

Date of Hearing: April 23, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Juan Carrillo, Chair

AB 920 (Caloza) – As Amended March 24, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Permit Streamlining Act: housing development projects: centralized application portal.

**SUMMARY:** Requires cities and counties with populations greater than 150,000 to make available on its internet website a centralized application portal to track the status of a housing development project application. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires a city or county with a population of 150,000 or more to make available a centralized application portal available on its website to an applicant for a housing development project to track the status of an application.
- 2) Finds and declares that this bill addresses a matter of statewide concern rather than a municipal affair, as specified. Therefore, the bill applies to all cities, including charter cities.
- 3) Provides that no reimbursement is required by the bill pursuant Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because a local agency or school district has the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to pay for the program or level of service mandated by this bill, as specified.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** This bill is keyed fiscal and contains a state mandated local program.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Bill Summary.** This bill requires a city or county with a population of 150,000 or more to make a centralized application portal available on its website to an applicant for a housing development project to track the status of an application.

This bill is sponsored by Abundant Housing LA.

- 2) **Author’s Statement.** According to the author, “California is in a housing and affordability crisis. A universal lack of technology to track housing permits is one of the major challenges facing local governments and housing providers when it comes to fast-tracking housing projects. Physically contacting, emailing, or calling simply can’t support the current volume of permit applications and local governments do not have the ability to meet future population demands. Current development approval processes are slow, complex, and largely flawed. AB 920 takes a meaningful step towards ensuring transparency and accountability in addressing our housing crisis.”
- 3) **Planning for and Approval of New Development.** Planning for and approving new development is mainly a local responsibility. The California Constitution allows cities and counties to “make and enforce within its limits, all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws.” It is from this fundamental power (commonly called the police power) that cities and counties derive their authority to regulate behavior to preserve the health, safety, and welfare of the public – including land

use authority. Cities and counties enforce this land use authority through zoning regulations, as well as through an “entitlement process” for obtaining discretionary as well as ministerial approvals.

The scale of the proposed development, as well as the existing environmental setting determine the degree of local review that occurs. For larger developments, the local entitlement process commonly requires multiple discretionary decisions regarding the subdivision of land, environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), design review, and project review by the local agency’s legislative body (city council or county board) or by a planning commission delegated by the legislative body.

- 4) **The Permit Streamlining Act.** The PSA requires public agencies to act fairly and promptly on applications for development proposals. Under the PSA, public agencies have 30 days to determine whether applications for development projects are complete and request additional information; failure to act results in an application being “deemed complete.” The PSA applies to the discretionary approval phase of a development review process; this is the phase where the agency, in its discretion, decides whether it approves of the concept outlined in the development proposal.
- 5) **Non-discretionary Post-entitlement Permits.** A development proposal that is approved and entitled by a local agency is still required to obtain approval for a range of non-discretionary permits. This includes building permits and other permits related to the physical construction of the development proposal. The timelines established in the PSA do not apply to these non-discretionary permits.

Essentially, the PSA applies to the discretionary approval phase of a development review process. This is the phase where the local agency, in its discretion, decides whether or not it approves of the concept outlined in the development proposal. Because the local agency is exercising discretion, these approval decisions are subject to CEQA. A development proposal that is approved and entitled by a local agency must also obtain approval of objective permits associated with the development proposal. This ensures the proposal is compliant with state and local building codes and other measures that protect public health, safety and the environment. This stage of the review process is often ministerial, as these post-entitlement permits are typically objective in nature. Generally, once a local agency invests the time and effort to approve and entitle a development proposal, there is an incentive for the agency to process the post-entitlement permits in a timely fashion.

- 6) **Application Portals.** Cities and counties across the state have access to software to create portals on their websites for applications related to the development, improvement, or repair of a housing development project. These portals can be helpful when a city or county has multiple departments working on an application. For example, according to the City of Santa Barbara’s *Accela Citizen Access User Guide* updated on March, 12, 2025, Santa Barbara has moved to an all-digital application and plan review platform. Sacramento County uses the same software for their application portal. In contrast, the City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety hosts a portal where Los Angeles can issue an express permit where work does not require any type of plan review or approval. In its information bulletin P/GI 2020-003 as it was last revised on April 20, 2022, the City of Los Angeles outlines the types of building, HVAC, plumbing, fire protection, electrical, elevators, pressure vessel, or other permits eligible to be reviewed through the online portal.

Online portals are not limited to the use of cities and counties. The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) uses online portals to process the project applications, new meters, and upgrades or additions to existing infrastructure. Similarly, the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) has online portal for applications for applying for service.

7) **Policy Considerations.**

a) **Definitions.** This bill requires cities and counties with populations greater than 150,000 to make a “centralized application portal” to an applicant for a “housing development project” to allow for the tracking of the status of an application. “Housing development project” can have various meanings in state law. “Central application portal” is undefined for the purpose of local agencies approving permits on a website. The Committee may wish to consider if defining these terms would provide needed clarity.

b) **Teamwork makes the dream work?** While many cities and counties have portals for applications that would bridge departments across the same local agency, it is unclear how this bill would apply to other local agencies. If the “centralized application portal” is intended to create a ‘one-stop shop’ for a project from plan review to certificate of occupancy and beyond, the portal would need to have input from not only the city and county but other local agencies, state agencies, and utility providers that provide permits. The Committee may wish to consider if it is prudent to specify if a city or county should include applications and the status of those applications across other public agencies and private entities.

8) **Committee Amendments.** To address the policy considerations above, the Committee may wish to consider the following amendments:

a) Require cities and counties to make available the “centralized application portal” no later than January 1, 2028.

b) Add the following provisions to the bill.

*(c) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply,*

*(1) “Centralized application portal” shall mean a website or software that a city or county uses to collect information and materials provided by the applicant necessary for the city or county’s consideration of a housing development project.*

*(2) “Housing development project” means a use consisting of any of the following:*

*(A) Residential units only.*

*(B) Mixed-use developments consisting of residential and nonresidential uses with at least two-thirds of the square footage designated for residential use.*

*(C) Transitional housing or supportive housing.*

*(d) A city or county shall not be required to provide the status of a permit or inspection required by another local agency, state agency, or utility provider.*

*(e) A local agency required to comply with subdivision (a) may extend the time period described in that subdivision by up to two years if the legislative body of the local agency does both of the following by January 1, 2028:*

*(1) Makes a written finding that adopting an online permitting system by January 1, 2028, would require substantial increases in permitting fees.*

*(2) Has initiated a procurement process for the purpose of complying with subdivision (a).*

*(f) For purposes of this section, the population of a county shall be determined based on the population of the unincorporated areas.*

9) **Related Legislation.** AB 1294 (Haney) requires the HCD to create a standardized housing entitlement application that all local governments must accept.

10) **Arguments in Support.** Abundant Housing LA writes in support, “AB 920 is a key component of the Fast Track Housing Production Package, which aims to fix the most common roadblocks to getting to “yes” on housing. By tackling inefficiencies at every stage of the approval process, from applications and CEQA compliance to entitlements, post-entitlement, and enforcement, this legislative package will help get housing built faster and at lower costs. One major barrier: many large cities lack a centralized and transparent system to manage the many steps in the entitlement and post-entitlement processes.

“Without such a centralized system, builders find it challenging to track the status of their projects and manage the complex landscape of different agencies and requirements. Disjointed processes are particularly difficult to navigate for small builders (many of them minority- or women-owned), who cannot afford to hire expeditors and land use consultants familiar with the particularities of each local jurisdiction.”

11) **Arguments in Opposition.** None on file.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

Abundant Housing LA (Sponsor)  
California Housing Consortium  
California Yimby  
Habitat for Humanity California  
Institute for Responsive Government Action  
Leadingage California  
South Pasadena Residents for Responsible Growth  
Spur  
The Two Hundred

### **Opposition**

None on file.

**Analysis Prepared by:** Linda Rios / L. GOV. / (916) 319-3958