



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Fire
Department No.: 031
For Agenda Of: June 3, 2025
Placement: June 3, 2025
Departmental
June 10, 2025
Administrative
Estimated Time: 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Fire District Board of Directors
FROM: Department Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief / Fire Warden
Director(s)
Contact: Fred Tan, Fire Marshal
SUBJECT: **Adoption of Designated Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones (LRA FHSZ) within the Unincorporated Areas of Santa Barbara County**

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form:

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

That the Fire District Board on June 3, 2025:

Consider recommendations regarding the adoption of Designated Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones (LRA FHSZ) within the Unincorporated Areas of Santa Barbara County as follows:

- a) Consider the introduction (First Reading) of an Ordinance of the Fire District Board (Attachment A) designating areas not identified as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones by the State Fire Marshal, as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) boundaries as outlined in the attached maps which align with state requirements, local needs for fire protection services and evacuation considerations; and
- b) Read the title and waive further reading of the Ordinance in full; and
- c) Set a hearing on the Administrative Agenda of June 10, 2025 to consider the adoption (Second Reading) of an Ordinance as follows:

- i) Adopt the Ordinance (Second Reading) designating areas not identified as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones by the State Fire Marshal, as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) boundaries as outlined in the attached maps which align with state requirements, local needs for fire protection services and evacuation considerations; and
- ii) Direct staff to notify relevant agencies (California Board of Forestry) of the adoption of these boundaries pursuant to Government Code Section 51179 after the second reading of the ordinance 30 days after this approved action; and
- iii) Determine that the above action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), because pursuant to section 15378(b)(5) the recommended action consists of organizational, administrative, or fiscal activities of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

On March 10, 2025, fire departments within Santa Barbara County received updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps for Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) from the Office of the State Fire Marshal. These maps were developed by CAL FIRE pursuant to Government Code Section 51178 and reviewed by local fire agencies, fire marshals and planning agencies to meet the requirements of both Government Code Sections 51178 and 51179.

The purpose of this hearing is to brief the Board on the State's process and the subsequent local process to adopt revisions to the maps provided by the State Fire Marshal's office. The maps provided for consideration today, including the proposed map (Attachment B), contain unincorporated areas of LRA within the jurisdiction of the County of Santa Barbara. More detailed maps, the 2025 State Fire Marshal Designated Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map Packet (Attachment C) and the 2025 Santa Barbara County Unincorporated Proposed Amended VHFHSZ LRA Map Packet (Attachment D) are included in this presentation.

In light of the growing challenges posed by wildfires and increasing urbanization, adopting the proposed map by ordinance, with a second reading after 7 days, meets Government Code requirements and is an essential step guiding mitigation efforts, development review and prevention activities within the boundaries of the resulting LRA FHSZ in the unincorporated areas of the County.

Discussion:

County Planning, the Santa Barbara County Fire Department (SBCFD), the Montecito Fire Protection District (MFPD) and the Carpinteria-Summerland Fire Protection District (CSFPD) have utilized the LRA FHSZ map recommended by CAL FIRE in 2008 (Attachment E), and adopted locally, for defensible space inspections, development review and planning for fire mitigation efforts.

On March 10, 2025, the local fire marshals received the revised maps from the State Fire Marshal's office (OSFM). The six fire marshals throughout the County met to discuss the new maps and discuss the next steps, including discussions with the fire chiefs of the County, our respective planning agencies, and the timelines for our agencies to post the maps and any proposed changes to the maps on our respective websites.

A key difference between the development the LRA FHSZ maps between 2007-2011 and the maps delivered by the OSFM was the exclusion of the consideration of areas with limited evacuation routes. That factor; as well as, the exclusion of home density considerations in the development of the maps resulted in the reduction of the overall LRA FHSZ in the unincorporated areas in the jurisdiction of the County, SBCFD, MFPD and CSFPD. Within the 2008 LRA FHSZ maps, the City of Santa Barbara (STB) also had locally adopted fire hazard severity zones no longer designated in the 2025 iterations of the LRA FHSZ maps.

As a result of the reduction in the LRA FHSZ in the 2025 OSFM LRA FHSZ map (Attachment F) in the unincorporated areas of the County, the fire chiefs, fire marshals and their respective planning agencies met to discuss the inclusion of the previously designated areas into the proposed unincorporated LRA FHSZ map (Attachment B). Utilizing our respective CWPPs, our local knowledge of the area and the evacuation challenges, and data from the draft Santa Barbara Foothill Traffic Study (Attachment G), we recognized the areas within the 2008 LRA FHSZ boundary would be challenged with any resulting evacuation. Figure 1 is an excerpt from the Santa Barbara Foothill Traffic Study which indicates extended evacuation times for the Mission Canyon and Foothill Road communities with different fire ignition areas and times of day. As these times did not take into consideration areas and cities adjacent to the study area, actual evacuation times would likely be longer as more vehicles from these adjacent neighborhoods would be evacuating ahead the residents within the plan area. Per Government Code 51182, the traffic study and the draft Countywide Evacuation Study provide substantial evidence that the density and limited evacuation routes in these areas pose a significant risk to the public and first responders. Additionally, these characteristics hinder fire protection during large scale wildland fire events. Due to these findings, the local fire marshals and fire chiefs agree that by designating the areas within the proposed map as Very High Fire Hazard Severity, County Fire can properly mitigate risk through defensible space, adequate access, and addressing future housing density. These factors can increase safety during an evacuation in an area where evacuations are challenging for local residents.

Screenlines with Greatest Expected Traffic	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Scenario 6
Mission Canyon Road (southbound) <i>Between Foothill Road and Alameda Padre Serra</i>	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	<1 hour	1-2 hours	3-4 hours	4-5 hours
Foothill Road (westbound) <i>Between southern and northern legs of Mission Canyon Road</i>	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	<1 hour	<1 hour	2-3 hours	3-4 hours
Mission Canyon Road (southbound) <i>Between Tunnel Road and Foothill Road</i>	1-2 hours	1-2 hours	<1 hour	<1 hour	1-2 hours	1-2 hours
Foothill Road (westbound) <i>Between Mission Canyon Road and Mountain Drive</i>	<1 hour	<1 hour	<1 hour	<1 hour	1-2 hours	1-2 hours

Figure 1: Estimated Time to Clear During an Evacuation Event

With minor modifications, SBCFD, MFPD, CSFPD and STB posted the original OSFM maps and the proposed revisions to the OSFM maps on our respective websites and provided opportunities for comments in line with Government Codes 51178 and 51179. To date the fire agencies have only received “2 to 3” comments per agency and have been able to address community concerns.

Background:

State Process and Considerations:

In 2007, CAL FIRE updated the Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) for the entire State Responsibility Areas (SRAs) as a result of fires experienced during that time period, primarily the Cedar Fire in 2003 and the Witch Fire in 2007. Between 2008-2011 CAL FIRE worked with local governments to make recommendations for the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) as a result of destructive fires in local jurisdictions, including the 1991 Oakland Hills Fire.

While the State updated and adopted the FHSZ maps in the State Responsibility Areas (SRA) in 2024, development for the LRA FHSZ maps were underway. On March 10, 2025, the fire agencies in Santa Barbara County received the updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps from the State Fire Marshal’s Office. These maps were developed pursuant to Government Code Section 51178, which mandates the identification and classification of areas in California based on their relative fire hazard severity.

The Government Codes do not limit or restrict the fire districts' and/or agencies' authority to impose more restrictive fire and public safety requirements, as otherwise authorized by law.

It is important to remember that these maps measure hazard and not risk. Insurance companies determine fire risk scores with direction from Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara for the insurance agencies to accurately assess risk to set premiums for their customers.

- Fire “hazard” is based on physical conditions that create a likelihood and expected fire behavior over a 30- to 50-year period without considering mitigation measures such as home hardening, recent wildfires, or fuel reduction.
- Fire “risk” is the potential damage a fire can do to the area under existing conditions, accounting for any modifications such as fuel reduction projects, defensible space, and ignition-resistant building construction.

Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps, created by the State, were developed using models that assess factors such as vegetation, topography, fire history and weather patterns that contribute to fire behavior. These maps are instrumental in guiding fire prevention strategies, applying for grants, application of building standards, application of defensible space requirements, application of fire safe regulations and; ultimately, and ensuring the safety of residents in high-hazard areas.

To access an interactive webmap, visit: <https://sbcmgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Style/index.html?appid=2f1213412d54470c88721daa2a43daf0>

CEQA Compliance:

The adoption of the ordinance and the proposed maps are exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5). Adoption of the ordinance and the proposed maps are organizational and administrative activities which will not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no fiscal and facilities impacts.

Staffing Impacts:

There are no staffing impacts.

Special Instructions:

The Clerk of the Board shall publish the Ordinance in a publication regularly published once a week in the county within 15 days after the passage, per Government Code 25124(a).

Attachments:

Attachment A - Proposed Ordinance

Attachment B - Proposed Unincorporated LRA Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map – SB County (Exhibit B in Ordinance)

Attachment C - 2025 State Fire Marshal Designated Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map Packet

Attachment D - 2025 Santa Barbara County Unincorporated Proposed Amended VHFHSZ LRA Map Packet

Attachment E - 2008 LRA FHSZ Adopted Map

Attachment F – 2025 OFSM LRA FHSZ SB County Unincorporated Map (Exhibit A in Ordinance)

Attachment G - Santa Barbara Foothill Transportation Study

Attachment H - PowerPoint Presentation

Contact Information:

Fred Tan, Fire Marshal
ftan@countyofsb.org