DARRELL ORWIG
315 W. Third Street, Apt. 705
Long Beach, CA 90802
dorwig1@earthlink.net

May 13, 2008

Rae Gabelich, Chair and
Members of the Economic Development Committee
333 West Ocean Blvd.
Long Beach, CA 90802

Dear Ms Gabelich and Members of the Committee:

The proposal for an ordinance mandating the retrofitting of multi-story apartments and condominiums with a fire-sprinkler system is a recipe for the financial ruin of hundreds of residents of this city. Such an ordinance is not necessary. Most of these buildings have stood for many years without a major catastrophe and in all probability will continue to do so indefinitely. Yes, another major residential fire sometime in the future is possible but such events are rare. Disasters of all sorts occur from time to time and they always will; fires, floods, hurricanes, plane crashes. Fatal automobile accidents happen daily as do gang shootings and all manner of other things. Potential dangers exist for all of us in this world and absolute safety cannot be legislated by anyone.

While this proposed ordinance is well-intentioned the potential consequences have not been fully taken into account. The fire department's cost projections are highly unrealistic; in reality, this would be a multi-million-dollar burden on each affected building that the owners could not possibly afford on any terms or within any time period. The sprinkler system itself is but a fraction of the costs and complications involved. Once these older buildings are opened up there will be enormously costly asbestos and lead-paint issues, and structural problems. Then there are huge costs associated with moving out, storing belongings, and securing living accommodations for the interim.

As it is, many people, particularly those who bought in recent years, are currently facing serious difficulties accruing from crushing mortgage obligations coupled with the continuing drop in real estate values. Older people, living on fixed incomes, would be wiped out. There is a very real probability that owners would be forced to walk away, abandon the buildings, and forfeit their entire investment, which for most people is their primary source of financial security.

Over-zealous idealism can be very dangerous, and it is not protecting the public. Rather, it is gross and irresponsible over-reaction to a rare incident. As others have pointed out, reasonable and practical measures could be taken to improve fire safety without going to reckless extremes. So, I urge you to consider very carefully the consequences of your decision before you consign hundreds of your constituents to disaster.