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June 6, 2025

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Oakland Mayor Barbara Lee
1 Frank Ogawa Plaza, 3rd Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
officeofthemayor@oaklandca.gov
cc: jdjohnson@oaklandca.gov

RE: RESIGNATION OF CHIEF BUILDING OFFICIAL UNDERSCORES NEED FOR PERMITTING REFORM

Dear Mayor Lee,

As Oakland's only nonprofit organization solely devoted to representing the interest of builders, developers, property owners, architects, and others involved in Oakland real estate, we are writing today for two primary reasons:

- 1) To express serious concern regarding the reasons given by chief building official Lonell Butler for resigning in a publicly circulated letter dated May 13, after less than one year on the job. Mr. Butler is the second building official in succession to resign after a truncated tenure. In summary, Mr. Butler stated that he resigned due to: **(a)** the "lack of support for implementing improvements throughout the Department... especially when it comes to streamlining the development review process and getting businesses, developers and builders through the permit process in a timely manner;" and **(b)** the City's inability to implement a proactive lead poisoning rental inspection program – a top recommendation from the City's Equity Department as part of a lead paint industry settlement that netted the City more than \$4 million in 2021.
- 2) As you and your fellow councilmembers submit 2025-2027 Budget Priorities and Policy Directives, we urge you to focus on doing more to expedite planning and building permits. These permits take longer to process in Oakland than any other East Bay city, and in the case of building permits in particular, are often subject to different interpretations depending on the inspector. There are many ways to address these issues, including (but not limited to) dedicating more staff to processing permits and expanding the Permit Center walk-in hours to include



oaklandbuildersalliance.org



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Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Moreover, the OBA's members were promised an 'ombudsman' with practical knowledge of permitting and code enforcement, whose primary role would be to communicate directly with builders to find solutions and quickly adjudicate code interpretation issues. This has not happened.

Unlike many other city services, planning and building permitting ***directly generate two forms of income for the city:*** (a) permit and development impact fees, and (b) economic development. Given the income-generating nature of planning and building, and their impact on much needed economic development, it is only common sense to give them priority during the current budget crisis. Our mantra at OBA is: ***"permits = city revenue and jobs."***

Related to the items above, we respectfully request that the City identify dates and times in the July City Council schedule to hold hearings on these planning and building matters. Economic development is one of the most meaningful ways for the City to address its budget issues and has a direct positive impact on jobs, housing, public safety and quality parks. Given that planning and building are instrumental to economic development, it is imperative that the City and the builder community quickly engage with each other to find meaningful solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Robert W. Selna", written over a horizontal line.

Robert W. Selna, General Counsel

Oakland Builders Alliance

cc: Joe Ernst, President, Oakland Builders Alliance

cc: James Heilbronner, Vice President, Oakland Builders Alliance