



CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

July 8, 2025
Agenda Item No. 16

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Jeff Boyles, Fire Chief - 949-644-3101, jboyles@nbfd.net

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TITLE: Ordinance No. 2025-11: Amending Section 9.04.470 (Local Agency Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone) To Adopt the 2025 Moderate, High, and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, As Designated By The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and Pursuant to California Government Code Section 51178

ABSTRACT:

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) recently completed its 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone map update. This map update includes expanded Local Responsibility Area designations across 4.6 million Southern California acres. Assembly Bill 211 (2022) mandates the local adoption of the State Fire Marshal's Moderate and High designations within 120 days. The City of Newport Beach must adopt these zones by ordinance by July 22, 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Conduct a public hearing;
- b) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and
- c) Waive full reading, direct the City Clerk to read by title only, introduce Ordinance No. 2025-11, *An Ordinance of the City Council of the City of Newport Beach, California, Amending Section 9.04.470 (Local Agency Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone) To Adopt the 2025 Moderate, High, and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, As Designated By The California Department of Forestry And Fire Protection And Pursuant to California Government Code Section 51178*; and pass to a second reading on July 22, 2025.

DISCUSSION:

Background

Government Code Section 51175(a) recognizes that wildfires are extremely costly to both residents and local agencies, and that embers can ignite structures beyond the active wildfire area. Because the spread or movement of a fire can cross jurisdictional

boundaries, coordinated action across all levels of government is essential to preserve public peace, health and safety.

In response to the 1991 Oakland Hills fire, Assembly Bill 337 (1992) directed CAL FIRE to evaluate and identify Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) within Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) and required that this information be shared with local jurisdictions. CAL FIRE, through the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), develops and maintains Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps under the authority of Government Code Sections 51175–51189.

These maps help local agencies identify elevated wildfire risk areas and apply appropriate land use, mitigation and construction standards. CAL FIRE uses advanced fire modeling techniques that incorporate a 30- to 50-year hazard horizon based on historical wildfire data, ember transport potential, vegetation fuel loads, and long-term drought conditions. Unlike weather-based risk assessments, these maps provide a consistent, science-driven evaluation of hazard potential.

Assembly Bill 642 (2021) expanded CAL FIRE’s mandate to include identification of Moderate and High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (MFHSZ and HFHSZ) within LRAs. Senate Bill 63 (2021) further required local governments to adopt all three classifications—Moderate, High, and Very High—into their local planning, zoning and building regulations. Previously, only Very High zones were required to be designated at the local level.

Assembly Bill 211 (2022) further reinforces state-local coordination by requiring jurisdictions to adopt the State fire marshal’s Moderate and High FHSZ designations within 120 days of their release. While local governments may expand the designated zones based on unique local conditions, they are not permitted to reduce the severity classifications set by the State fire marshal.

2025 CAL FIRE Map Update

CAL FIRE’s 2025 update to the LRA FHSZ maps, released on March 24, 2025, significantly expands upon the previous 2011 version, which only identified “Very High” zones. The new maps classify approximately 4.6 million acres in Southern California into Moderate, High and Very High zones. For the City of Newport Beach, the 2011 maps included 2,825 parcels in VHFHSZ. Under the 2025 update, 831 parcels are now in the Moderate zone, 1,160 in the High zone, and 4,247 in the Very High zone.

Properties located within HFHSZ and VHFHSZ are subject to wildfire-resistant construction standards under California Building Code Chapter 7A. These include requirements such as ember-resistant venting, ignition-resistant materials, and multi-pane windows for new construction and major renovations. Additionally, Assembly Bill 38 (2019) mandates that property sellers in VHFHSZs complete a defensible space

inspection and provide documentation of compliance with home-hardening standards before closing escrow.

Homeowners in VHFHSZ must also meet defensible space requirements established by Government Code Section 51182 and may soon be subject to additional standards under Assembly Bill 3074 (2020). AB 3074 introduces an “Ember-Resistant Zone” (Zone 0), defined as the area within five feet of any structure, which must be cleared of combustible materials including decorative items, landscape vegetation, and potted plants. The Board of Forestry is expected to finalize Zone 0 regulations by December 31, 2025, pursuant to Governor Newsom’s Executive Order N-18-25.

In compliance with Government Code Section 51178.5 and Senate Bill 63, the City made the updated FHSZ map available to the public on March 25, 2025, for comment and review. All materials, including maps, were presented in a format that was clear and accessible.

The Newport Beach Fire Department also hosted two public outreach events to present the maps and explain the implications to the community. The first meeting was held on Monday, May 19 at the Newport Beach Civic Center. The second meeting took place on Wednesday, June 12 at the OASIS Senior Center. The May 19 meeting was recorded and made available on the City’s website and social media channels.

The 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps must be adopted within 120 days of their release on March 24, 2025. Adoption of this ordinance ensures compliance with State law, preserves eligibility for related State funding, supports efficient building permit processing, and enables clear communication with property owners regarding fire safety requirements.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Local Responsibility Area Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map
Attachment B – Ordinance No. 2025-11