



County of Monterey

Item No.

Board Report

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

Legistar File Number: ORD 25-008

August 19, 2025

Introduced: 7/24/2025

Current Status: Agenda Ready

Version: 1

Matter Type: Ordinance

Adopt an ordinance to designate the Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the unincorporated areas of Monterey County as recommended by the California State Fire Marshal pursuant to Government Code section 51178.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors adopt an ordinance to designate the Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the unincorporated areas of Monterey County as recommended by the California State Fire Marshal pursuant to Government Code section 51178.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

On August 5, 2025, the Board of Supervisors introduced and waived first reading of the ordinance and advanced the ordinance for consideration of adoption at the meeting on August 19, 2025, at 10:30 a.m.

California Government Code section 51178 requires the State Fire Marshal to identify areas in the state as moderate, high, and very high fire hazard severity zones based on consistent statewide criteria and based on the severity of fire hazard that is expected to prevail in those areas. The State Fire Marshal has released updated 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps for Local Responsibility Areas across the state, including recommendations for unincorporated Monterey County. Government Code sections 51178.5 and 51179 require that local agencies make fire hazard severity zones available for public review and comment in a format understandable and accessible to the general public, including but not limited to maps, and that a local agency by ordinance designate fire severity zones in its jurisdiction. The County complied by posting the maps on the Monterey County website at:

<https://www.countyofmonterey.gov/government/departments-a-h/housing-community-development/planning-services/current-planning/general-info/local-responsibility-areas-lra-2025>

The FHSZ map identifies areas as moderate, high, or very high fire hazard severity zones, using consistent statewide criteria. Designations are based on factors such as fuel loading, slope, fire weather, and other relevant elements, including areas where winds have been identified by the Office of the State Fire Marshal as a major cause of wildfire spread. A local agency may, at its discretion, include additional areas within its jurisdiction that are not identified by the State Fire Marshal as moderate or high FHSZ. However, a local agency is prohibited from reducing the severity zone designations assigned by the State Fire Marshal. State law does not allow local jurisdictions to request modifications or provide comments on the recommended FHSZ designations. A local agency may choose to increase the severity designation for specific areas or designate new areas not included by the State Fire Marshal.

County staff evaluated the recommended map and consulted with all fire districts within Monterey County to determine whether any modifications were needed. All fire districts confirmed there were no proposed changes and indicated their intent to adopt the recommended FHSZ map as provided by the State Fire Marshal.

Therefore, to ensure consistency, simplify administration, and provide clarity to property owners and other stakeholders, the County will rely on the recommended FHSZ map provided by the State Fire Marshal without further changes at this time. The draft ordinance before the Board includes the FHSZ map as an exhibit.

New Requirements:

With the adoption of the FHSZ, the County will be required to implement new regulations, some of which will affect new development depending on the designated severity zone. The County will evaluate the FHSZ during the project development and environmental review process for the new regulations.

Property owners and/or occupants of structures located within the designated FHSZs will be subject to additional fire safety requirements that do not apply to areas outside these zones. These additional requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Property development standards such as road widths, water supply, and signage, in compliance with California Public Resources Code section 4290.
- Requirements under Chapter 7A of the California Building Code, “Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure.”
- Hazard disclosure obligations for properties located in High and Very High Severity Zones, subject to Assembly Bill 38 (AB 38 2019)
- In Very High Severity Zones, additional defensible space and landscaping requirements will also apply, in compliance with California Government Code section 51182.

All of these factors will be considered by County staff during project review. To comply with state law, the County must approve the updated FHSZs Map by ordinance.

CEQA:

The proposed ordinance is not considered a “Project” under CEQA because it does not have the potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3 Section 15060(c)(2) and Section 15060(c)(3).

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The Office of County Counsel has approved the ordinance as to form. Staff have collaborated with fire district staff to verify a consistent approach on adopting the recommended State Fire Marshal FHSZ map. If the Board of Supervisors recommends adoption of the ordinance, staff will submit a copy of the ordinance adopted to the State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection within 30 days of adoption pursuant to Government Code section 51179.

FINANCING:

The proposed ordinance has no financial impact on the County General Fund. Staff time to prepare this report is included in the FY2025-26 Adopted Budget for HCD Appropriation Unit HCD002, Unit 8543.

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Reviewed by: Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner, (831) 784-5700

Approved by: Melanie Beretti, Chief of Planning, (831) 755-5285

The following attachments are on file with the Clerk of the Board:

Attachment A - FHSZ Ordinance

Cc: Craig Spencer, Director of Housing and Community Development; Melanie Beretti, Chief of Planning; Josh Bowling, Chief of Building Services; Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner; Edgar Sanchez, Assistant Planner; Kelly Donlon, County Counsel; Art Black, art@carmelfire.com; Carol Wallace, carolw@csgengr.com , Rick Rodewald rickr@csgengr.com; Jim Dias, jimd@csgengr.com; Chris Lynch, chris.lynch@fire.ca.gov; Hector Ramirez, hector.ramirez@fire.ca.gov ; Jesse Reimer, jessereimer@cachaguafire.com; Frank Espinoza, frank.espinoza@fire.ca.gov; Nick Bautista, nick.bautista@fire.ca.gov; Liliana Zabala, lzabala@ci.gonzales.ca.us ; Jason Muscio, jmuscio@ci.gonzales.ca.us; Joel Mendoza, joel.mendoza@ncfcpd.org; Carolina Bravo, carolina.bravo@ncfcpd.org; Jess Cortez, jess.cortez@ncfcpd.org; Scott Anderson, sanderson@mcrfd.org ; Rick Magno, rmagno@mcrfd.org; Kenia Joachin, kenia@csgengr.com; Board of Supervisor Notices 7-13-17 Distribution List