



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 6/10/2025

File #: 25-733

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Planning and Building Department

Agenda Section: Departmental

Vote Requirement: Majority

SUBJECT:

Introduce for First Reading an Ordinance Amending Title III, Division 11, Chapter 1 of the Humboldt County Code to add Section 3111-14 - Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones; Adopting the Recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones within the Local Responsibility Area.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Introduce the attached Ordinance amending Title III, Division 11, Chapter 1 of Humboldt County Code to add Section 3111-14 - Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones; adopting the recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones within the Local Responsibility Area; and
2. Set the Ordinance for adoption on June 24, 2025; and
3. Direct the Clerk of the Board to publish the required pre-adoption summary of the ordinance and to post a certified copy of the full text of the proposed Ordinance in the office of the Clerk of the Board, both the publication and posting to be done at least five (5) days prior to the Board meeting at which the Ordinance will be adopted [Government Code Section 25124 (b)(1)]; and
4. Direct the Clerk of the Board, within 15 days after adoption of the Ordinance, to publish a post-adoption summary of the Ordinance with the names of the Supervisors voting for and against the Ordinance, and to post in the office of the Clerk of the Board a certified copy of the full text of the adopted Ordinance and amendments along with the names of those Supervisors voting for and against the Ordinance [Government Code section 25124(b)(1)].

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: Safe & Healthy Communities

Strategic Plan Category: 1008 - Update General Plan ordinances for quality of environment

DISCUSSION:

This item introduces for adoption the Fire Hazard Severity Zones as mapped by the Board of Forestry within the County Fire Safe Regulations. Adopting Fire Hazard Severity Zones is a requirement of the Board of Forestry. The new aspect is that it now applies to Local Responsibility Areas in addition to State Responsibility Areas.

Starting Feb. 10, 2025, and ending March 24, 2025, CAL FIRE released Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps for each county in California, providing the recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones, as determined by the Office of the State Fire Marshal. The State Fire Marshal is required to identify Moderate, High, and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones throughout the state, per Section 51178 of the California Government Code. Each local government is required to adopt, by ordinance, those

severity zones in the Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) within 120 days of receiving the recommendations from the State Fire Marshal, per Section 51179 of the California Government Code, which had been updated by AB 211 in 2022. The adopted zones are required to be at least as severe as the zones recommended by the State Fire Marshal, per Section 51179(b), but may be determined to be more severe, as appropriate.

The map for Humboldt County's recommended Fire Hazard Severity Zones was released Feb. 24, 2025, so the maps as recommended or greater are required to be adopted on June 24, 2025, or earlier. This ordinance will come back to the Board on June 24, 2025 for adoption.

The State Fire Marshal categorizes land as Moderate, High, or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones based on terrain, vegetation, fire history, and climate conditions that each contribute to expected fire behavior over a 50-year period. These zones evaluate hazard, not risk, and do not account for mitigation efforts in the short-term, such as defensible space or fire-resistant construction. New construction in High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones is subject to Chapter 7A of the California Building Code.

The mapped zones for the Local Responsibility Area affect up to 7,900 parcels within the unincorporated County jurisdiction, across an area of over 28.1 square miles (over 18,005 acres); approximately 5,800 of these parcels' areas are covered by an updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone by at least 90%.

Approximately 97% of the affected parcels within unincorporated Humboldt County are recommended to be Moderate Fire Hazard Severity and the remaining percentage is recommended to be High Fire Hazard Severity. No parcels within unincorporated Humboldt County are proposed to be Very High Fire Hazard Severity, which would otherwise impose more significant restrictions on development. There are recommended Very High Fire Hazard Severity zones within the City of Trinidad and the territory of the Hoopa Valley Tribe, but the County of Humboldt is not responsible for adopting those zones on their behalf.

To adopt Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Map and Fire Safe Regulations text amendment, the following findings in Attachment 1 must be made:

- The proposed amendment is in the public interest; and
- The proposed amendment is consistent with the Fire Safe Regulations; and
- The proposed amendment is consistent with the purpose of the ordinance.

Effect of Ordinance:

The proposed amendment to the Fire Safe Regulations will present the adopted map, reference an online location where the map may be reviewed at a larger scale, and state that the areas depicted by the map are designated as Moderate, High, and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. It will also state that High and Very High Severity Zones are subject to Chapter 7A of the California Building Code.

A draft Resolution for your consideration is attached and it will be presented for adoption on June 24, 2025 with the Ordinance. The Ordinance is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378 as it is not a project that has a potential for resulting in a direct or indirect change in the environment.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

The salary funding for research, staff tasks, and preparing the draft ordinance and staff report is included in the General Fund contribution to the Long-Range Planning unit (1100-282).

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Staff costs and other expenses related to research, staff tasks, and preparing the draft ordinance and staff report total approximately \$10,000.

STAFFING IMPACT:

Staff time related to implementation has been accomplished with current staff resources.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The action item was referred to County Counsel. CAL FIRE was consulted to clarify appropriate procedure for the program.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Alternative 1: The Board of Supervisors could choose to amend the language of the ordinance or add additional restrictions or requirements. This alternative should be implemented if the Board is unable to make all the required findings. Staff believe that the required findings can be made and does not recommend further consideration of this alternative.

Alternative 2: The Board of Supervisors could choose to adopt Fire Hazard Severity Zones at greater severities or more broadly apply Fire Hazard Severity Zones within the Local Responsibility Area. This alternative should be implemented if the Board determines there is evidence justifying greater Hazard Severities. The additional environmental review required to justify an increase has not been performed, so Staff does not recommend further consideration of this alternative.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Ordinance and LRA Fires Hazard Severity Zones
2. Pre-Adoption Summary
3. Post-Adoption Summary
4. Draft Resolution

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Meeting of: N/A

File No.: N/A