



# City of Oceanside

300 North Coast Highway,  
Oceanside, California 92054

## Staff Report

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**File #:** 25-811

**Agenda Date:** 6/4/2025

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**DATE:** June 4, 2025

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers

**FROM:** Fire Department

**TITLE: ORDINANCE OFFICIALLY DESIGNATING THE FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONES  
WITHIN THE CITY OF OCEANSIDE**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the City Council introduce an ordinance officially designating the Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) within the City of Oceanside, as recommended by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), in accordance with Government Code Section 51179.

### **BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS**

The State of California, through CAL FIRE, is responsible for identifying areas of varying fire hazard severity based on factors such as fuel, slope, weather, and fire history. These zones are classified as Moderate, High, or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Under Government Code Section 51179, local agencies are required to adopt these zones by local ordinance to enhance wildfire preparedness, mitigation, and land-use policy.

As part of the map update process, and as required by California Government Code Section 51178, a public comment period was made available to residents for a period of 30 days, ending on April 25. All public comments received will be compiled and forwarded to CAL FIRE, however the Oceanside Fire Department is not able to decrease the severity of zones regardless of comments provided.

CAL FIRE has completed a scientific and data-driven analysis to update the Fire Hazard Severity Zones across the state. These updates are part of a statewide effort to address the increased frequency and intensity of wildfires and to inform local planning decisions, building standards, and public safety measures. The proposed ordinance aligns local zoning maps with CAL FIRE's latest recommendations, which will:

- Enhance the City's ability to prioritize fuel reduction projects and defensible space enforcement.
- Inform future development and building code compliance in at-risk areas.
- Improve the City's eligibility for state and federal wildfire mitigation resources and grants.
- Strengthen public awareness of fire risk and improve emergency planning.

During the public comment period, the City received a range of feedback from residents expressing both support and concern regarding the proposed Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) designations. Several commenters questioned the accuracy of zone boundaries, citing inconsistencies such as partial inclusion of properties, proximity to irrigated or managed landscapes (e.g., cemeteries, green spaces, and water reservoirs), or historical absence of wildfire activity. Others raised concerns about the potential impacts on homeowners' insurance, noting that reclassification into high-risk zones may lead to increased premiums or loss of coverage despite site-specific fire mitigation measures. Some residents requested reevaluation of specific parcels or areas based on factors like defensible space, Homeowner's Association (HOA)-maintained land, nearby fire breaks, or planned development aligned with fire-resilient urban design. The feedback reflects a community that is generally supportive of wildfire preparedness but seeks transparency, equity, and accuracy in the application of fire hazard mapping and its real-world consequences.

The Oceanside Fire Department is understanding of the concerns expressed by the public and acknowledges the challenges posed by insurance availability and regulatory impacts. However, the department is also supportive of the advanced scientific methodology and data-driven modeling used by CAL FIRE in determining the zone designations. These zones are based on fire behavior modeling that includes ember cast potential, slope, fuels, and historical fire data-factors which often do not align with property boundaries or personal opinions.

It is important to clarify that insurance companies utilize risk models, which are distinct from hazard models such as those used by CAL FIRE. While hazard models focus on long-term environmental factors influencing fire behavior, insurance risk models also consider the susceptibility of individual structures to fire damage, short-term variables, and property-specific characteristics. It is unlikely that insurers specifically reference CAL FIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zones in their underwriting, but they do incorporate many of the same datasets. Insurance models are updated frequently and may reflect market dynamics, property conditions, and claims history, whereas CAL FIRE's hazard maps are designed to remain relatively stable for 10 or more years to guide land use planning and policy.

Additionally, while residents expressed a desire for increased brush clearing in certain areas, there are environmental limitations in place for habitat preservation that must be observed. The City of Oceanside actively manages brush and vegetation on City-owned parcels through the Public Works Department to balance fire risk reduction with environmental stewardship. The Oceanside Fire Department is currently pursuing funding for a pilot project for a fuels reduction crew to further manage hazard vegetation within Oceanside.

In accordance with the Government Code 51179, the Oceanside Fire Department is not able to decrease the severity of zones provided by CAL FIRE; however, all public comments received will be compiled and forwarded to CAL FIRE for further evaluation and consideration.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

No fiscal impact.

### **COMMISSION OR COMMITTEE REPORT**

This item was approved by the Police and Fire Commission at its May 15, 2025 regular meeting.

**CITY ATTORNEY'S ANALYSIS**

The referenced documents have been reviewed by the City Attorney and approved as to form.

Prepared by: Blake Dorse, Fire Division Chief

Reviewed by: David Parsons, Fire Chief

Submitted by: Jonathan Borrego, City Manager

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Staff Report
2. Ordinance
3. Fire Hazard Severity Zones Map