

TOWN OF WINDSOR AGENDA REPORT

Joint Windsor Town Council, Windsor Redevelopment Successor Agency and Windsor Water District Meeting Date: May 21, 2025

To: Mayor and Town Council
From: Kim Jordan, Planner III
Subject: Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map

Recommendation to Council:

Introduce and hold first reading, by title only, an ordinance designating fire hazard severity zones, amending Town of Windsor Municipal Code Title VII - Building and Housing, and adding Municipal Code Title VII, Chapter 7 - Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps.

Strategic Plan Element:

The recommended action supports the goal of Livability. Goal Statement: Preserve community character by maximizing the use of existing amenities and creating future opportunities that enhance quality of life for all.

Background:

On February 24, 2025, the Office of the State Fire Marshal released the Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) Maps for local responsibility areas (LRAs), which are areas where the primary responsibility for wildfire protection and emergency response are provided by a local agency, such as a city, town or county. The FHSZ Map from the State Fire Marshal ("FHSZ Map") for the Town of Windsor is included as Attachment 2. Although fire services within Windsor are provided by the Sonoma County Fire District (SCFD), the Town is the agency responsible for adopting the Town of Windsor FHSZ Map.

The FHSZ Maps were developed using a science-based and field-tested model that assigns a hazard score based on the factors that influence fire likelihood and behavior, including fire history, existing and potential natural vegetation (fuel), slope, predicted flame length, blowing embers (embercast), terrain and typical fire weather for an area. The model does not take into account measures such as home hardening or fuel reduction. The fire severity zones are divided into three categories – moderate, high, and very high. The FHSZ Map identifies certain areas at the north and west edges of the Town as a moderate fire severity zone. The northeastern area of Windsor (Foothill Regional Park area) is designated as high and moderate fire severity zones. No areas are designated as very high fire severity. Most of the areas surrounding the Town's north and west boundaries are designated as a moderate fire severity zone.

Government Code Chapter 6.8 (Moderate, high, and Very High Fire Severity Zones) establishes the requirements for fire hazard severity zones, including the review and adoption of the FHSZ Map from the State Fire Marshal. Within 30 days of the release of the FHSZ Map, the Town was required to make the FHSZ Map available for public review and comment. On March 24, 2025, information, including how to review and comment on the FHSZ Map, was made available to the public on the Town's website: <https://www.townofwindsor.ca.gov/1585/Fire-Hazard-Severity-Zones-Map>. The availability of the FHSZ Map was also posted on the Town's social media platforms, through press releases, and in the

Town's *Insider* newsletter. Subsequent posts to the Town's social media platforms occurred on April 10 and 17, 2025. The correspondence received is included as Attachment 3.

The Town is required to adopt the FHSZ Map by ordinance within 120 days of the date the FHSZ Map was released. Therefore, the Town Council must adopt the FHSZ Map no later than June 18, 2025. The FHSZ Map may be adopted with no changes or may be amended to increase the level of fire hazard severity. The level of fire hazard severity may not be decreased. A copy of the adopted ordinance and FHSZ Map is required to be sent to the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection within 30 days of adoption.

The Town's Building Code designates all areas within the Town as a moderate fire severity zone. This designation requires new construction to use exterior materials and construction methods that are ignition resistant. The Town took this action in response to the 2017 Tubbs and Nuns fires. These wildfires spread to urban areas via wind driven embers, which ignited structures and created spot fires. In order to make the Town more resistant to the spread of wildfire as occurred with these fires, the Fire Marshal and Building Official recommended that additional wildfire mitigation actions be included in the Town's 2018 Hazard Mitigation Plan. In June 2019, the Town Council adopted the recommended mitigation actions, which included recommendations to make structures more resistant to ignition. In order to implement the mitigation actions, the Town's 2019 Building Code designated the Town as a moderate fire hazard severity zone and required fire resistant building design and materials for new construction and additions. These measures are also included in the Town's current Building Code (2022 Building Code).

Discussion:

The General Plan Health and Safety Element (August 2023) describes Windsor as having factors that can contribute to the spread of wildfire, including vegetation, wind, temperature, slope, riparian creek corridors, surrounding wildland and oak woodland areas, and being susceptible to wind driven embers that can be carried miles from a wildfire creating spot fires. Wind driven embers are identified as one of the greatest fire risks to the Town and research shows home loss is primarily driven by two factors: 1) embers, which cause 80% of wildland home ignitions since many elements of homes are highly vulnerable to embers; and 2) vegetative fuels within 100 feet of structures. Research shows that these factors can be mitigated by requiring the use of ignition resistant materials and construction methods that harden structures and creating defensible space around structures, through the appropriate location and selection of plant and landscape materials. The Health and Safety Element includes the following relevant policies:

PHS-4.1 Fire Protection Design for New Development. New development adjacent to heavily grassed and semi-arid hillsides shall be designed to minimize fire hazards to life and property, including the use of fire preventive site design (i.e., defensible space), landscaping and building materials, and fire suppression techniques.

PHS-4.6 Project Review for Proposals in Fire Hazard Areas. The Town shall require that fire hazards be identified during project review by comparing the project site against the fire hazard maps prepared by Cal Fire. Project sites that lie within the moderate, high, or very high Fire Hazard Severity Zones or in the wildland-urban interface areas shall be subject to design modifications and conditions to minimize potential exposure to wildland fire and to allow adequate response, including rapid access by emergency responders and sufficient capacity for evacuation.

The Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan (October 13, 2021) (HMP) ranks wildfire as a "High" risk to the

Town. The risk level is based on the potential impacts on people, property, and the economy. The HMP includes the following mitigation measures that are intended to reduce the impact of wildfire:

Action WIN-3—Integrate the hazard mitigation plan into other plans, ordinances and programs that dictate land use decisions within the community including the General Plan, Building Code, Zoning Ordinance, Municipal Code, Emergency Operations Plan, Climate Adaptation Plan., Riparian Corridor Wildfire Fuel Management Plan, etc.

Action WIN-8—Implement plans and ordinances that include measures that avoid or reduce the impacts of hazards and increase resiliency, such as the 2040 General Plan, Municipal Code, Building Code, Riparian Corridor Wildfire Fuel Management Plan, Storm Drain Master Plan, Water Master Plan, Ground Water Sustainability Plan, Windsor Resiliency Plan (Windsor Ready), Urban Water Management Plan, Collection System Master Plan.

The Fire Marshal and Town staff, including the Building Official, reviewed the FHSZ Map, the Town's Building Code, General Plan, and HMP to determine whether the FHSZ Map should be amended.

Based on past wildfires, the policies and mitigation actions adopted by the Town, and to reduce the potential for the spread of wildfire, the determination was made to recommend that the Town Council adopt an amended FHSZ Map that would identify areas within the Town not designated as moderate or high on the FHSZ Map as moderate. This amendment retains the existing fire hazard severity zone designation and building code requirements included in the Town's Building Code. In order to incorporate the FHSZ Map into the Town's Municipal Code, amendments to Title VII (Building and Housing) of the Municipal Code are also recommended (Attachment 1, Draft Ordinance). The recommended amendments are described below.

- Add Chapter 7 – Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps
- Add Section 7-7-100 – Purpose.

This section designates all areas within Windsor that are not already identified on the FHSZ Map from the State Fire Marshal as a moderate or high fire severity zone as a moderate fire severity zone. This retains the current fire severity zone designation for the affected areas and does not create any new requirements.

- Add Section 7-7-105 – Applicability.

This section requires construction to comply with the requirements for fire resistive construction included in Chapter 7A (Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure).

- Amend Section 7-2-317 – Wildland Urban Interface Area.

This section would be amended to identify the Chapter 7A requirements that would apply to construction in areas designated as moderate.

- Amend Section 7-2-310 – Application

This section includes the exceptions for buildings in fire severity zones. The exception for buildings not located a fire hazard severity zones would be removed, since all areas within Windsor would be designated as a moderate or high fire severity zone. As discussed above, all of Windsor is currently designated as a moderate fire severity zone, so this amendment

would not create new requirements or designate any new areas as being in a fire severity zone.

The adoption of the ordinance amending the FHSZ Map from the State Fire Marshal and the Municipal Code would reduce the threat to life and property and costs to property owners, residents and local agencies associated with wildfires. The adoption of the ordinance is consistent with the General Plan Health and Safety Element policies and implement wildfire mitigation actions included in the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan.

One public comment was received regarding the FHSZ Map, which supported the proposed amendment that would designate the areas of Town not designated as moderate or high fire severity as moderate (Attachment 3).

Fiscal Impact:

The adoption of the ordinance would not result in a fiscal impact. The ordinance would be implemented by the Town's Building Division staff as part of their review of building permits and inspections. These activities are part of the Building Division's regular activities and responsibilities.

Environmental Review:

The ordinance is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") because the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment and it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that this ordinance may have a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(2)). Also, the ordinance is not a project as defined by CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c)(3), 15061 (Review for Exemption), and 15378 (Definition of a Project)). The ordinance is exempt from CEQA pursuant CEQA Guidelines Section 15308 (Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment), since the adoption of the FHSZ Map and municipal code amendments would help to reduce the spread of wildfire.

Attachment(s):

1. Ordinance
2. Windsor Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map
3. Public Comment Received
- 12.3 PowerPoint (Distributed 2025-05-21)

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Reviewed by:

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Approved by:

Jon Davis
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