



# AGENDA REPORT


**TO:** Jestin D. Johnson  
City Administrator

**FROM:** Damon Covington  
Fire Chief

**SUBJECT:** Ordinance to Designate City of  
Oakland Fire Hazard Severity Zone

**DATE:** April 29, 2025

City Administrator Approval

  
Jestin Johnson (May 15, 2025 15:42 PDT)

Date: **May 15, 2025**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**Staff Recommends The City Council Adopt An Ordinance to Designate The City of Oakland Fire Hazard Severity Zone**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Adoption of the proposed ordinance will result in the enactment of the fire hazard severity zone for the City of Oakland. Based on Oakland's recent fire mitigation efforts that are coordinated around areas previously designated as the wildfire prevention zone, including the area recently mapped as part of Measure MM, City staff recommends designating all portions of the wildfire prevention zone as the City of Oakland Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

On Monday, February 24, 2025, the State Fire Marshal released maps for the Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones. State government code requires the State Fire Marshal to make recommendations of fire hazard severity zones to local municipalities for their designation and adoption by ordinance. Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps were developed in response to major destructive fires, prompting the recognition of these areas and strategies to reduce wildfire risks. The legislative response led to mandated mapping across California under the California Public Resources Code 4201-4204, encompassing all State Responsibility Areas (SRA) and Local Responsibility Areas (LRA).

See the revised map of LRAs for the city of Oakland, as identified by the State Fire Marshall, [here](#).

The State Fire Marshal is mandated to classify lands within SRAs and LRAs into Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ). Fire Hazard Severity Zones fall into one of the following classifications:

- Moderate
- High

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- Very High

As part of this process, the City of Oakland is required to provide an online public comment period within 30 days of the map's release, and within 120 days, the City Council is required to adopt the ordinance approving the map designations.

## **ANALYSIS/POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

Since 1923, more than a dozen major wildfires have impacted the Oakland Hills, resulting in extensive damage, economic harm, and loss of life. The City of Oakland 2021-2026 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies large historic wildfires being recorded in the Bay Area in 1961, 1962, 1965, 1970, 1981, 1985, 1988, and 1991. Most notably, high winds, steep terrain, and heavy fuel load contributed to the 1991 Oakland/Berkeley firestorm, which burned over 1,500 acres, destroyed more than 3,000 homes, caused the deaths of 25 people, and injured over 150 people.

Designating a City of Oakland Fire Hazard Severity Zone is an acknowledgement of an inherent hazard within the city limits and is in alignment with the following citywide priorities: Holistic Community Safety; Responsive, Trustworthy Government; and is also consistent with the citywide priority to ensure all city departments have a role to play in preventing, preparing for, and responding to wildfires.

The series of recent historic wildfires throughout California and the Western United States demonstrates that the impacts of global climate change will continue to have potentially devastating local effects throughout the region, including habitat destruction, loss of life, economic impacts, infrastructural damage, and public health hazards associated with air quality.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection ("CAL FIRE") first published fire hazard severity zone maps for state responsibility areas ("SRA") – those areas where the State has financial responsibility for wildland fire protection and prevention – in 1985.

Fire Hazard Severity Zones are mapped and identified based on expected burn probabilities, potential fuels over a 30- to 50-year time period, and their correlated expected fire behavior, in order to better predict possible vegetation fire exposure to buildings and developments.

CAL FIRE finalized its statewide fire hazard severity model to include very high fire hazard severity zones in the LRA in 2007, which showed significant portions of the Oakland Hills—approximately 10,800 acres of land—to be designated as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone; and

The Oakland Fire Department ("OFD"), the agency responsible for fire protection within the City's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, has been actively managing vegetation on City-owned property since 2003 to minimize wildfire hazard, utilizing various techniques, including goat grazing, hand crews, and limited mechanical treatments.

In 2019, the City Council of the City of Oakland (“City”) passed [Resolution No. 87940 C.M.S.](#), which prioritized wildfire prevention in the City, and the City Administrator established an interdepartmental Wildfire Prevention Working Group to ensure all City departments prioritize these efforts.

California law requires cities to adopt Cal Fire's Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps. While cities cannot downgrade the hazard levels, they can increase them if justified by local conditions.

### ***Amendment to the Safety Element of the General Plan***

In October 2023, the City of Oakland adopted an amended Safety Element to the Oakland General Plan, which identified the goal of proactively preventing urban fires and exposure to wildfires, protecting community members and property from fire danger. The Safety Element further concluded that the City should continue to enforce the Oakland Fire Code to require building owners in high-risk areas to maintain defensible space and implement fire prevention measures.

### ***Adoption of the 10 Year Vegetation Management Plan***

In May 2024, the [City Council approved a comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan \(“2024 VMP”\)](#), that describes the actions that OFD will take over a 10-year plan timeframe to reduce fire hazards on approximately nineteen hundred and twenty-four (1,924) acres of City-owned land and along three hundred and eight (308) miles of roadway in the area defined as the Wildfire Prevention Zone;

The 2024 VMP identifies the Oakland Hills as one of the highest risk areas in the country for devastating wildland urban interface fires that present a significant risk to public and firefighter safety and built and natural environment and concluded that the fire hazard conditions present in the area necessitated a proactive hazard mitigation approach.

In the November 2024 election, City of Oakland voters owning property within the Wildfire Prevention Zone enacted Measure MM, levying a special tax for 20 years in the Wildfire Prevention Zone to prevent wildfires by implementing City of Oakland prevention plans, including vegetation management, evacuation route protection, annual inspections, enhanced fire patrols during high danger periods, goat grazing, and public education; and

### ***State Fire Marshal Maps***

On Monday, February 24, 2025, the State Fire Marshal released maps for the Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones. See the revised map of LRAs for the city of Oakland, as identified by the State Fire Marshall, [here](#).

State government code requires the State Fire Marshal to make recommendations of fire hazard severity zones to local municipalities for their designation and adoption by ordinance. Fire

Hazard Severity Zone maps were developed in response to major destructive fires, prompting the recognition of these areas and strategies to reduce wildfire risks.

The State Fire Marshal map proposes to remove large portions of the Oakland Hills that are currently designated as Very Fire Hazard Severity Zone, such that those areas would either be located within moderate and high severity zones or would not be labeled with any severity zone designation.

Staff from the City of Oakland met with the State Fire Marshal on two occasions since the maps were released. The way Cal Fire developed and published the new map did not allow for cities to challenge or edit them; only allowing for cities to expand the area legislatively based on local indicators and conditions.

The City did not agree with the decision by Cal Fire to reduce the land area in Oakland. By adopting our own map, the City is demonstrating and protecting its long-standing interest in proactive prevention efforts in neighborhoods known to be at greatest risk because of a multitude of hazards.

Although the Oakland Fire Department will maintain its robust annual fire prevention program, the potential unintended consequence of this new map from the state could lead to confusion about the role and responsibility of residents in these areas. Additionally, the revised state map would restrict the city's Planning and Building Department's ability to prevent larger housing development and other high density type projects from being proposed in this high-risk geographical area.

### ***OFD Recommendation***

In recent years, the City, including through City Council action, has consistently identified the Wildfire Prevention Zone as presenting significant fire hazards within the City. This includes the adoption of the Vegetation Management Plan, the 2021-2026 Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, the City of Oakland Safety Element, and the adoption of Measure MM. The boundaries of the Wildfire Prevention Zone are shown in the map included in **Exhibit A**, and as further described in **Exhibit B**. These areas present a substantial fire risk such that the requirements of Government Code Section 51182 are necessary for effective fire protection.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Major wildfires have significant economic impacts, including property damage, lost income, and disruptions to businesses and supply chains. These impacts can extend beyond the immediate area affected, affecting regional and even national economies. The Oakland firestorm of 1991 caused significant economic losses, estimated at \$1.5 billion in 1991 dollars, which is equivalent to \$2.99 billion in 2024 dollars. Adopting a Fire Hazard Severity Zone by which the city has will

ensure that city departments have a framework to adequately budget human and physical resources to mitigate hazards and risk, and will allow for a clearly defined geographical area to reference when applying for grants and other local, state, and federal funding allocations.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST**

As part of this process, the City of Oakland was required to provide an online public comment period within 30 days of the map's release, and within 120 days, the City Council is required to adopt the ordinance approving the map designations. The Fire Prevention Bureau received two inquiries from residents on whether their homes fell inside of the new state map boundary but did not receive any comments, positive or negative, on the proposed state map itself.

### **View the Fire Severity Zone maps**

For more information: <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/fire-hazard-severity-zones>

### **Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps**

- [Fire Hazard Severity Zone Viewer](#)
- [Oakland Map](#)
- [Questions and Answers](#)
- [Local Responsibility Area - Legislation Factsheet](#)

## **COORDINATION**

The Planning and Building Department, City Administrator's Office, and the City Attorney's Office were consulted in the preparation of this report. The Working Group met twice on this topic and had a special meeting with the State Fire Marshal to gain further clarity on this matter.

## **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

**Economic:** As noted in the Fiscal Impact section, major wildfires have significant economic impacts, including property damage, lost income, and disruptions to businesses and supply chains. These impacts can extend beyond the immediate area affected, affecting regional and even national economies. The Oakland firestorm of 1991 caused significant economic losses, estimated at \$1.5 billion in 1991 dollars, which is equivalent to \$2.99 billion in 2024 dollars.

**Environmental:** Wildfires have significant environmental impacts, including altering vegetation, impacting wildlife habitats, degrading water and air quality, and contributing to climate change. They can also lead to long-term changes in ecosystems, such as reduced biodiversity and increased risk of invasive species. Failure to prevent them would be at the city's peril.

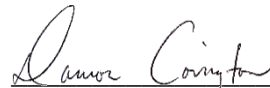
***Race and Equity:*** Race and equity considerations are crucial in fire prevention because certain racial and ethnic groups face disproportionate risks of fire-related deaths and injuries. Addressing these disparities through targeted fire prevention efforts, building code criteria, emergency management planning, and community engagement can ensure equitable fire safety outcomes.

**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt An Ordinance to Designate City of Oakland Fire Hazard Severity Zone

For questions regarding this report, please contact Fire Marshal Felicia Bryant, Fire Department, at [Fbryant@oaklandca.gov](mailto:Fbryant@oaklandca.gov)

Respectfully submitted,



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