
AB 835 SINGLE EXIT STAIR WORK GROUP MEETING

Meeting Minutes –Tuesday, October 7, 2025



Crystal Sujeski, CAL FIRE – Office of the State Fire Marshal, Chair
Robert Marshall, Senior Regulatory Engineer - UL Solutions, Deputy Fire Chief - San Mateo (Retired) - Co-Chair (Present)

Work Group Members

Stoyan Bumbalov, Executive Director, Building Standards Commission (Present)
Irina Brauzman (Alternate), Building Standards Commission
Kyle Krause, Deputy Director, Housing Community Development (Present)
Mitchel Baker (Alternate), Assistant Deputy Director, Housing Community Development (Present)
Stephan Smith, Executive Director, Center for Building in North America (Present)
Jeff Maddox (Alternate), The Fire Consultants (Present)
James Dobson, Fire Marshal, California Fire Chiefs (FM Section) (Present)
James Gillespie Fire Marshal (Alternate), California Fire Chiefs (FM Section)
Joe Cavin, Fire Marshal, California Fire Prevention Officers (Present)
Ian Hardage, Fire Marshal (Alternate), California Fire Prevention Officers (Present)
Brian Rice, President, California Professional Firefighters
Melissa McDonald, Executive Assistant (Alternate), California Professional Firefighters
Ed Mendoza, MAP Research Associate, California YIMBY (Present)
Brian Hanlon, CEO (Alternate), California YIMBY
Max Dubler, California YIMBY
Robert Raymer, Consultant, California Building Industry Association
Christopher Ochoa, Senior Council (Alternate), California Building Industry Association
Ali Fattah, Asst Deputy Director, San Diego, Representing California Building Officials (Present)
Matt Wheeler (Alternate), California Building Officials
Faruk Sezer (Alternate), California Building Officials
Tracy Rhine, Senior Policy Advocate, Rural Counties Representatives of California
Patrick Blacklock (Alternate), Rural Counties Representatives of California
Staci Heaton (Alternate), Rural Counties Representatives of California
Jack Smalley, Legislative Advocate, California State Association of Counties
Mark Neuburger, Legislative (Alternate), California State Association of Counties
Travis Tyler, Director, California State University (CSU) (Present)
Mike Major, (Alternate), California State University (CSU)
Stephen Guarino, Director, University of California (UC)
Tracy Staiger, (Alternate), University of California (UC) (Present)

CAL FIRE Staff

Jena Garcia, CAL FIRE – Office of the State Fire Marshal (Present)

1. CALL TO ORDER 8:00 AM

- A. Welcome/Introductions
- B. Roll Call/Quorum Established

Robert Marshall
Robert Marshall

C. Agendas/Minutes Review (Motion Required)

I. Agenda

Motion: Joe Cavin/James Dobson **Action:** Approved

II. Minutes – With Ali Fattah- requested correction to “upcoming meeting date 2024” to 2025.

Motion: Stephen Smith/Ed Mendoza **Action:** Approved

2. OLD BUSINESS

Robert Marshal

A. Timeline – Updates –

- I. Sub group leads met with technical writer from SAC State – Ben Fell.
 - a. James Dobson-Egress video should be completed on 10/10/25 and still photos can be taken from it.
- II. Final Report – Technical writer report schedule
 - a. 1st Draft pending
 - b. 2nd Draft Review Proposed for - October 2025
 - c. 3rd Draft Review – Oct-Nov 2025
 - d. Final (well-rounded) Ready Group discussion - November 2025
 - e. Completed November/December 2025 to present to the State Fire Marshal to be presented to the Legislature in January 2026.

3. NEW BUSINESS

Robert Marshal

A. Subgroups – Report out (new information)

- I. Cost Impact [Lead Stephen Smith] stephen@centerforbuilding.org (No new information to report out)
 - a. Summary - the cost impact report, revealing that the estimated cost for a second stairway in a small multifamily building is around \$230,000. He included a section on elevator costs, explaining that elevators are not mandated in apartment buildings at specific height thresholds per California Building Code. Smith also addressed comments regarding the necessity of elevators in various scenarios, concluding that they are not typically required. And, added a brief, two-paragraph explanation of elevator cost drivers but recommends removing it as it's not central to the report.
 - b. Comments:
 - 1) Steve Digiovanni – Is the stair cost for a entirely separate stair shaft, or is there a stair cost that addresses scissor stairs?
 - i. Stephen Smith-It's entirely separate. We did not consider scissor stairs.
 - ii. Robert Marshal- explained that the elevator discussion was included because someone raised the idea of allowing elevators as an alternative means of egress instead of a second stair, which could become relevant if that's a final recommendation.
 - iii. Greg Rogers– Should this include cost for scissors stair?
 - iv. Stephan Smith-Clarification is provided in the beginning of the report.

- II. Fire Protection (Active/Passive) [Lead Jeff Maddox] jmaddox@thefireconsultants.com (No new information to report out)
- Summary – the Fire Protection subgroup is satisfied with the draft reported previously, which reflects their view that adding a story or two doesn't pose major fire/life safety issues as long as a standard sprinkler system, fire alarm, and construction code requirements are met.
 - Comments: None
- III. Code Comparison [Lead Ali Fattah] AFattah@sandiego.gov (No new information to report out)
- Summary –
 - Two paragraphs were added to the beginning of the report but likely belong toward the end, possibly for the November meeting.
 - Couldn't add them in the comment field due to length, so they appear as tracked changes.
 - The matrix helped identify common priorities among the group, including:
 - A preference for the four-story, single-stair building option.
 - A cap of four dwellings per story and a 4,000 sq ft floor area limit.
 - A travel distance limit from unit doors to the stair, implying need for an intermediate corridor.
 - Requiring emergency escape and rescue openings, especially since IBC is clearer for three-story buildings than four.
 - Ali and Stephen are refining the matrix terminology:
 - Clarifying differences between “No,” “**Not Required (NR),” and “No Limit.”
 - Example: If a code doesn't specify a sprinkler type, it's NR, defaulting to base code requirements.
 - Final work involves cleaning up the matrix and possibly including all relevant features, even if duplicative of existing code, to ensure clarity for single-exit building requirements.
 - Suggested moving toward a recommendation on emergency escape and rescue openings since:
 - The base code relies heavily on tables and footnotes, which many jurisdictions don't modify, instead adding standalone sections.
 - These standalone sections often omit specifics on emergency escape and rescue openings for buildings over three stories.
 - There's an interpretation choice: either follow the table up to three stories and default to code beyond that, or assert no such openings are required for four- to six-story single-exit buildings.
 - Believes the interpretation that no openings are required in these taller buildings is incorrect and that the recommendation should clarify this.
 - Comments: None
- IV. History / Baseline (US) [Lead Stephen Smith] stephen@centerforbuilding.org (No updates to report out)
- V. Egress Analysis [Lead Joe Cavin] joe.cavin@santamonica.gov

- a. Summary- Reported that there's not much new progress since the last meeting. Received some baseline data for the egress analysis but it lacks comparison to two-stair buildings, limiting its usefulness so far. Attempting to schedule a meeting with TERP consulting to review the data but hasn't received a response yet. The egress committee meetings are on hold until they can coordinate, and more updates are expected soon.
- b. Comment:
 - 1) Joseph May – Is the egress analysis comparing single stair versus two stairs in buildings of the same size or the maximum size allowed by code?
 - i. Joe Cavin- Doesn't believe the comparison is for the same size building and is still waiting for TERP to clarify how they're making the comparison.
 - 2) Robert Marshal –Explained that while the number of units is the same, the building size changes slightly when adding a stair, so the buildings aren't exactly the same size but are roughly comparable for an apples-to-apples comparison.
 - 3) Jeff Maddox- What I was expecting to see is some sort of description of, if you have two stairs, how long it takes to get out before the fire department arrives compared to one stair — is that the information TERP is providing?
 - i. Joe Cavin- Yes, that was the intent of what I thought TERP was going to provide, which is why the egress section in the draft is light, pending their data.
 - ii. Jeff Maddox- Are we concerned about egress times and risks in sprinklered vs. non-sprinklered buildings?
 - iii. Robert Marshal- Yes, that's part of the report though not modeled in the egress analysis itself, which doesn't include fire or smoke simulation. And, they examined occupant age (over 55) and holiday overcrowding (Thanksgiving) as practical worst-case situations.
 - 4) Stephen Smith- provided insights on the floor plans for a two-stair building, indicating that the realistic size is about 55,000 square feet per floor, which is significantly larger than the 4,000 square feet typical for single-stair buildings.
 - i. Joe Cavin - acknowledged that the single-stair building example used may not be the worst-case scenario.
 - ii.
 - 5) Tim Koutsouros - raised a question regarding the inclusion of large and small family care facilities in the exit analysis.
 - i. Joe Cavin- confirmed would not be considered. But an elderly scenario is being modeled. No time to add additional models.
 - ii. Tim Koutsouros-Is elevator options for mobility-impaired individuals being considered?
 - iii. Robert Marshal-No, not from the exiting analysis standpoint, but understand that it has been a point of discussion.
 - 6) James Dobson – Conversation has been focused around fire, but was seismic provisions included in discussion.
 - i. Rober Marshal – It was part of the initial discuss with active shooter concerns.
 - 7) Ed Mendoza – If we are applying earthquake provisions, are we considering both stairs being compromised?

- i. Robert Marshal— emphasized that while the egress modeling didn't account for structural collapse or seismic damage, the report should briefly acknowledge these scenarios—such as one stair being damaged or a total building failure (e.g., a "pancake" collapse)—to show the group considered them, even though they don't significantly impact the core analysis or warrant an extended discussion.
- ii. Jeff Maddox- concluded that current building codes provide adequate seismic protection for new buildings, and having one stair instead of two does not significantly impact safety in seismic or active shooter scenarios—so no additional seismic requirements are needed solely due to a reduction in stairs.
- iii. Ali Fattah-Any new building will have seismic provisions. Maybe we should address the need for existing building retrofitting.
- iv. Robert Marshal - noted that early in the group's discussions, the idea of retrofitting older buildings to remove a stair was considered, but it hasn't been revisited since.

VI. FD Capabilities [Lead James Dobson] james.dobson@sanjoseca.gov (No Report)

- a. Summary - Reported that while he hasn't yet addressed the incoming comments, he believes the section accurately reflects the surveyed concerns of fire personnel, particularly around operational needs and equipment dimensions. He highlighted that measurements were taken with fully outfitted personnel to assess space requirements in stairwells, especially near standpipe connections. He also discussed challenges with ladder access due to setbacks, vegetation, and rooftop features like parapets or screening. Although a 100-foot ladder can technically reach a seven-story building under ideal conditions, these obstacles can make access more difficult. Overall, he believes the section effectively captures the practical limitations faced by fire crews.

b. Comments-

- 1) Robert Marshal-Raised concern about security and safety issues related to single-stair apartment buildings, specifically focusing on domestic violence incidents that often involve weapons. Although "active shooter" may not be the precise term, there is worry from law enforcement and organizations like the California Police Chief's Association that these situations are significant and should be addressed in the report. The point is that legislators may ask questions about this issue, so it needs to be acknowledged, even if no immediate action is proposed.
 - i. James Dobson-Agrees.
 - ii. Kyle Klause-Posted in chat that the recommendations will address fire and life safety or emergency activities in single exit single stairway apartment houses. And he correctly points out that emergency activities are not limited to fires.
- 2) Ali Fattah- noted that while LA and Santa Monica are working on single-exit ordinances, LA has not yet made a decision, and Santa Monica's ordinance remains in place. He suggested it's premature to include this in the current report but recommended revisiting it in the next report round as the issue develops.
 - i. Robert Marshal-May be a dead issue due to AB 130 impacts.

- 3) Joseph May- there was one city in the state that did pass a ordinance before the AB 130 deadline and then Santa Monica did sort of a directive to do an AMMR. The one city to look at is Culver City.
 - i. Ed Mendoza-Wanted to confirm that Culver City was able pass a ordinance.
 - ii. Stoyan Bumbalov-BSC clarified that the application with the amendment was received but has not been reviewed. Furthermore, BSC are not the enforcing agency that will check if the ordinances filed meet the criteria in the Health & Safety Code. The ordinance will most likely be filed but may not be able to be enforced.
- 4) James Dobson- provided an update on the upcoming video shoot scheduled for Friday, explaining they aimed to use a six-story building but couldn't find a stairwell that was exactly 36 inches wide—only one closer to 44 inches. The plan includes 20 people per floor to simulate evacuation and capture timing and movement. Due to short notice, coordinating logistics has been challenging, including gathering enough participants. He also noted that using their training center wasn't feasible, as its stairwell is 54 inches wide—too large to realistically represent code-compliant buildings—so they opted for an active building with a more appropriate standpipe and stair configuration.

4. ROUNDTABLE

Robert Marshal

- A. Jena Garcia – Single Exit Stair inbox created and posted. Please funnel all correspondence, public comment, etc. to sesworkgroup@fire.ca.gov
 - I. Greg Roger- Will this inbox remain available outside this timeline?
 - II. Jena Garcia-At this time it is scheduled to be closed December 2025. If there is a need, it may be extended.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

Robert Marshal

- A. Randy O'Connor – Testimony in support of single exit stair reform to improve the housing crisis. Citing research such as a Pew Charitable Trust report, he believes that fire safety is more influenced by features like sprinklers and fire doors than by the number of stairwells. He supports expanding the allowable height of single-stair buildings to six or seven stories, seeing this as a way to make small-lot developments more feasible and diversify housing beyond large apartment blocks.
- B. Joseph May – representing the Los Angeles Housing Production Institute, responded to earlier comments about code comparisons that Ali Fattah brought up the issue of egress window requirements. He noted that this became a major topic during local code discussions in Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Culver City. A key concern is whether to require egress windows in taller buildings where they are typically exempt. He pointed out that ladders used by fire departments often cannot reach beyond three stories, limiting the practical safety benefit of such windows above that height—except on street-facing facades. He also recommended involving architects in the discussion, as mandatory egress windows on non-setback sides could significantly affect building design.
- C. Bryan (DBA) – an architect from San Francisco with testimony in support of the single exit stair reform and shared his perspective as both a professional and a resident of a typical early 20th-century building with outdated but functioning life safety features, such as non-separated stairs and no sprinklers. He emphasized that while such buildings

wouldn't meet current codes, they remain livable and are accepted under grandfathered provisions. Bryan argued that single stair reform could enable more livable, family-sized apartments in dense cities like San Francisco, potentially reducing sprawl into wildfire-prone areas. He urged the committee to adopt a forward-thinking approach, noting that six-story single-stair buildings have already proven safe in other regions.

- D. Annie Fryman –representing the Bay Area organization SPUR, voiced strong support for extending single stairway allowances to 4–6 story buildings, especially in cities like San Francisco with small parcels and many unsprinklered, older buildings. She emphasized that enabling single stair construction could determine whether new, safer housing gets built in these areas. Fryman connected this reform to improving both fire and earthquake safety, noting it aligns with practices in other cities like Seattle, NYC, and Honolulu. She urged the group to support the extension as a key step toward enabling modern, code-compliant housing in urban California. This will improve new construction of buildings compliant with seismic provisions, fire alarms, fire sprinklers, etc. that impact newer, modern, safer structures meeting modern standards.
 - I. Robert Marshal –clarified that all new residential buildings in California are required to have fire sprinklers by code, but retrofitting older buildings with sprinklers depends on local ordinances and varies by city.
 - II. Stephan Smith - argued that requiring two stairways on small lots makes redevelopment unfeasible, meaning older, less safe buildings will remain unless the code is changed to allow single stair designs.
 - III. Annie Fryer- emphasized that although new buildings are required to have sprinklers, the tight site constraints make it nearly impossible to build new projects without more flexibility, especially allowing single stairways—to meet other code and planning requirements.

6. UPCOMING MEETING DATE FOR 2025

Robert Marshal

- A. The first Tuesday of each month starts at 8 AM and ends at 10 AM.
 - I. Next Meeting – November 4, 2025, 8-10 AM PDT
 - II. Sub-group meeting will be conducted in the interim prior to the next main group meeting.
 - III. Members need to advise if they will not be able to attend the meetings and plan to have their designated alternate present so that a quorum is not impacted.

7. MEETING ADJOURNED (Motion Required) 9:10AM

Robert Marshal

Motion: Mitchel Baker/James Dobson Action: Approved

If you would like to watch the recording of this meeting, please visit the link below:

<https://youtu.be/3kU8kn4BMGQ>