



## CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

**MEETING DATE:** May 27, 2025

**ITEM TITLE:** Consideration of Introducing an Ordinance Retitling and Amending San Carlos Municipal Code Section 15.04.110 F (6)(a) to Designate Fire Hazard Severity Zones for Local Responsibility Areas as Recommended by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection Pursuant to Government Code Section 51178.

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### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommend that the City Council waive first reading and introduce an ordinance retitling and amending San Carlos Municipal Code Section 15.04.110 F (6)(a) regarding designation of Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) for Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs).

### FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

There is no fiscal impact.

There may be staff time to coordinate with CAL FIRE, review the FHSZ maps, and facilitate the ordinance adoption process. Additional costs may arise if mitigation efforts are required. This effort may require interdepartmental coordination between the Fire Department, Community Development Department, Informational Technology Division, and City Clerk's Office. However, these tasks can be completed with existing department budgets.

### BACKGROUND:

On April 1, 2024, CAL FIRE's Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) finalized the FHSZs for the State Responsibility Areas (SRA). The update process now extends to LRAs as mandated by Government Code Section 51178. This law requires CAL FIRE to classify areas into "moderate", "high", or "very high" fire hazard severity zones using consistent statewide criteria. The Fire Hazard Severity Zones are developed through a science and field-tested model that assesses various factors such as fire history, vegetation, flame length predictions, and typical weather patterns. The definitions are as follows:

- **Moderate:** Areas where wildland fire risk exists, but at a lower intensity or likelihood
- **High:** Areas with significant fire risk due to fuel loads, slope, and fire weather
- **Very High:** Areas with extreme fire behavior potential where fires are likely to be fast-moving, intense, and difficult to control

The original FHSZ mapping process began in the late 1980s and was based on topography, fuel load, fire weather patterns, and historical wildfire data. These maps have long played a role in guiding where wildland-urban interface (WUI) building codes apply, defensible space standards

are enforced, and fire hazard disclosures are required during real estate transactions. In recent years, California has experienced more frequent and destructive wildfires due to a combination of factors including climate change, prolonged drought, extended fire seasons, and increasing development along the wildland-urban interface.

In response, CAL FIRE initiated a comprehensive update of the FHSZ in 2022, using advanced fire science and modeling techniques to reflect the evolving wildfire landscape. This effort resulted in updated SRA maps finalized in late 2023, and local jurisdictions are now required to review and adopt updated FHSZ maps for their respective LRAs. As part of this statewide effort, CAL FIRE issued a major update to its LRA FHSZ maps for the first time since 2007. In November 2024, the City of San Carlos received official notice that portions of the city have been identified for updated FHSZ in the LRA under this new mapping initiative. CAL FIRE has identified the City of San Carlos as potentially containing Moderate and High FHSZ.

Per Government Code Sections 51178.5 and 51179, the City is required to:

- Make the draft maps available to the public for review and comment within 30 days of transmittal from the State Fire Marshal.
- Adopt the final map designations via ordinance within 120 days of receiving the recommendations from the State Fire Marshal.
- Submit the adopted ordinance and maps to CAL FIRE within 30 days of adoption.

This item is being brought forward to the City Council to fulfill the requirements of state law and to begin the adoption process.

#### ANALYSIS:

The draft maps and supporting data for LRAs were made available to the City of San Carlos from the State Fire Marshal on February 24, 2025. On March 10, 2025, the notification of the release of LRA maps was shared through public notice and the City of San Carlos website, and the maps were made available to the public for review and comment: [https://www.cityofsancarlos.org/city\\_hall/departments\\_and\\_divisions/fire/wildfire\\_preparedness.php#lrahazardseverityzoneupdate](https://www.cityofsancarlos.org/city_hall/departments_and_divisions/fire/wildfire_preparedness.php#lrahazardseverityzoneupdate)

The updated FHSZ provide essential information for community planning, hazard mitigation, and public safety. These designations are intended to help local governments and residents understand fire hazards and make informed decisions about mitigation strategies. It is important to note that Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps evaluate hazard, not risk—similar to how flood zone maps reflect the probability of flooding without predicting specific impacts. Hazard is based on the physical conditions that influence the likelihood and expected fire behavior over a 30- to 50-year period, without considering mitigation efforts. Risk, by contrast, reflects the potential damage under current conditions, accounting for factors like defensible space, fuel treatments, and ignition-resistant construction. Compared to the previous maps (published between 2007-2011), fire hazard severity zones in our area have been reduced. There are no areas in the City of San Carlos classified as Very High FHSZ. This means that property owners and new developments will not face additional defensible space requirements based on these classifications. The Fire Marshal is listed as the point of contact with CAL FIRE and will be submitting the final adopted ordinance and maps to CAL FIRE.

ALTERNATIVES:

The alternatives available to the City Council include:

1. Introduce an Ordinance designating the Fire Hazard Severity Zones as recommended by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection pursuant to Government Code Section 51178; or
2. Do not introduce the Ordinance; or
3. Provide staff with alternative direction.

Respectfully submitted by:

Greg DaCunha, RCFD Deputy Fire Chief

Approved for submission by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Maltbie', is written above a horizontal line.

Jeff Maltbie, City Manager

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. Proposed Ordinance  
Exhibit A to Ordinance - Fire Map