



County of Monterey Planning Commission

Item No.4

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Agenda Item No. 4

April 24, 2024

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REF240002 - COUNTY OF MONTEREY (REBUILD OF PROPERTIES AFFECTED BY FIRE)

Receive a report on properties affected by Wildfires from 2015 to current.

Project Location: Toro Area Plan, Carmel Valley Master Plan, and Big Sur Coast Land Use Plan

Proposed CEQA action: Not a project pursuant to Section 15378 of the CEQA Guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission receive a report on properties affected by wildfires from 2015 to current (Referral 18.11) and provide direction to staff regarding the County's disaster response practices.

SUMMARY:

On December 13, 2023, Commissioner Diehl requested that staff provide an update on the rebuild of properties affected by wildfires from 2015 to current. Commissioner Diehl clarified the need for additional information specific to the number of rebuilds to determine where rebuilding hurdles may exist (Referral 18.11).

Since 2015, there have been several major wildfires that destroyed or substantially damaged buildings in Monterey County. Those fires include:

- The River, Carmel and Dolan Fires, started in August 2020 which destroyed a total of 122 structures (77 homes and 45 other structures); and
- The Soberanes Fire, which started in July 2016, destroyed a total of 68 structures (57 homes and 11 outbuildings).

These wildfires together resulted in the destruction of 134 homes and 56 other structures. To date, only 53 homes have been or are being rebuilt following the fires.

According to County permit records, the County processed 94 construction permits related to recovery from the River, Carmel and Dolan fires. Of the 77 homes destroyed in these fires, 50 homes have been or are being rebuilt. The remaining 44 permits were for repairs or replacement of structures other than the main dwelling. Unfortunately, there was no program in place to account for construction permits processed for recovery from the Soberanes Fire. Of the 57 homes destroyed in that fire the County has record of three applications to rebuild homes. More are likely to exist, but the records are not labeled or categorized in a manner that would make this information searchable.

With the information available, rebuilt homes account for approximately 39% of the units destroyed indicating that there are factors or hurdles to rebuilding after a fire. Unfortunately, many displaced residents were either under-insured or not insured and, as a result have no financial means to rebuild. Many sold their properties and moved away.

There are many factors or hurdles to reconstruction of buildings after a fire. This report focuses on the County's role in permitting demolition of damaged homes and construction of new/replacement homes as the one factor we have the most control over.

For each fire, the Board of Supervisors has adopted a Resolution for fire recovery which specified criteria intended to reduce hurdles to rebuilding. Each resolution varies slightly but the criteria contained in the resolutions and the process for rebuilding after a fire are discussed in more detail in this report. Staff will discuss the rebuilding process for the most recent fires from 2020, as the Fire Recovery Guidelines are the most detailed and are still in place.

DISCUSSION:

On September 15, 2020, the Board of Supervisors approved Fire Recovery Guidelines for the River, Carmel and Dolan Fires to support the processing of permits for the rebuilding of structures destroyed or damaged by the three fires for a 5-year period (September 15, 2025); along with a five-year extension not to exceed September 15, 2030. **(Exhibit A - Fire Recovery Guidelines).**

Immediately following the devastation, the County opened a Local Assistance Center (LAC) located at the Portola Plaza in Monterey. The LAC provided several services from County agencies, such as, Assessor's Office, Environmental Health Bureau, Resource Management Agency (RMA), (which included the Permit Center, Planning, Development Services, Environmental Services, and Public Works), Office of Emergency Services, state agency Cal OES, and Federal agency FEMA. The LAC stayed open for 30 days to provide information and assistance to those affected by the River, Carmel, and Dolan Fires. The RMA made sure their stations were manned every day the LAC was opened.

Based on the 2020 Fire Recovery Guidelines, a matrix was created to streamline the process and ensure rebuilding occurred consistent with the regulations, minimizing future risks to the residents. This included expedited processes with Special Handling for the homeowners who were insured, uninsured, permitted or legal nonconforming structures, and unpermitted structures.

As part of the 2020 recovery, the Office of Emergency Services, in coordination with Cal OES, created a Debris Removal Program for all properties affected by these fires. Approximately 122 properties that were impacted by the fires participated in the Private Property Debris Removal program. They either relied on the County to clear the debris from their properties or they hired private companies to remove the debris. From the 122 properties that participated, to date, only 94 construction permits have been submitted to Housing and Community Development.

HCD responded by ensuring affected homeowners had priority with their rebuild applications. The Permit Center Point of Contact created a special numbering system for all the rebuild applications. The HCD Point of Contact also set up zoom meetings with Environmental Health Bureau and homeowners

to go over the expedited process and showed them how to begin. This included providing historical records for each property owner. The process was done only for the most recent fires in 2020.

In 2022, HCD staff found there were several new homeowners who purchased fire related sites and wanted to build new structures. If they were not the original homeowner, they were not given the benefit of waived fees for construction permits. As such, none of these construction permit applications were flagged.

The County Office of Emergency Services (OES) continues to improve upon disaster response and recovery programs learning upon the past experiences with floods and fires within the County. HCD has coordinated with OES on the numbers provided in this preliminary report. This preliminary report is provided to the Planning Commission in response to a referral. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive the report and provide direction to staff on how disaster response might be improved in the future.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The following agencies/groups have reviewed the guidelines:

- Housing and Community Development

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Approved by: Craig Spencer, HCD Director, (831) 755-5233

The following attachments are on file with HCD:

Exhibit A - Fire Recovery Guidelines

Exhibit B - River, Carmel, and Dolan Fire Data

Cc: Planning REF240002

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