



Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass gets a lot of unfair grief from the media and from Angelenos. Many criticized her for being out of the country when the Palisades Fire struck: but she was abroad in Africa representing President Biden (when in Congress one of her areas of expertise was Africa), and mayors do this sort of thing all the time. Now attorneys are suing the City for alleging not having enough water in municipal reservoirs during the fire, although shortages did not occur until the early morning, long past when many houses (including mine) had already burned down; more importantly, the reservoir was undergoing crucial maintenance at the appropriate time of the year, and partially due to Clean Water Act requirements.

But when it comes to land use — an area that the City actually has authority over — she deserves every criticism she gets. Faced with the need according to the state for nearly a quarter of a million housing units to meet the city's needs, her response was to favor keeping two-thirds of the City's lots zoned for single-family. After the Venice Community Housing Corporation received council approval for a wonderful project that would provide dozens of new affordable units, under neighborhood pressure she has blocked issuing permits that were already approved.

And now this. [She has issued an Executive Order blocking the development of duplexes in Pacific Palisades](#), which SB 9 made by-right throughout the state: "The landmark 2021 law, passed in response to the state's housing shortage, lets property owners divide single-family-home lots and build duplexes, triplexes or fourplexes." SB 9 is a crucial piece of legislation to allow for "missing middle" housing, enabling greater density without skyscrapers or other massive developments.

It appears as if Bass can do this, because Governor Newsom has declared a State of Emergency, which allows him to waive the provisions of state laws in some Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (of which Pacific Palisades is one). The idea that duplexes would have caused worse problems is highly debatable at best; no article I can find has any data whatsoever on whether “missing middle” housing would create a fire hazard. Just the opposite: if we are trying to reduce fire risk, [infill development actually reduces risk because leapfrogging development brings more people into the wildfire urban interface](#). [Julia Stein has posted about the work](#) she did on the UCLA Task Force about rebuilding back better in Los Angeles: there was *nothing* in [the report](#) about reducing density, because that does not make the city more resilient. It’s a complete red herring.

But that isn’t what this is about. NIMBYs in the Palisades and other very affluent have been hysterical about SB 9 since it was passed, screaming about “Manhattanization” – because as we all know, Manhattan is known as a City Of Duplexes.



Pacific Palisades Community Council

Palisadean NIMBYs aren’t really pretending. According to the Los Angeles Times, “Residents retain deep scars from January’s tumultuous evacuation and fear it would be even worse with a larger population, said Larry Vein, founder of wildfire recovery group Pali Strong. They also desire the area to return to the predominately single[1]family-home neighborhood it was, he said. ‘The community does not want higher density,’ Vein said.”

That is what it is about. We don’t want Those People coming into Our Neighborhood. The Pacific Palisades Community Council opposed SB 9 when it was first proposed. It has

opposed just about every housing bill considered in the Legislature. When former Councilmember Mike Bonin suggested that maybe someone should study whether tiny homes for the homeless in beach parking lots, the outcry was so fierce that Bonin was pushed out of running for re-election.

His successor was Traci Park, who ran on a NIMBY platform and has fought all housing since coming into office. She pushed Bass to kill the Venice project, and Bass has complied.

The Times article notes that Bass isn't trying to kill ADUs, just SB 9. But both provide more housing. Why?

"Vein said Palisades residents are friendlier to ADUs because their construction may not necessarily lead to a larger population. Many people, he said, would use an ADU to work from home, as a guest house or allow members of multigenerational families to have their own space. By contrast, he said, SB 9 duplexes inevitably will add people. 'You've just doubled the density,' he said.

Ah, I see. If multigenerational families move in, or there are guests, then *that's* okay. But...you know...*other* people? No.

Note how this has absolutely **nothing** to do with fire hazards. It's pure plutocracy, and Bass seems to be fine with it.

Mayoral spokesperson Zachary Seidl said SB 9 was not anticipated to be used after a major wildfire, he said, while streamlining ADU permitting assists property owners with reconstruction. "The mayor with both of these positions is supporting community members in the Palisades rebuild," Seidl said.

This is exactly wrong. SB 9 is perfectly suited to be used after a major wildfire: with cleared lots, it is much easier to rebuild with duplexes instead of trying to gut and rebuild afterwards.

I get it. Bass faces a potentially tough re-election fight next year. She can't afford to alienate constituencies. But there are *loads* of ways to deal with this issue that do not involve caving to people who are caricatures of elitist, nasty NIMBYs. Those are the sorts of skills that we want politicians to have. That's why we hire them. And Bass has just made her case for retention a lot weaker.