

California aims to speed retail renovations with permitting law

Self-certification will trigger a 20-business-day deadline for local permits



Landlords across California can count on speedier local permits for retail interior renovations like the conversion of a former Sprinkle's bakery in Beverly Hills into a Brooki Bakehouse locations thanks to a new statewide law that allows for self-certification of plans. (CoStar)

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Shopping center owners and retailers across California now have a faster path to wrap renovations as the state takes aim at permitting delays that can leave leased spaces sitting idle.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1693 on Sept. 30, creating a statewide option for retailers to self-certify — or hire qualified architects or engineers to certify — that interior renovation plans meet building, health and safety codes. Beginning Jan. 1, 2027, local building departments must approve or deny complete applications submitted through that process within 20 business days.

Under the current process, retailers submit plans and wait for city or county workers to check them for code compliance before issuing a permit. Allowing a private professional to certify compliance upfront could reduce reliance on that review queue.

“This bill will streamline the process for small mom and pop retailers and others to open and renovate their spaces while ensuring safety and compliance with local laws,” said a statement from Todd Johnson, president and CEO of the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce.

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The California Retailers Association, a bill sponsor, told lawmakers its members reported renovation permit processing averaging about 12 weeks — 31 weeks in some jurisdictions — leaving businesses carrying rent and financing expenses before opening.

Faster approvals would address one expense, but construction remains costly: National shopping center store fit-outs averaged \$157 per square foot in 2026, up 1.4% from a year earlier, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Introduced in February by Assemblymember Rick Chavez Zbur, the measure builds on California’s 2025 restaurant permitting law, AB 671, and applies throughout the state, including charter cities.

The deadline starts after a complete certified application is submitted, rather than when design work begins, and the law retains required construction inspections and audits of at least 20% of certified projects.

The approach has precedents outside California. New York City allows architects and engineers to certify code compliance through a program that bypasses department plan examination, while Chicago offers self-certification for eligible projects. California’s new option also joins existing local efforts to accelerate approvals, including Los Angeles’ same-day review process for certain qualifying improvements, meaning the benefit will depend on the project and the jurisdiction.

“Whether a retailer is updating the layout of a store, renovating an existing space, or preparing a storefront for a new tenant, straightforward interior improvements shouldn’t get stuck in a lengthy permitting process,” Zbur said in the announcement.

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