing - often called a "housing of last resort." Individuals may utilize housing vouchers to rent out motel rooms on a temporary basis. However, these programs often do not include many of the tenant protections that are associated

with a longer-term lease nor the supportive services these individuals require. The proposed ordinance in many ways represents a continuation of this activity, but with some improvements. Residents would be permitted to remain in the unit and would be provided the stability of a longer-term lease. Additionally, the quality and type of supportive services and property management provided to residents would be improved. Furthermore, the reuse of these properties that would be permitted by the proposed ordinance allows for the rapid increase in the supply of housing units in the near term while more permanent supportive and low-income housing can be constructed.

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

In accordance with public hearing notification requirements for a Zoning Ordinance Amendment in Long Beach Municipal Code Section 21.21.302.C, notice of this public hearing was published in the Long Beach Press-Telegram on May 7, 2020; written notices were sent to the California Coastal Commission and public hearing notices were posted in public places throughout the City. Due to the declared state of emergency, notices were not provided to City libraries (they are closed), notice posting was provided at City Hall but not at multiple locations. A study session on this item was held at the Planning Commission meeting on April 16, 2020. And a notice of the proposed code amendment was distributed through the City's LinkLB e-mail blast system.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the project is statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.50 which states that the conversion of a motel structure to supportive or transitional housing, where the conversion does not result in the expansion of more than 10 percent of the floor area of any individual living unit in the structure and/or does not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality is statutorily exempt from CEQA requirements. No additional action is required for Environmental Review.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Attachments: Exhibit A – Findings

Exhibit B – Draft Red-Line Code Amendment