ORDINANCE NO. 2025 - 013

AN URGENCY ORDINANCE AMENDING SECTIONS 15.02.105 AND 9.02.040 OF THE CULVER CITY MUNICIPAL CODE TO AMEND PORTIONS OF THE 2022 EDITION OF THE CALIFORNIA BUILDING STANDARDS CODE AND THE CALIFORNIA FIRE CODE IN ORDER TO ALLOW FOR SINGLE-EXIT APARTMENT RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS OF UP TO SIX STORIES DUE TO LOCAL CLIMATIC, GEOLOGICAL, OR TOPOGRAPHICAL, CHANGES

WHEREAS, California Health and Safety Code Sections 17958.5 and 17958.7 authorize the City Council to make reasonably necessary changes or modifications to the provisions of the California Building Standards Code (Title 24, California Code of Regulations) upon finding these changes are reasonably necessary due to local administrative, climatic, geological or topographical conditions;

WHEREAS, climate change effects in Culver City, including more frequent and intense heat waves and increased wildfire risk, necessitate a shift toward building forms that consume less energy and reduce urban heat island effects;

WHEREAS, the state building code often requires multiple stairwells in multifamily buildings taller than three stories, a requirement that has been shown to constrain housing design, increase construction costs, and limit the development of "missing middle" housing types on otherwise eligible urban infill lots;

WHEREAS, most other countries in the world allow single-stair buildings, alternatively called "point access blocks," that are taller than the three stories currently permitted in Culver City, and this building typology has been found to offer many significant benefits to cities with similar topography, geology and climate, without any documented safety concerns;

WHEREAS, single-stair buildings are designed to take advantage of Southern California's temperate climate, allowing for more corner units and through-units, and thereby increasing opportunities for cross-ventilation, access to natural light, and opportunities for outdoor circulation. In doing so, single-stair buildings support climate-adaptive design by reducing dependence on mechanical heating and cooling, lighting systems, and reducing electricity use, thereby aligning with the City of Culver City's Green New Deal and climate resilience goals;

WHEREAS, the climate of Culver City is characterized by mild winters, limited snowfall, and temperate seasonal conditions, which reduce the need for enclosed, mechanically ventilated circulation corridors in residential buildings. These conditions support the safe and effective use of single-stair designs with operable windows and natural ventilation;

WHEREAS, Southern California also experiences periods of intense heat waves, high winds, wildfires and other phenomena associated with climate change that cause power outages with increasing frequency, while buildings that provide survivable indoor conditions without dependence on the electrical grid can protect residents without access to or those who can not afford to run air conditioning units;

WHEREAS, single-stair buildings allow for shallower unit depths, narrower building footprints, and more efficient floor area ratios. These characteristics promote smaller building envelopes, lowering material use and its associated embodied carbon and enable greater site efficiency and infill density, which reduces per-capita infrastructure demands;

WHEREAS, by enabling housing types (e.g., 4–6 story single-stair multifamily buildings) suited for urban infill on small and irregular sized single lots, single-stair reform

fosters transit-oriented, walkable development patterns. This reduces dependency on automobiles and directly supports greenhouse gas reduction, consistent with state goals around Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction and location-efficiency;

WHEREAS, Culver City's current housing stock contains many older buildings, typically lacking systems like fire alarms and fire sprinklers, and many more buildings built in the last 20-30 years are now coming of age with their exits, and exit access corridors, that are behind current code requirements and/or have been compromised since construction. A single-stair ordinance would provide safer exiting when compared to existing conditions;

WHEREAS, single-stair buildings are required to be fully sprinklered and designed with shorter travel distances to an exit, allowing occupants to evacuate more quickly in an emergency. The proposed height limits for single-stair buildings ensure that fire department aerial ladders can provide access to upper floors under typical conditions, while internal sprinklers and other protections provide additional life-safety measures;

WHEREAS, the current building code allows large double-loaded corridor buildings that allow for extremely long dead-end corridors and have many more residents sharing the same stairs than comparable single-stair buildings;

WHEREAS, the proposed ordinance would significantly limit the number of occupants leaving an exit stairwell. Compared to the currently adopted building code, which allows up to 500 occupants per floor to share two exits, the ordinance limits floor plates to 4,000 square feet (equivalent to 20 occupants) per floor for a single exit, resulting in 92% fewer occupants per exit;

WHEREAS, cities around the US, including the City of Seattle, have, for decades, successfully permitted single-stair (or "point access block") construction for

apartment buildings up to six stories, demonstrating a safe and effective alternative to the more restrictive State of California standard;

WHEREAS, a recent study by The Pew Charitable Trusts analyzed fire death rates in modern single-stair buildings in Seattle and New York City from 2012 to 2024, finding that fire-related fatalities in these buildings were "indistinguishable from those in other multifamily buildings";

WHEREAS, the Pew study further revealed that in the rare instances of fire-related deaths in these buildings, "the lack of a second stairway did not play a role" in any of the fatalities, as they all occurred in the unit of origin;

WHEREAS, the City of Culver City has drafted an ordinance modeled after Seattle's single-stair code that City Council has determined is no less protective than the state building code because it includes a suite of enhanced life safety measures that mitigate the lack of a second stair, including but not limited to:

- A maximum of six rather than three stories;
- A maximum of four dwelling units per floor, to mitigate occupant load and congestion during an evacuation;
- A requirement for positive pressurization of interior stairwells and allowance of an exterior stairway to mitigate smoke infiltration and create a safe, smoke-free path for occupants to exit and for firefighters to enter;
- Increased front and rear access for aerial ladders;
- Enhanced sprinkler regulations;
- An elevator for buildings of five and six stories is required to assist with the evacuation and accessibility; and

- A limit on the maximum travel distance from a dwelling unit's entry door to the exit stair, ensuring rapid access to the protected egress path;

WHEREAS, in support of the following modifications and changes, the City Council hereby expressly finds that the following amendments and modifications to the California Building Standards Code are reasonably necessary due to local climatic conditions as well as to further green building standards;

WHEREAS, the single-stair construction type, as exemplified by the City of Seattle's code, is a safe and proven alternative to the State of California's more restrictive two-stair requirement, and that its demonstrated safety record and enhanced life safety features make it a viable and beneficial building option for increasing housing supply and improving residential design without compromising occupant safety.

NOW, THEREFORE, the City Council of the City of Culver City, California, **DOES HEREBY ORDAIN** as follows:

SECTION 1. Culver City Municipal Code Section 15.02.105 California Building Code Adopted by Reference with Local Amendments is amended to add the following:

Section 1006.3.5 is added to Chapter 10 of the 2022 California Building Code and the 2022 California Fire Code to read as follows:

1006.3.5 Single-exit buildings with Group R-2 dwelling units with an occupied floor or roof above the third story. Single-exit, Group R-2 occupancy buildings with an occupied floor or roof above the third story are hereby permitted within the City of Culver City so long as they strictly comply with all of the following in addition to the requirements of this Code, and the CBC where specified, other than CBC Section 1006.3.4 as in effect on June 30, 2025:

1. All dwelling units or accessory dwelling units shall meet the definitions of dwelling units or accessory dwelling units as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025, and no other type of unit shall be permitted within the building.2. Group R-2 occupancies, as defined in CBC Section

310.3, within the building shall be limited to apartment houses. Group R-2.1 and Group R-2.2 occupancies shall not be permitted.

2. The building is not classified as a high-rise building as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025.

3. The floor area of each floor (story or basement) shall not exceed 4,000 net habitable square feet (371.6 m^2).

4. There shall be no more than two single exit stairway conditions on the same property.

5. Single-exit buildings over three stories are not permitted in any High or Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zones.

6. The building shall be of VA (four stories maximum), IVA, IVB, IVC, IIIA, IIA, IB, or IA type of construction.

7. Recycling, waste, and linen chute access shall be located within a separate room and shall not be accessible from the interior stairway. The separate chute access room shall have no horizontal dimension less than five feet (1.53 m) nor be less than 25 square feet (2.32 m^2) in area.

8. Each dwelling unit and each accessory dwelling unit shall be limited to a maximum of six habitable spaces as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025.

9. An elevator is required for buildings that are five or six stories in height. All stories must be served by the elevator. When an elevator is provided, it shall comply with CBC Section 3002.4A, general stretcher requirements as in effect on June 30, 2025.

10. When an elevator is provided, it shall have a pressurized shaft or pressurized hoistway that at all times must remain pressurized in accordance with CBC Section 909.21 at a minimum positive pressure of 0.10 inch of water (25Pa) and a maximum positive pressure of 0.25 inch of water (67Pa) with respect to all adjacent areas on all floors, or shall open into elevator lobbies constructed to comply with CBC Section 3006.

11. No more than 20 feet (6.10 m) of travel distance to the exit stairway as measured from the entry/exit door of any dwelling unit to the exit stairway door or related passageway door shall be permissible.

12. Other occupancies are permitted in the same building provided they separately comply with all the requirements of this Code. Other occupancies shall not communicate with the Group R occupancy portion of the building and shall be provided with a separate means of egress, distinct from the single-exit serving the Group R-2 occupancy.

Exception: Parking garages accessory to the Group R-2 occupancy are permitted to use the single-exit stairway.

13. Private roof decks up to 150 square feet (13.9 m^2) per unit are permitted at or below the sixth story. The private roof deck must be accessible only through that individual unit. Individual roof decks shall be separated from other private roof decks and any other areas by a minimum 42-inch (1067 mm) tall guardrail or walls.

14. No more than a total of four dwelling units (including accessory dwelling units) shall be permitted on each story or basement level.

15. The building shall not exceed six stories. Basement levels shall be counted as stories for the purpose of this limit.

16. Exit access doors shall swing in the direction of egress travel at the exterior or interior exit stairway, associated passageway, or vestibule, regardless of the occupant load served. Door swing shall not reduce or encroach into the required stair landing. Landings shall not be reduced by any amount when the door is in any position. Reductions in the minimum required landing dimensions, as allowed per CBC Section 1010.1.5 and CBC Section 1011.6, shall not be permitted.

17. The maximum exit access travel distance, measured in accordance with CBC Section 1017, shall not exceed 125 feet (38.1 m).

18. A corridor complying with CBC Section 1020 or an egress balcony complying with CBC Section 1021 shall separate each dwelling unit entry/exit door from the exit stairway, including any related passageway, on each floor. Corridor and egress balcony walls shall be of not less than 1-hour fire-resistance-rated construction. The egress balcony shall be separated from the interior of the building by walls and opening protectives as required for 1-hour fire-resistance-rated corridors.

19. Dwelling units, elevators, equipment rooms, storage rooms, trash rooms, and other similar rooms or spaces shall not open into the interior exit stairway enclosure.

20. An exterior exit stairway or interior exit stairway shall be provided. The interior exit stairway, including any related passageways, shall be a smokeproof enclosure in compliance with CBC Section 909.20.

21. Electrical receptacles shall be prohibited in an interior exit stairway.

22. Dwelling unit doors are permitted to open onto an exterior exit stairway as long as the dwelling unit doors do not encroach into the stairs and required stairway landings. Reductions in the minimum required landing dimensions, as allowed per CBC Section 1010.1.5 and CBC Section 1011.6, shall not be permitted.

23. Exits shall terminate directly onto a public way that is 15 feet wide minimum or onto an egress court where the width of the egress court is equal to or exceeds the court length and terminates at a public way that is no less than 15 feet wide.

24. The total horizontal travel distance from the edge of the roadway to the farthest unit door (at any level), excluding the vertical rise within a stairway (and associated landings), shall be less than 250 feet.

25. Notwithstanding CBC Section 1031.2, all basement levels and sleeping rooms within any story or basement shall have not fewer than one emergency escape and rescue opening in accordance with CBC Section 1031.

26. The building shall be provided with a sprinkler system in accordance with NFPA-13 as adopted by the California Building Standards Commission and amended by the City of Culver City.

27. A manual fire alarm system and automatic smoke detection system that activates the occupant notification system in accordance with CBC Section 907.5 shall be provided. Smoke detectors shall be located in common spaces outside of dwelling units, including but not limited to gathering areas, laundry rooms, mechanical equipment rooms, storage rooms, interior corridors, interior exit stairway, and passageways.

28. Compliance with these requirements does not exempt Single-exit, Group R-2 occupancy buildings with an occupied floor or roof above the third story from any other applicable requirements of the City of Culver City Fire Code or the State Fire Code.

29. There shall be 20 feet of width in both the front and rear of the building for fire department access and operations, specifically with regard to aerial ladder usage. For purposes of the rear requirement, a public alley, designated egress court, or other approved form of public access may be used to satisfy all or part of the required 20 feet.

SECTION 2. Culver City Municipal Code Section 9.02.040 California Fire Code Adopted by Reference with Local Amendments is amended to add the following:

Section 1006.3.5 is added to Chapter 10 of the 2022 California Building Code and the 2022 California Fire Code to read as follows:

1006.3.5 Single-exit buildings with Group R-2 dwelling units with an occupied floor or roof above the third story. Single-exit, Group R-2 occupancy buildings with an occupied floor or roof above the third story are hereby permitted within the City of Culver City so long as they strictly comply with all of the following in addition to the requirements of this Code, and the CBC where specified, other than CBC Section 1006.3.4 as in effect on June 30, 2025:

1. All dwelling units or accessory dwelling units shall meet the definitions of dwelling units or accessory dwelling units as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025, and no other type of unit shall be permitted within the building.2. Group R-2 occupancies, as defined in CBC Section 310.3, within the building shall be limited to apartment houses. Group R-2.1 and Group R-2.2 occupancies shall not be permitted.

2. The building is not classified as a high-rise building as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025.

3. The floor area of each floor (story or basement) shall not exceed 4,000 net habitable square feet (371.6 m^2).

4. There shall be no more than two single exit stairway conditions on the same property.

5. Single-exit buildings over three stories are not permitted in any High or Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zones.

6. The building shall be of VA (four stories maximum), IVA, IVB, IVC, IIIA, IIA, IB, or IA type of construction.

7. Recycling, waste, and linen chute access shall be located within a separate room and shall not be accessible from the interior stairway. The separate chute access room shall have no horizontal dimension less than five feet (1.53 m) nor be less than 25 square feet (2.32 m^2) in area.

8. Each dwelling unit and each accessory dwelling unit shall be limited to a maximum of six habitable spaces as defined in Chapter 2 of the CBC as in effect on June 30, 2025.

9. An elevator is required for buildings that are five or six stories in height. All stories must be served by the elevator. When an elevator is provided, it shall comply with CBC Section 3002.4A, general stretcher requirements as in effect on June 30, 2025.

10. When an elevator is provided, it shall have a pressurized shaft or pressurized hoistway that at all times must remain pressurized in accordance with CBC Section 909.21 at a minimum positive pressure of 0.10 inch of water (25Pa) and a maximum positive pressure of 0.25 inch of water (67Pa) with respect to all adjacent areas on all floors, or shall open into elevator lobbies constructed to comply with CBC Section 3006.

11. No more than 20 feet (6.10 m) of travel distance to the exit stairway as measured from the entry/exit door of any dwelling unit to the exit stairway door or related passageway door shall be permissible.

12. Other occupancies are permitted in the same building provided they separately comply with all the requirements of this Code. Other occupancies shall not communicate with the Group R occupancy portion of the building and shall be provided with a separate means of egress, distinct from the single-exit serving the Group R-2 occupancy.

Exception: Parking garages accessory to the Group R-2 occupancy are permitted to use the single-exit stairway.

13. Private roof decks up to 150 square feet (13.9 m^2) per unit are permitted at or below the sixth story. The private roof deck must be accessible only through that individual unit. Individual roof decks shall be separated from other private roof decks and any other areas by a minimum 42-inch (1067 mm) tall guardrail or walls.

14. No more than a total of four dwelling units (including accessory dwelling units) shall be permitted on each story or basement level.

15. The building shall not exceed six stories, not more than 5 stories of Group R-2 occupancy are permitted to be served by a single exit stairway. Basement levels shall be counted as stories for the purpose of this limit.

16. Exit access doors shall swing in the direction of egress travel at the exterior or interior exit stairway, associated passageway, or vestibule, regardless of the occupant load served. Door swing shall not reduce or encroach into the required stair landing. Landings shall not be reduced by any amount when the door is in any position. Reductions in the minimum required landing dimensions, as allowed per CBC Section 1010.1.5 and CBC Section 1011.6, shall not be permitted.

17. The maximum exit access travel distance, measured in accordance with CBC Section 1017, shall not exceed 125 feet (38.1 m).

18. A corridor complying with CBC Section 1020 or an egress balcony complying with CBC Section 1021 shall separate each dwelling unit entry/exit door from the exit stairway, including any related passageway, on each floor. Corridor and egress balcony walls shall be of not less than 1-hour fire-resistance-rated construction. The egress balcony shall be separated from the interior of the building by walls and opening protectives as required for 1-hour fire-resistance-rated corridors.

19. Dwelling units, elevators, equipment rooms, storage rooms, trash rooms, and other similar rooms or spaces shall not open into the interior exit stairway enclosure.

20. An exterior exit stairway or interior exit stairway shall be provided. The interior exit stairway, including any related passageways, shall be a smokeproof enclosure in compliance with CBC Section 909.20.

21. Electrical receptacles shall be prohibited in an interior exit stairway.

22. Dwelling unit doors are permitted to open onto an exterior exit stairway as long as the dwelling unit doors do not encroach into the stairs and required stairway landings. Reductions in the minimum required landing dimensions, as allowed per CBC Section 1010.1.5 and CBC Section 1011.6, shall not be permitted.

23. Exits shall terminate directly onto a public way that is 15 feet wide minimum or onto an egress court where the width of the egress court is equal to or exceeds the court length and terminates at a public way that is no less than 15 feet wide.

24. The total horizontal travel distance from the edge of the roadway to the farthest unit door (at any level), excluding the vertical rise within a stairway (and associated landings), shall be less than 250 feet.

25. Notwithstanding CBC Section 1031.2, all basement levels and sleeping rooms within any story or basement shall have not fewer than one emergency escape and rescue opening in accordance with CBC Section 1031.

26. The building shall be provided with a sprinkler system in accordance with NFPA-13 as adopted by the California Building Standards Commission and amended by the City of Culver City.

27. A manual fire alarm system and automatic smoke detection system that activates the occupant notification system in accordance with CBC Section 907.5 shall be provided. Smoke detectors shall be located in common spaces outside of dwelling units, including but not limited to gathering areas, laundry rooms, mechanical equipment rooms, storage rooms, interior corridors, interior exit stairway, and passageways.

28. Compliance with these requirements does not exempt Single-exit, Group R-2 occupancy buildings with an occupied floor or roof above the third story from any other applicable requirements of the City of Culver City Fire Code or the State Fire Code.

29. There shall be 20 feet of width in both the front and rear of the building for fire department access and operations, specifically with regard to aerial ladder usage. For the purposes of the rear requirement, a public alley, designated egress court, or other approved form of public access may be used to satisfy all or part of the required 20 feet.

SECTION 3. DECLARATION OF URGENCY AND OPERATIVE DATE. Based on the findings set forth in the Recitals to this Ordinance, the City Council finds and declares this Ordinance to be necessary for the immediate preservation of the public

health, safety and welfare and upon that basis has determined that an urgency measure, pursuant to Government Code Section 36937(b) and Culver City Charter Section 614, is warranted and shall take effect immediately upon adoption by a four-fifths vote of the City Council. The City Council directs staff to implement this ordinance only if and when either of the following occurs: the State amends the California Building Code and the California Fire Code to make lawful the provisions of this ordinance which allows single-exit, single-stairway buildings of greater than three stories, or the provisions of this ordinance are approved by the California Building Standards Commission.

SECTION 4. SEVERABILITY. If any portion, subsection, sentence, clause, or phrase of this ordinance is for any reason held by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, such a decision shall not affect the validity of the remaining portions of this ordinance. The City Council hereby declares that it would have passed this ordinance and each portion or subsection, sentence, clause and phrase herein, irrespective of the fact that any one or more portions, subsections, sentences, clauses or phrases be declared invalid.

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SECTION 5. PUBLICATION. Pursuant to Sections 616 and 621 of the City Charter, prior to the expiration of fifteen (15) days after the adoption, the City Clerk shall cause this Ordinance, or a summary thereof, to be published in the Culver City News and shall post this Urgency Ordinance or a summary thereof in at least three places within the City.

APPROVED and ADOPTED this 29th day of September, 2025.

DAN O'BRIEN, Mayor
City of Culver City, California

ATTEST:

JEREMY BOCCHINO, City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

for
HEATHER S. BAKER, City Attorney

STATE OF CALIFORNIA)
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES) SS
CITY OF CULVER CITY)

Certification of Urgency Ordinance No. 2025-013

I, Jeremy Bocchino, City Clerk of the City of Culver City, California do hereby certify that the foregoing Urgency Ordinance was duly passed, approved, and adopted at a regular meeting of the City Council which was held on the 29th day of September 2025 at the Mike Balkman Council Chambers by the following vote:

AYES: Fish, McMorrin, Vera, Puza, O'Brien

NOES: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAIN: None

Certified on this 29th day of September 2025, at the City of Culver City.

Jeremy Bocchino

Jeremy Bocchino, CMC, City Clerk
Ex-Officio Clerk of the City Council
City of Culver City, State of California