



Agenda Report

Fullerton City Council

MEETING DATE: MAY 6, 2025

TO: CITY COUNCIL / SUCCESSOR AGENCY

SUBMITTED BY: ADAM LOESER, FIRE CHIEF

PREPARED BY: JON FUGITT, DEPUTY CHIEF / FIRE MARSHAL

SUBJECT: PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO 2025 FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONES FOR LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY AREAS

SUMMARY

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) published revised Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for Local Responsibility Areas on March 24, 2025. Local jurisdictions must adopt these maps within 120 days, either as published by CAL FIRE or with more stringent local designations.

PROPOSED MOTION

Introduce Ordinance No. XXXX for first reading by title only and waive further reading of the ordinance.

ORDINANCE NO. XXXX - AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA, AMENDING FULLERTON MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTER 13.19 TO INCORPORATE THE 2025 FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONES FOR LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY AREAS, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION AND PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 51178

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- Approve the Proposed Motion
- Other options brought by City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Proposed Motion.

CITY MANAGER REMARKS

These amendments are part of the State of California updated Fire Hazard Severity Zones. There will be impacts to properties that are within the revised Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

PRIORITY POLICY STATEMENT

This item matches the following Priority Policy Statements:

- Public Safety
- Infrastructure and City Assets.

FISCAL IMPACT

Adopting the updated Fire Hazard Severity Zones incurs no direct cost to the City, beyond minimal expenses related to public outreach. However, expanding designated hazard areas would require additional Fire Department resources in the future, particularly for Fire Prevention Division inspection and enforcement capacity. Staff would evaluate these resource needs and report findings to City Council as appropriate. Staff expects compliance with applicable fire hazard mitigation requirements to reduce wildfire risk in designated areas and limit City exposure to related damages and costs over the long-term.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

CAL FIRE, through the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), develops and maintains Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps for areas under local jurisdiction, known as Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs). These maps, required by California Government Code Sections 51175 through 51189, help local governments identify elevated wildfire risk areas and apply appropriate mitigation standards. CAL FIRE develops FHSZ maps using a scientific model incorporating factors such as previous wildfire activity, ember transport potential and vegetation density. The maps provide a long-term wildfire hazard projection over a 30- to 50-year horizon, independent of temporary conditions such as current land use or weather. They also incorporate advanced fire modeling techniques and historical climate data, including regional drought conditions.

CAL FIRE's 2025 update significantly expands upon the last revision from 2011, which had limited LRA hazard zone designations to "Very High." Approximately 4.6 million acres in Southern California have one of three hazard categories: "Moderate" (MFHSZ), "High" (HFHSZ) and "Very High" (VHFHSZ). The updated maps within the City of Fullerton increase the VHFHSZ area by 28% from 1,186 acres to 1,516 acres, which mirrors the 26% increase across the region. The maps newly classify 426 acres as MFHSZ and 419 acres as HFHSZ. The largest expansions concentrate in the West Coyote Hills and East Coyote Hills areas which have significant Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) risks due to flammable vegetation and potential ember cast (airborne burning material that can travel significant distances).

Properties located within HFHSZ and VHFHSZ become subject to state-mandated building requirements. California Building Code Chapter 7A requires fire-resistant building

standards (e.g., ember-proof venting, ignition-resistant materials and multi-pane windows) for new construction or major renovations in these areas. Additionally, homeowners in VHFHSZ must comply with vegetation management and defensible space requirements established under Assembly Bill 38 (2021) and Assembly Bill 3074 (2020). AB 38 requires property sellers complete a Brush Clearance Inspection and provide documentation confirming compliance with home-hardening features prior to closing escrow. AB 3074 establishes an “Ember Resistant Zone” (Zone 0) within five feet of structures, requiring removal of combustible materials such as decorative structures, landscape materials and potted plants. Regulations implementing Zone 0 requirements currently await Board of Forestry adoption by December 31, 2025, pursuant to Governor Newsom’s Executive Order N-18-25.

Adopting the updated FHSZ maps does not directly affect homeowners’ ability to secure insurance coverage. California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara stated insurance providers are not dependent on the maps for insurance rates or underwriting decisions. The maps represent hazard potential based on physical and environmental conditions; however, insurance providers rely on their own proprietary models based on risk, which incorporate factors such as local Fire Department resources, historical claims and other underwriting criteria. Insurers model comprehensive risk, not solely hazard potential. For example, the City’s Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating from the Insurance Services Office (ISO), which heavily reflects Fire Department capabilities, recently declined from Class 2 to Class 3. Improving this ISO rating back to Class 2 could potentially yield more substantial benefits regarding insurance availability and cost for residents than the FHSZ map designations alone.

Fire Department staff would coordinate with other City departments to ensure consistent public messaging regarding the updated FHSZ maps and their implications, particularly concerning insurance, to minimize potential misunderstandings among residents and property buyers. The Fire Department updated the City Fire Hazard Mitigation webpage to include the new FHSZ maps, along with a public comment form for residents to submit feedback or concerns as part of these public outreach efforts. Staff aggregated submitted comments and attached to this report for consideration. In addition, staff sent a direct mail notification to more than 3,900 property owners whose parcels may now fall within a designated Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

Adopting the proposed Ordinance would expand existing City restrictions on the sale and discharge of fireworks. Previously, the City limited fireworks restrictions to FHSZ. The restriction would now extend to all three hazard level areas, including MFHSZ and HFHSZ, to mitigate the potential for wildfire ignition, especially during peak fire-risk periods.

Staff recommends City Council adopt Ordinance No. XXXX, amending Fullerton Municipal Code Chapter 13.19 to incorporate the 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map. The City Attorney reviewed and approved the proposed Ordinance. This action fulfills the City’s legal obligation to adopt the maps by July 22, 2025 (within 120 days of March 24, 2025 publication). The City has authority to designate additional areas beyond those recommended by CAL FIRE but it cannot reduce the severity or scope of CAL FIRE’s hazard designations. The Fire Department has evaluated the updated hazard zones and

concurs with the CAL FIRE recommendations, finding them appropriate for Fullerton's local risk profile without requiring additional designations.

Timely adoption of this ordinance would comply with state law, preserve eligibility for related funding, ensure timely building permit processing and facilitate clear communication with property owners regarding applicable fire safety requirements. The City would take an important step toward ensuring community safety and reducing wildfire risk in vulnerable areas by adopting the maps as published.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 –Draft Ordinance No. XXXX
- Attachment 2 – CAL FIRE Letter of Transmittal, dated March 24, 2025
- Attachment 3 – Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones
- Attachment 4 – Public Submitted Comments

cc: City Manager Eric J. Levitt