

Adaptive Reuse

POSITION

BOMA/GLA supports adaptive reuse as a practical strategy to revitalize underutilized commercial properties, support housing production, strengthen economic recovery, and preserve the long-term competitiveness of Greater Los Angeles.

As office vacancy rates remain elevated and commercial corridors continue to face economic challenges, adaptive reuse provides an opportunity to return vacant and underperforming buildings to productive use. However, outdated regulations, lengthy approval processes, excessive fees, and seismic retrofit requirements often make these projects financially infeasible.

BOMA/GLA supports policies that modernize regulations, streamline approvals, reduce unnecessary barriers, and encourage investment while maintaining appropriate life safety standards.

Why Adaptive Reuse Matters

Revitalizes Commercial Districts

High office vacancy levels continue to impact Downtown Los Angeles and commercial corridors throughout the region. Adaptive reuse helps restore activity, increase foot traffic, support small businesses, and reactivate underutilized properties.

Produces Housing More Efficiently

Converting existing buildings can deliver housing faster and often at lower cost than ground-up construction while reducing environmental impacts associated with demolition and new construction.

Preserves Existing Buildings and Reduces Waste

Reusing existing structures supports sustainability goals, preserves historic assets, and reduces demolition waste and carbon emissions.

Stabilizes the Tax Base

Long-term vacancy weakens property values and reduces local tax revenue. Adaptive reuse helps maintain productive use of commercial properties and supports long-term fiscal stability.

Current Barriers to Adaptive Reuse

Despite growing interest in adaptive reuse, several barriers continue to prevent projects from moving forward:

- Lengthy and unpredictable entitlement processes
- Rigid zoning and parking requirements
- Density, FAR, and use restrictions
- Development fees that do not align with conversion economics



Position Statement

- Building code provisions designed for new construction rather than conversions
- Seismic retrofit mandates that may create financial infeasibility for existing buildings
- Limited flexibility for projects outside Downtown Los Angeles

Without reform, many adaptive reuse projects remain financially unworkable even when market demand exists.

BOMA/GLA Policy Priorities

Streamline Approvals

BOMA/GLA supports by-right or ministerial approval pathways for adaptive reuse projects that do not significantly expand existing building envelopes. Reducing discretionary reviews and unnecessary hearings can significantly shorten project timelines.

Modernize Zoning and Building Standards

Adaptive reuse projects should not be subject to regulations written for new construction.

BOMA/GLA supports:

- Eliminating parking minimums
- Increasing flexibility for density and FAR requirements
- Allowing mixed-use outcomes where appropriate
- Modernizing fire and life safety standards for conversion projects

Reform Seismic Retrofit Requirements

Seismic safety remains essential but retrofit policies must account for the financial realities of adaptive reuse projects.

BOMA/GLA supports:

- Phased compliance timelines
- Alternative compliance pathways
- Incentives such as grants, tax credits, or fee reductions
- Risk-based retrofit standards
- Consistency between retrofit requirements for adaptive reuse and continued commercial occupancy

A balanced seismic policy should improve safety without unintentionally forcing demolition, prolonged vacancy, or project failure.

Reduce Financial Barriers

Current fee structures often prevent adaptive reuse projects from moving forward.

BOMA/GLA supports:

- Fee deferrals until certificate of occupancy

- Fee reductions for long-vacant properties
- Temporary tax abatements during conversion
- Incentives for voluntary affordable or workforce housing inclusion

Expand Adaptive Reuse Citywide

Adaptive reuse opportunities should extend beyond Downtown Los Angeles and apply across:

- Commercial corridors
- Transit-oriented districts
- Appropriate industrial areas
- Suburban office markets facing long-term vacancy

Conclusion

Adaptive reuse represents one of Los Angeles' strongest opportunities to address housing needs, revitalize commercial districts, reduce vacancy, and support long-term economic recovery. With thoughtful regulatory modernization and balanced safety standards, Los Angeles can encourage investment, preserve existing buildings, strengthen communities, and restore underutilized properties to productive use.

BOMA/GLA is committed to working collaboratively with policymakers and stakeholders to advance practical adaptive reuse policies that support both economic vitality and public benefit.

BACKGROUND

Los Angeles is experiencing historically high office vacancy rates, changing workplace patterns, and increasing pressure on local tax revenues and commercial corridors. At the same time, the region continues to face significant housing and economic development challenges. Adaptive reuse — including the conversion of underutilized commercial buildings into residential, mixed-use, institutional, or other productive uses — presents an important opportunity to help address these issues while revitalizing existing properties and communities.

Adaptive reuse can accelerate housing production, support economic recovery, reduce long-term vacancy, preserve existing buildings, and improve sustainability outcomes by reducing demolition and new construction impacts. However, many projects remain financially infeasible due to outdated zoning standards, lengthy approval processes, excessive fees, and seismic retrofit requirements that do not adequately reflect the realities of existing building conversions.

BOMA/GLA believes regulatory modernization, flexible development standards, and balanced safety requirements are necessary to encourage investment and allow adaptive reuse projects to move forward in a practical and economically viable manner.