City of Culver City

Staff Report

File #: 25-1102, **Version:** 1 **Item #:** A-2.

CC - ACTION ITEM: Introduction of an Ordinance Adopting Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones by Amending and Restating in its Entirety Section 9.02.400 of the Culver City Municipal Code Regarding the Designation of Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

Meeting Date: June 23, 2025

Contact Person/Dept: Chris Miller/Fire Department

Phone Number: (310) 253-5926

Fiscal Impact: Yes [] No [X] **General Fund:** Yes [] No [X]

Attachments: Yes [X] No []

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (06/19/2025)

Department Approval: Kenneth Powell, Fire Chief (06/02/2025)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council introduce an Ordinance adopting Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones by amending and restating in its entirety Section 9.02.400 of the Culver City Municipal Code regarding the designation of Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

In 1992, following a significant wildfire season, Assembly Bill 337 was passed, mandating the identification of Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZs) throughout California. In 2021, Senate Bill 63 expanded this oversight to include Moderate and High FHSZs in addition to the Very High classification. In 2022, Assembly Bill 211 required municipalities and local agencies to adopt Moderate, High, and Very High FHSZ designations by ordinance within 120 days of receiving recommendations from the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM). Local governments may not downgrade State-designated hazard levels but may increase them at their discretion, following a finding supported by substantial evidence in the record that the requirements of Government Code Section 51182 are necessary for effective fire protection within the area.

On March 24, 2025, the OSFM issued the 2025 recommended FHSZ maps for Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) in Los Angeles County, including one specific to Culver City (Attachment 1). For comparison, the City's previously adopted 2012 Very High FHSZ map is provided alongside the Culver City Fire Department's 2025 recommended map, which retains the same Very High FHSZ boundaries (Attachment 2).

The Fire Department recommends maintaining the previous Very High FHSZ boundaries, as doing so enables more stringent brush clearance and construction standards in those areas-measures that enhance public safety. Specifically, homes in the Very High FHSZ will continue to be required to maintain 100 feet of defensible space around structures, and new construction or renovations must comply with Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) building codes.

Justification for Increasing 2025 State-Recommended FHSZ from High to Very High in the Wrightcrest Neighborhood:

The Wrightcrest neighborhood features narrow separation between structures and high housing density, with many older homes that have not been retrofitted to comply with Chapter 7A of the California Building Code (Materials and Construction Methods for Exterior Wildfire Exposure). Additionally, limited evacuation routes increase the risk of delays and congestion during fast-moving, wind-driven wildfires.

As demonstrated by the Palisades Fire in January 2025, constrained egress routes can also hinder fire apparatus access. Wrightcrest is bordered by several high-risk areas: Kenneth Hahn Park (387 acres) to the east, the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook (57 acres) to the west, and the Inglewood Oil Fields (approximately 1,000 acres) to the south and southwest. These open spaces contain significant amounts of chaparral, native shrubs, and invasive grasses, all of which are highly flammable during hot, dry conditions.

The Wrightcrest neighborhood is vulnerable to both regular offshore westerly winds and Santa Ana wind events from the northeast, which can carry embers over long distances. Elevating the FHSZ designation to Very High allows the Culver City Fire Department to continue enforcing the 100-foot defensible space requirement and mandates an ember-resistant zone within 5 feet of structures-key measures to mitigate fire spread. Notably, Wrightcrest was previously designated as a Very High FHSZ in 2012. As such, no additional requirements would be imposed on property owners as a result of this change.

Justification for Increasing 2025 State-Recommended FHSZ from High to Very High in a Portion of the Lower Culver Crest Neighborhood:

The Lower Culver Crest neighborhood also features narrow separation between structures and high housing density, with many older homes lacking Chapter 7A retrofits. Similar to Wrightcrest, this area faces limited exit routes, which could severely hinder evacuation and emergency response during a wind-driven wildfire.

While most of the neighborhood remains in the Very High FHSZ, 13 homes-12 on Molony Road and one on Stephon Terrace-were downgraded to the High FHSZ on the 2025 OSFM recommended map. However, Molony Road borders a deep ravine densely covered with unmaintained, non-irrigated native chaparral and tree-form shrubs. During Santa Ana conditions, this vegetation poses a

significant ember and flame threat to the adjacent homes.

The Culver City Fire Department currently enforces vegetation management and brush clearance per Government Code § 51182 in this area. Continuing enforcement throughout the entire Lower Culver Crest neighborhood, including the 13 downgraded properties, is essential. Elevating these parcels back to the Very High FHSZ designation supports consistent enforcement and public safety. Similar to Wrightcrest, this portion of Lower Culver Crest was previously designated as a Very High FHSZ in 2012. As such, no additional requirements would be imposed on property owners as a result of this change.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

There is no fiscal impact associated with the introduction of this ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2025-06-23_ATT 1 - Office of the State Fire Marshal 2025 Recommended Local Responsibility Area
2. 2025-06-23_ATT 2 - Culver City Fire Department 2025 Recommended Local Responsibility Area
3. 2025-06-23_ATT 3 - Ordinance Amending and Restating CCMC Section 9.02.400 - Designating Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones

MOTION

That the City Council:

Introduce an Ordinance adopting Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones by amending and restating in its entirety Section 9.02.400 of the Culver City Municipal Code regarding the Designation of Very High, High, and Moderate Fire Hazard Severity Zones.