



TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY STAFF MEMO

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Laura Russell, Planning & Building Director

DATE: December 7, 2022

RE: Supplemental Information regarding Fire Maps

At the Planning Commission meetings held in November, the Commission requested additional information regarding fire mapping in Town and what maps are being used. In particular, there was a question as to why the 2008 Cal Fire Map was included in the Housing Element rather than the 2008 Moritz Map. As background, the 2008 Cal Fire Map shows the very high fire severity zones in Portola Valley. These maps are created based on fire risk factors established and modeled by Cal Fire. The 2008 Moritz report was commissioned by the Town to survey the existing vegetation on both private property and right of way to assist in a comprehensive vegetation management program. The Town incorporated the Moritz Map into the 2010 version of the Safety Element.

State General Plan law mandates the contents of each element/chapter of the General Plan and requires these chapters to be consistent with one another. General plan law requires fire hazards to be discussed in the Safety Element and requires towns to include fire maps on file with the Office of the State Fire Marshal in their Safety Elements ([Government Code 65302](#)):

- (3) Upon the next revision of the housing element on or after January 1, 2014, the safety element shall be reviewed and updated as necessary to address the risk of fire for land classified as state responsibility areas, as defined in Section 4102 of the Public Resources Code, and land classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, as defined in Section 51177. This review shall consider the advice included in the Office of Planning and Research's most recent publication of "Fire Hazard Planning, General Plan Technical Advice Series" and shall also include all of the following:
 - (A) Information regarding fire hazards, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

(i) Fire hazard severity zone maps available from the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

(ii) Any historical data on wildfires available from local agencies or a reference to where the data can be found.

(iii) Information about wildfire hazard areas that may be available from the United States Geological Survey.

(iv) General location and distribution of existing and planned uses of land in very high fire hazard severity zones and in state responsibility areas, including structures, roads, utilities, and essential public facilities. The location and distribution of planned uses of land shall not require defensible space compliance measures required by state law or local ordinance to occur on publicly owned lands or open space designations of homeowner associations.

(v) Local, state, and federal agencies with responsibility for fire protection, including special districts and local offices of emergency services.

The 2008 map was prepared by Cal Fire and is the official map on file with the State Fire Marshal. Therefore, it must be included in the Safety Element. In addition, the currently proposed draft of the Safety Element also includes the 2008 Moritz Fuel Hazard Assessment Report and builds off of the 2022 fire memo prepared by the Town's fire hazard consultant Zeke Lunder of Deer Creek Resources. The Town's current fire consultant Zeke Lunder, cautions against relying on the Moritz Map beyond its stated purpose of vegetative management:

"The 'Moritz Map', created by Ray Moritz, does a decent job of characterizing the highest hazard areas within the Town. However, the initial map is nearly 15 years old, and it appears to miss several areas with Very High hazards in steep canyon areas. Also, by calling almost the entire town 'high' hazard, Moritz's map lacks subtlety. There is a wide variety of conditions within the areas Moritz paints broadly as 'high' hazard, and in many of these areas, concerted vegetation management could greatly reduce hazards. Since vegetation can be managed, especially on areas of milder slope, it is not reasonable to exert there is nowhere safe in town to build higher-density developments. Thorough and well-designed wildfire mitigations are possible, wildfire hazard is not chiseled in stone." (Exhibit 2.)

Both the 2008 Cal Fire Map and 2008 Moritz Report are now outdated. Accordingly, the Woodside Fire Protection District (WFPD) is currently preparing a state of the art fire hazard map. Once the WFPD map is finalized it will be considered by the Town for incorporation into the Safety Element. Meanwhile, other available fire mapping resources (such as the 2008 Moritz Fuel Hazard Assessment Report and the 2022 fire memo prepared by the Town's consultant Deer Creek Resources) have all been incorporated into the Safety Element. The available fire maps were shared with the Ad Hoc Housing Element Committee, as well as a presentation by Zeke Lunder, prior to their selection of housing sites. The key elements of all those fire resources are shown in Figures 4-5 through 4-7 of the Draft

Housing Element. In addition, the Draft Housing Element references the Safety Element which also discusses the Moritz Map.

Given community interest, the Town has mapped the Housing Sites on the Moritz Map (see Exhibit 1). Below is a table showing the types of vegetation existing as of 2008 as depicted in the Moritz Map.

PVHE HOUSING SITES BY VEGETATION

Housing Site	Type of Vegetation
The Sequoias	Fire-Prone Oak Woodland (highest)/Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
Christ Church	Mowed grass (low)/Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
4394 Alpine	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
Willow Commons Pipeline Project	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
4370 Alpine	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
Ladera Church	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
Vacant portion of the Ford Field	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (high)
Glen Oaks	Mowed Grass (low)/ Fire-Prone Oak Woodland (highest)
Stanford Wedge Pending Project	Fire-Prone Urban Forest (highest)/Chaparral (highest)

As both the Cal Fire and Moritz Maps are outdated, staff coordinated with the WFPD for their review of the sites based on the best information available today. On December 1, 2022, the Fire Marshal reported that he had asked the District's current mapping consultant, Flame Mapper, to assess the five housing inventory sites on Alpine. Flame Mapper concluded that all of the parcels, except the Stanford site, would be Moderate. The sites are not in the Very High or High areas. Once the sites are built, then the moderate would be reduced to low. In regard to the Stanford site, with no building the site would be considered high, but as with the others, once built out, it would be reduced to a moderate. (See Exhibit 3.)

Exhibits

1. Housing Element Sites Plotted on 2008 Moritz Map
2. Updated December 2, 2022 Deer Creek Memo
3. Emails between Laura Russell and Fire Marshal Don Bullard