



AGENDA REPORT

TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Damon Covington
Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Amendments to the Oakland
Fire Code

DATE: November 19, 2025

City Administrator Approval 
Betsy Lake (Dec 4, 2025 16:46:58 PST)

Date: 12/04/2025

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt An Emergency Ordinance: (1) Repealing Current Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 15.12, “The Oakland Fire Code”; (2) Adopting And Making Local Amendments To The 2025 Edition Of The California Model Building Code, California Code Of Regulations Title 24, Part 9 (Also Referred To As The “California Fire Code”); (3) Recodifying Said Code As Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 15.12, “The Oakland Fire Code”; And (4) Adopting California Environmental Quality Act Exemption Findings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, staff proposed the adoption of [Appendix D of the California Fire Code](#) into the City of Oakland Fire Code. This proposal followed an ordinance ([Number 13720](#)) adopted in December of 2022, based upon requirements in the California Health and Safety Code. Although the adoption of Appendix D is voluntary and is applicable primarily for roadways, buildings, and facilities hereafter constructed, it contains language which reinforces the importance of road widths of 26' for buildings that are over 30' tall. This height has been a long existing standard for Fire Department apparatus needs pertaining to firefighting and rescue operations. Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) and the Oakland Fire Department (Suppression and Fire Prevention Bureau) have continued their ongoing collaboration pertaining to roadway design and public safety.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The California Health and Safety Code allows cities and counties to adopt local amendments to the triennial editions of the California Building Standards Code, Part 9 (Fire). Amendments may be administrative, and non-administrative, such as the adoption of special standards in the Oakland Hills Fire Hazard Zones. Non-administrative amendments must be no less restrictive than statewide regulations and must be supported by findings based on local climactic, geologic, topographic, or geographic conditions. The amending Ordinance and Resolution of

findings must be adopted by the City Council and received by the State Building Commission in Sacramento.

On October 27, Assistant Fire Marshal (AFM) Javan Smith met with the City's Bicyclist and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) regarding Appendix D and portions of Chapter 5 of the California Fire Code. AFM Smith met with the BPAC again on November 20, 2025.

Since January 2023 to the present, OakDOT and FPB staff have continued to collaborate on multiple projects throughout the city. OakDOT has joined the OFD suppression staff for multiple field visits to witness firsthand the apparatus placement and operations, and any associated concerns of the sworn members who operate the fire engines and trucks on the streets affected by proposed design alterations. Additionally, OakDOT and FPB staff meet bi-weekly to discuss proposed design solutions for safer city streets and roadways, while incorporating design alternatives and concerns communicated by the suppression and FPB staff.

ANALYSIS/POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The Oakland Fire Department is now classified as and firmly operates as a Class 1 fire department. Given the unique topography, advanced age of the structures throughout our community, and the existence of high rise buildings, rail transportation (below and above ground), Wildland-Urban Interface and Wildfire Prevention Zones, one of the largest Maritime Cargo Ports in the United States, a Metropolitan International Airport and more, our members must arrive rapidly and with sufficient personnel and resources to save lives and reduce potential property and environmental damage. OFD responded to over 77,000 calls for service in 2024. To provide for sufficient firefighting, rescue, and emergency medical services, it is imperative that OFD suppression and contracted ambulance services can arrive and operate in an expedited manner, where mere seconds can make all the difference in achieving successful and life-saving actions.

Adoption of this ordinance aligns with each of the four citywide priorities: holistic community safety; housing, economic, and cultural security; vibrant, sustainable infrastructure; and responsive, trustworthy government.

The City of Oakland has various geographical, climactic, geological, and topographical conditions that, by their existence, create substantial challenges for timely response to any type of emergency in our city. The OFD has concluded that the recommended code amendments from the 2025 CFC are warranted in part because of the reasons stated above, and those below:

- **Seismic Hazards:** The City of Oakland is susceptible to multiple major earthquake faults, including the North Hayward, Rodgers Creek, and San Andreas Faults, with the Hayward fault being a significant concern given its longitudinal direction and the vulnerable areas of our community that will likely be impacted in the occurrence of a high magnitude earthquake. Other potential effects include significant power disruption, water

supply and distribution breaks, and transportation corridor collapses involving bridges, tunnels, freeways, overpasses, underpasses, streets, roads, and main thoroughfares.

- **Highway Infrastructure:** The City of Oakland connects several highways, including Interstates 80, 580, 880, 980, and highways 13 and 24. Interstate 80 and 880 are designated by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) as transportation corridors for extremely hazardous, highly toxic, and flammable gases and radioactive materials. Oakland has experienced overturned flammable fuel trucks on the 80/580/880 interchange and the Highway 880 corridor in the past. The volume of a containerized vehicle requires multiple resources and, for extended operational periods, to safely mitigate the hazards involved. The potential for future incidents is probable, and the ability of sufficient response apparatus, personnel, and equipment to arrive quickly and conduct evacuations, fire suppression, medical care, and overall response, protective and recovery efforts is critical to prevent loss of life, mass casualty injuries, property damage, and/or environmental destruction. Current traffic conditions during early morning, mid-afternoon, and early evening commutes create serious back-ups and delays for traffic off-ramps and on-ramps. This hinders emergency response times and sometimes leads to the use of different travel routes, which extends the total response time of emergency personnel.
- **Topographical Challenges:** The City of Oakland has a wide range of terrain that contributes to service delivery challenges, especially fire protection and evacuations. The Oakland hills consist of narrow, winding roads that present challenges for larger vehicles such as waste pick-up and delivery trucks. However, those same challenges present even greater obstacles for aerial ladder trucks and vehicles that are responding for medical emergencies, structure fires, or wildland-urban interface incidents. Emergency First Responder access can be hampered by residents using the same streets and roads for egress in a wildfire. The access and egress are further complicated by the many narrow roads and roadway obstacles (such as parked vehicles) and fuel load (vegetation) conditions. Fire Engines can have trouble securing a water supply and achieving delivery in some areas if there is an earthquake affecting the pump or water distribution systems, as an example. The topography described above is a significant portion of the City of Oakland, and due to its built-out status, requires further attention to mitigate the challenges posed.
- **Climactic Conditions:** The City of Oakland experiences weather patterns that range from windy, foggy, rainy, hot, and dry depending on the season. During the summer and fall months, dry, hot winds known as the Foehn or Diablo Winds can lead to significant increases in temperature and decreases in humidity. Occasional extreme fire weather forecasts and conditions have resulted in wildfires that have caused significant wildfire risks and destruction. Adopting code requirements that can reduce or prevent substantial damage from a rapidly spreading wildfire (i.e., by preventing ignition or via the activation of a fire protection system such as indoor or outdoor sprinkler systems, planting fire-smart vegetation, and home hardening measures) has become imperative as drier conditions persist due to droughts, climate patterns, and intense wind conditions. These conditions are especially concerning due to the existence of our

Wildfire Prevention Zones and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones spreading through a substantial portion of the City. Fires starting in adjacent communities can pose immense risks to the City of Oakland, causing poor air quality in the same manner as those wildland fires which originate in the City of Oakland. Fires in similarly situated communities in our State have been devastated by the rapid acceleration, intensity, and rate of fire spread and growth that have quickly overwhelmed responding emergency personnel and resources.

The Oakland Fire Department supports the local amendments to the 2025 California Fire Code as being essential to effectively mitigate any event that results from or are affected by local climactic, geographical, topographical, or geological conditions experienced in the City of Oakland.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are no fiscal impacts associated with the adoption of this ordinance. This is an administrative action mandated by State law.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST

Staff provided the BPAC with a discussion about the Fire Code amendments at its meeting held on October 27 and a second meeting on November 20, 2025. OFD and OakDOT staff have periodically met with representatives of the BPAC since June 2023.

COORDINATION

The office of the City Attorney, City Administrator, OakDOT, and Building and Planning were participants in discussions related to the development and recommendations in this report.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: The amendments to the California Building Standards Code, Part 9 (Fire) provide for improving the overall safety of the community, employees and visitors. Plan review of street designs, inspections of impacted roadways and properties, are activities that serve to ensure life safety and the maintenance of property in a safe manner. The measures recommended can improve the overall safety of the City of Oakland making it more attractive to new residents, businesses and visitors.

Environmental: The amendments to the California Building Standards Code, Part 9 (Fire) provide for the protection of residents, pedestrians, property, and the environment. These amendments consider roadways for emergency response, safe road widths, pedestrian walkways, and bicycle lanes to increase civilian safety considerations and measures. The

requirements that are specific to fire road width were designed for public safety, property preservation, and environmental conservation.

Race and Equity: The life safety provisions for new and existing buildings in the proposed Code adoption provide for fire safety improvements and maintenance, which promote socio-economic sustainability through the provision of fire safe housing for City of Oakland residents.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt An Emergency Ordinance: (1) Repealing Current Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 15.12, “The Oakland Fire Code”; (2) Adopting And Making Local Amendments To The 2025 Edition Of The California Model Building Code, California Code Of Regulations Title 24, Part 9 (Also Referred To As The “California Fire Code”); (3) Recodifying Said Code As Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 15.12, “The Oakland Fire Code”; And (4) Adopting California Environmental Quality Act Exemption Findings

For questions regarding this report, please contact Darin White, Interim Fire Marshal, Oakland Fire Department, at (510) 238-6559.

Respectfully submitted,



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