

Helping to rebuild is our highest priority

Napa Valley Register
David Morrison
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Editor's Note: Morrison submitted this letter in response to a critical letter by Napa resident William Kastner, which is running simultaneously in print and is attached to the online version of this letter.

Helping residents in our community rebuild quickly and safely after the fires is our priority.

In order to achieve this mission, Napa County has cut costs and sped up permit processing so residents can return to their homes as soon as possible. Recovery planning began on the first day of the fires, and the Board of Supervisors and the Planning, Building, and Environmental Services Department continue to work to eliminate obstacles and ease the path for those who lost everything in the disaster.

The Board of Supervisors adopted new policies to allow the owners of fire-damaged properties to re-use previous buildings plans, extend the life of permits, expand provisions for temporary housing, streamline view shed and water system requirements, waive planning site plan review, eliminate some parking and road setbacks, and protect non-conforming uses.

These measures have provided important relief to many landowners who would otherwise have had to comply with inflexible regulations. At the same time, the county is ensuring that streamlining is done carefully to maintain public health and safety, not only of residents returning to their new homes, but those who will call the Napa Valley home in future generations.

The board prioritized the processing of all rebuild permits over other pending applications, and staff is fully committed to helping owners quickly through the permit process.

Over the past 7 months, the PBES Department has issued 650 building permits in areas that burned. Almost 85 percent of these permits were approved on the same day that they were submitted. Another 7 percent were issued within the first week.

The county has already approved 19 building permits to rebuild homes that were destroyed in the fires, with an average processing time of only 35 calendar days, from submittal to issuance.

The board also recently approved fee waivers for landowners rebuilding in fire-damaged areas. Building permit fees will be reduced 30 percent for owners replacing their lost homes and structures. The waiver will be valid until Dec. 31, 2022.

In addition, staff will refund \$365,000 in fee waivers for the over 300 owners who have already obtained building permits. Over the next five years, fee waivers could total more

than \$3 million. This represents a significant investment by the board in rebuilding our future community.

Recently, the county secured more than \$389,000 in funding from the Golden State Finance Authority and Rural County Representatives of California, which will provide grants of up to \$2,500 for each household affected by the fires. For more information, please contact Jennifer Palmer, Project Manager, at jennifer.palmer@countyofnapa.org or (707) 299-1975.

PBES has designated a team of staff to process rebuild applications, so that owners receive consistent responses to their questions and are dealing with staff trained to provide the additional support these customers need.

In addition, staff have attended more than a dozen workshops and community meetings throughout the county, to answer questions and provide resources to people who are interested in rebuilding. We also regularly email updates about the ongoing fire recovery efforts to nearly 600 affected land owners and update the Board of Supervisors weekly on recovery efforts.

Despite all of these efforts, new buildings are subject to a breath-taking range of mandated state requirements, covering everything from water fixtures to driveways and insulation. County staff are required to follow all applicable state regulations when issuing permits.

We will continue to develop alternative solutions that meet all state requirements to meet public health and safety needs, while reflecting the special conditions that make Napa unique wherever possible.

If anyone has questions or concerns about county rebuilding process, please contact me at david.morrison@countyofnapa.org or (707) 253-4805.

The recovery effort is only just beginning. I am proud of our staff and the great job that they have been doing over the past seven months, but there is still much to do. The Board of Supervisors and the PBES Department will continue working tirelessly until all of our neighbors are safely back home again.

David Morrison, Director

Napa County Planning, Building and Environmental Services

https://napavalleyregister.com/opinion/letters/helping-to-rebuild-is-our-highest-priority/article_0c77d890-8041-5e6c-8baf-25da3f05cf04.html