

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL

February 11, 2020

Title 21 and 22 - Reduce Damage to Life and Property from Wildfires

At least once every year, wildfires destroy or threaten the homes of Los Angeles County residents. In 2018, the Woolsey Fire burned 96,949 acres across two counties, destroyed 1,121 residential and commercial structures and damaged another 189 structures in Los Angeles County alone, and resulted in the deaths of three people. The County incurred approximately \$52 million in fire suppression costs and estimates that the insured losses from the Woolsey Fire will total between \$3 and \$5 billion (Citygate After Action Review of the Woolsey Fire Incident). This fire epitomizes a growing trend toward bigger and more destructive wildfires.

In response to the increasing number of devastating wildfires, Governor Newsom released the “Wildfires and Climate Change: California’s Energy Future” report on April 12, 2019. This report recommends that local governments begin to deprioritize new development in areas of the most extreme fire risk. This motion is consistent with the Governor’s directive and allows for Los Angeles County to take a leadership role in the effort to reduce damage to life and property from wildfires.

MOTION

SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

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BARGER _____

Recent studies indicate that climate change has resulted in wildfires that last longer and occur more frequently. In 2007 and 2008 alone, wildland fires burned over 147,000 acres, destroyed 570 residences in the unincorporated areas. In 2009, the Station Fire burned nearly 160,000 acres and destroyed 76 residences. This fire occurred months before the Santa Ana winds, which often exacerbate wildfires in the fall and spring months.

The County is one of six communities that will receive technical assistance in 2020 under a national program proposing to address the growing challenges associated with wildfire through land use planning. As an increasing number of communities are affected by wildfire across the U.S., the Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW) program provides much-needed support at the local level. Through CPAW, community and local stakeholders will collaborate with a team of professional land use planners, foresters, risk modelers, and researchers to identify opportunities to address wildfire through the planning process. The CPAW program will analyze the County's development and land use regulations and provide recommendations to increase safety and reduce the threat of wildfire to homes and businesses.

The Los Angeles County General Plan's goals and policies provide for the deprioritization of new development in areas of high fire risk. Its Guiding Principles state that the General Plan "includes goals, policies and programs to minimize risks and discourage development in areas that are prone to safety hazards, such as earthquakes, floods and wildfires." The General Plan also recognizes the increasing cost of wildfires. Its Safety Element states that:

The rise in temperatures and prolonged periods of drought increase the fire ignition potential and may increase the frequency and duration of wildfires. Wildfires also have negative impacts on air quality. As exposure to smoke and particulate matter has immediate and long-term

public health impacts, populations may suffer from eye irritations, respiratory problems, and complications to existing lung and heart conditions. Wildfires also have major economic impacts and have the potential to cost the County millions of dollars every year.

This motion calls for the development of land use solutions that reduce the economic, air quality, and health impacts from wildfires by limiting new development within areas of extreme fire risk. This is consistent with, and supportive of, the following specific goals and policies of the General Plan's Safety and Land Use Elements:

- *Goal S 3: An effective regulatory system that prevents or minimizes personal injury, loss of life, and property damage due to fire hazards.*
- *Policy S 3.1: Discourage high density and intensity development in VHFHSZs (Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones).*
- *Policy S 3.2: Consider climate change implications in fire hazard reduction planning for FHSZs (Fire Hazard Severity Zones).*
- *Policy S 3.3: Ensure that the mitigation of fire related property damage and loss in FHSZs limits impacts to biological and other resources.*
- *Policy S 3.6: Ensure adequate infrastructure, including ingress, egress, and peak load water supply availability for all projects located in FHSZs.*
- *Policy S 3.7: Site and design developments located within FHSZs, such as in areas located near ridgelines and on hilltops, in a sensitive manner to reduce the wildfire risk.*
- *Policy S 4.1: Ensure that residents are protected from the public health consequences of natural or man-made disasters through increased readiness*

and response capabilities, risk communication, and the dissemination of public information.

- *Policy S 4.2: Support County emergency providers in reaching their response time goals.*
- *Policy S 4.3: Coordinate with other County and public agencies, such as transportation agencies, and health care providers on emergency planning and response activities, and evacuation planning.*
- *Policy S 4.5: Ensure that there are adequate resources, such as sheriff and fire services, for emergency response.*
- *Policy LU 11.6: Ensure that subdivisions in VHFHSZs site open space to minimize fire risks, as feasible.*

The VHFHSZs are one of Los Angeles County's Special Management Areas. Per the General Plan's Land use element, "these areas require additional development regulations to prevent the loss of life and property, and to protect the natural environment and important resources. The General Plan minimizes risks [from] hazards and discourages development in Special Management Areas."

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Director of Regional Planning, in consultation with the Department of Public Works, Fire Department, Office of Emergency Management, and County Counsel, to prepare and submit amendments to Los Angeles County Code Title 21 and 22 intended to reduce damage to life and property from wildfires. These amendments may include, but are not limited to, requirements that new development in FHSZs pass strict tests for egress during an extreme, wind-driven fire event. Standards should be set for length of time for safe community evacuation. For example, a standard could be established based on the

percent of a community evacuated within one hour of warning. The Director of Regional Planning shall also consider an amendment that requires a mandatory denial recommendation of any project shown to compromise public safety. Finally, the Director shall consider an amendment that requires a denial recommendation of plan amendments that increase allowed density/intensity within FHSZs. The Director of Regional Planning shall return to the Board of Supervisors within one year to present these proposed amendments to Title 21 and 22.

S:NE/Title 21 and 22 - Reduce Damage to Life and Property from Wildfires