
FW: Agenda Item 8.2

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Mon 10/27/2025 8:26 AM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

From: Salim Damerdji - [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 26, 2025 11:27 AM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Cc: The Office of Mayor Matt Mahan <mayor@sanjoseca.gov>; District1 <district1@sanjoseca.gov>; District2 <District2@sanjoseca.gov>; District3 <district3@sanjoseca.gov>; District4 <District4@sanjoseca.gov>; District5 <District5@sanjoseca.gov>; District 6 <district6@sanjoseca.gov>; District7 <District7@sanjoseca.gov>; District8 <district8@sanjoseca.gov>; District9 <district9@sanjoseca.gov>; District 10 <District10@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Agenda Item 8.2

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Hi Council,

I'm writing to express my support for the memorandum from Mayor Mahan and Councilmembers Campos, Tordillos, Cohen, and Mulcahy.

Here's a revealing fact. The building codes for single-family homes explicitly prioritize affordability, while codes for multi-family homes do not. This isn't my interpretation - you can compare the purpose statements for the IRC 101.3 and IBC 101.3 directly. The single-family code lists affordability in its purpose statement, but the multi-family code omits it entirely.

Given this framework, it's no wonder multi-family housing has become so expensive to build. The most significant cost driver is the requirement for two stairwells, which necessitates space-wasting double-loaded corridors. I applaud Mayor Mahan and Councilmembers Campos, Tordillos, Cohen, and Mulcahy for leading on driving down construction costs.

Best,
Salim Damerdji

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FW: Letter of Support for the Council Memorandum for Item 8.2

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Mon 10/27/2025 8:27 AM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

From: Matt Savage [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 26, 2025 7:28 PM
To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>; The Office of Mayor Matt Mahan <mayor@sanjoseca.gov>; District1 <district1@sanjoseca.gov>; District2 <District2@sanjoseca.gov>; District3 <district3@sanjoseca.gov>; District4 <District4@sanjoseca.gov>; District5 <District5@sanjoseca.gov>; District 6 <district6@sanjoseca.gov>; District7 <District7@sanjoseca.gov>; District8 <district8@sanjoseca.gov>; District9 <district9@sanjoseca.gov>; District 10 <District10@sanjoseca.gov>
Subject: Letter of Support for the Council Memorandum for Item 8.2

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Mayor Mahan and Members of the San José City Council,

We are writing on behalf of over one thousand San José YIMBY members in strong support of the Council Memorandum for item 8.2, which would modernize the San José building code to allow single-stair designs for small apartment buildings of six stories or less. This practical change is a significant step towards meeting the City's goals for housing affordability, sustainability, and design flexibility.

Under the current building code, even modest multifamily buildings must include two staircases. While this rule was made to enhance safety, it has also made it significantly more expensive and less space-efficient to build smaller apartment buildings. For many small builders, nonprofit housing developers, and climate-friendly infill projects, this requirement can make housing projects financially unfeasible.

By allowing single-stair configurations with reasonable height and occupancy limits, and by adopting modern fire-safety standards such as sprinklers, rated corridors, and smoke ventilation, San José can maintain safety while reducing unnecessary costs. This approach has been safely implemented in other cities across the U.S., as well as in Canada and Europe, where compact, livable, and family-friendly apartment buildings are far more common.

Adopting this reform would advance several key goals from San José's Housing Element and Envision San José 2040 General Plan, including expanding "missing middle" housing, promoting infill development near transit, and supporting a greater variety of affordable housing types. It would also align with regional efforts to increase the supply of attainable homes for working families while reducing sprawl and vehicle dependence.

We encourage the City Council to support this Council Memorandum as a meaningful, cost-effective way to support innovation in housing design and to advance San José's vision of a more inclusive and affordable community.

Take Care,


Matt Savage and Theresa Do
San José YIMBY Co-Leads

FW: 10/28 City Council Meeting Agenda Item 8.2

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>

Date Mon 10/27/2025 4:39 PM

To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

 1 attachment (16 KB)

Single stair reform letter.docx;

From: Carol Owendro [REDACTED]

Sent: Monday, October 27, 2025 4:05 PM

To: City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>

Cc: The Office of Mayor Matt Mahan <mayor@sanjoseca.gov>; District1 <district1@sanjoseca.gov>; District2 <District2@sanjoseca.gov>; District3 <district3@sanjoseca.gov>; District4 <District4@sanjoseca.gov>; District5 <District5@sanjoseca.gov>; District 6 <district6@sanjoseca.gov>; District7 <District7@sanjoseca.gov>; District8 <district8@sanjoseca.gov>; District9 <district9@sanjoseca.gov>; District 10 <District10@sanjoseca.gov>

Subject: 10/28 City Council Meeting Agenda Item 8.2

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Hi,

I'm writing to support single stair reform. See my attached letter.

Thank you,

Carol Owendro

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Dear San Jose Council Members,

I'm writing to support the single stair reform amendment proposed in agenda item 8.2. I believe San Jose should allow this single stair reform so we can lower the cost of multifamily housing construction and allow multifamily housing to fit more easily into smaller infill lots. It has also been shown that single stair 4-6 story buildings have the same safety performance as two staircase buildings.

Single stair reform lowers construction costs

- Pew Research found that requiring one vs two staircases in 4-6 story buildings can **lower construction costs by 6-13%.**¹ In our current climate of high construction costs, where barely any multifamily housing projects can pencil, this cost reduction is badly needed.

Single stair buildings have the same safety performance as two staircase buildings

- These single stair buildings are already allowed in New York City, Seattle and Honolulu. Pew looked at the safety performance of buildings with single stair vs two stairs in New York City and found no difference in safety performance². They point out that double staircases made more sense for fire safety before modern safety features became prevalent, like fire sprinklers.

Single stair buildings help multifamily buildings fit into infill lots

- Since single stair buildings require less floor space for staircases they can fit onto narrower lots.

We should update this outdated building code that doesn't provide higher levels of safety but is stopping us from building the multifamily housing this city badly needs.

Thanks for reading,

Carol Owendro

1,2. Horowitz, A., Rodnyansky, S., & Su, D. (2025, February 27). *Small single-stairway apartment buildings have strong safety record*. The Pew Charitable Trusts.
<https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2025/02/small-single-stairway-apartment-buildings-have-strong-safety-record>

FW: 8.2 Please support Single Stair in San José!

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>

Date Tue 10/28/2025 7:48 AM

To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

 1 attachment (244 KB)

HAC _ Coalition letter on Single Stair in SJ.pdf;

From: Ali Sapirman <[REDACTED]>

Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2025 7:43 AM

To: The Office of Mayor Matt Mahan <mayor@sanjoseca.gov>; District5 <District5@sanjoseca.gov>; District4 <District4@sanjoseca.gov>; District2 <District2@sanjoseca.gov>; District1 <district1@sanjoseca.gov>; District 6 <district6@sanjoseca.gov>; District3 <district3@sanjoseca.gov>; District7 <District7@sanjoseca.gov>; District8 <district8@sanjoseca.gov>; District 10 <District10@sanjoseca.gov>; Foley, Pam <Pam.Foley@sanjoseca.gov>; City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>

Cc: Alex [REDACTED] Lori Droste [REDACTED] Sujata Srivastava <[REDACTED]>; Mlane [REDACTED]; Leora [REDACTED]

Subject: 8.2 Please support Single Stair in San José!

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Dear Mayor Mahan, Council, and Staff,

Please see the attached letter of support for item 8.2 on Single Stair on behalf of HAC, SPUR, San José Yimby, and Catalyze SV.

In solidarity,

--

Ali Sapirman | Pronouns: They/Them
Advocacy & Policy Manager | Housing Action Coalition
555 Montgomery St. San Francisco, CA 94111
[REDACTED]


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CATALYZE SV



10/27/25

To: Honorable Mayor Matt Mahan and Members of the San José City Council

Re: Commending San José's Leadership on Exploring Single-Stair Building Reform

Dear Mayor Mahan and Councilmembers,

On behalf of the Housing Action Coalition (HAC), San José YIMBY, SPUR, and Catalyze SV we commend the Mayor and Councilmembers Campos, Tordillos, Cohen, and Mulcahy for introducing the October 24, 2025 memorandum directing staff to evaluate a local building code amendment to allow construction of buildings up to six stories with a single staircase.

This forward-thinking directive shows San José's continued leadership in addressing California's housing and construction cost crisis through evidence-based, feasible solutions.

The aforementioned memo recognizes a critical truth: **the cost of construction in California has risen dramatically—34.4% in just four years**, nearly twice the increase of the consumer price index. These rising costs, compounded by overlapping local regulations, threaten to make even modest housing projects infeasible.

By asking staff to evaluate a local amendment enabling single-stair buildings up to six stories, the City is taking a pragmatic step toward improving feasibility and affordability without compromising safety. San José is signaling that housing policy should be grounded in both data and design practicality.

We also applaud the memo's broader directive to streamline local codes, evaluate the cost impacts of new regulations, and seek stakeholder input from the development community, Associated General Contractors, and the Chamber of Commerce. **This kind of transparent and evidence-based process is precisely what's needed to ensure housing policy supports—not hinders—new home creation.**

Why Single-Stair Buildings Matter

Single-stair buildings are a proven housing typology used safely around the world in countries with equally rigorous fire and building codes, including Denmark, Japan, Canada, and Germany. In the United States, Seattle has permitted six-story single-stair apartment buildings since 1977 with no corresponding increase in fire incidents or fatalities.

Modern safety measures—such as full sprinkler coverage, fire-rated construction, and pressurized stairwells—make these buildings as safe as two-stair designs, according to research from the Pew Charitable Trusts. These buildings also improve livability and sustainability, allowing for more natural light, cross-ventilation, and efficient floorplans.



A Key Step Toward Missing-Middle and Infill Housing

Single-stair reform would make many small or irregular parcels in San José newly buildable, particularly in urban villages and transit corridors where double-stair layouts are infeasible. The result is more “missing-middle” housing: modestly sized walk-ups, courtyard apartments, and mixed-use infill—exactly the types of homes that meet the city’s affordability and climate goals.

By reducing redundant code barriers, San José can help unlock development on underutilized lots while maintaining design quality, safety, and accessibility.

Recommendations for Next Steps

As the City evaluates this reform, we recommend that staff and Council:

- Use **Seattle’s single-stair framework** as a baseline, adapting it for California’s seismic and fire-safety standards.
- Avoid untested requirements—such as excessive side setbacks or limits on units per floor—that reduce buildable space without proven safety benefit.
- Engage the **architectural and development community** early to ensure the resulting ordinance is feasible in practice, not just in concept.
- Coordinate with **state lawmakers** on any necessary updates to enable local implementation.

Conclusion

We thank the Mayor and Council for advancing this conversation and for recognizing that the cost and feasibility of housing are shaped as much by building code decisions as by zoning and finance. San José has the opportunity to lead the state once again in innovative, data-driven housing reform—making homes safer, more affordable, and more attainable for the next generation.

We stand ready to collaborate with City staff, the development community, and fellow advocates to help shape an ordinance that achieves these shared goals.

Respectfully,

Ali Sapirman

Advocacy & Policy Manager

Housing Action Coalition



FW: Opposition to Agenda Item 8.2 – Amendment to the San José Municipal Code on Single Staircase High-Rise Construction

From City Clerk <city.clerk@sanjoseca.gov>
Date Tue 10/28/2025 2:36 PM
To Agendadesk <Agendadesk@sanjoseca.gov>

From: Jean Cohen [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 28, 2025 2:35 PM
To: Jean Cohen <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Opposition to Agenda Item 8.2 – Amendment to the San José Municipal Code on Single Staircase High-Rise Construction

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Dear Honorable Mayor and Members of the San José City Council,

On behalf of the South Bay Labor Council and the Santa Clara and San Benito Counties Building and Construction Trades Council, we are writing to express our opposition to Agenda Item 8.2 and the proposal to evaluate local building code amendments that would allow single-staircase high-rise construction up to six stories.

Fire Fighters were not included in the roundtable discussions that informed this item, despite being the city professionals who respond to and risk their lives in these very structures during emergencies. Their lived experience and national data from recent tragedies show that reducing egress points and ventilation pathways in multi story buildings creates unacceptable risks for residents and first responders. Additionally, Construction Workers and high road contractors are important stakeholders that have developed strong safety protocols for construction that would be dangerously weakened by a reduction in egress points. Steps taken to account for this reduction and rebalance construction worker safety would likely be expensive and put high road contractors at a competitive disadvantage against low road contractors.

At a time when San José remains one of the lowest staffed metropolitan fire departments in the nation, we should be strengthening—not weakening—our fire and building safety standards. We support IAFF Local 230 and urge the City Council to reject single-staircase high-rise designs and to ensure that future building code discussions include public safety stakeholders and city employees.

Sincerely,

Jean Cohen and David Bini