

Santa Clara County General Plan Safety Element Update

Workshop #1 Summary: November 10, 2022

The Santa Clara County General Plan Safety Element Update is an opportunity to address the various natural and human-caused hazards affecting the unincorporated areas. As the primary policy document addressing these concerns, the Safety Element is intended to ensure existing and future development is better protected from these hazards and County communities are safer from future hazard events.

As the County of Santa Clara prepares its Safety Element Update, several opportunities to engage with County staff will be provided. On November 10, 2022, the County held its first community workshop to:

- Introduce the Safety Element Update to community members
- Receive input on public safety concerns and opportunities to improve emergency preparedness and response in the County
- Encourage participation in the engagement process

The Agenda included:

- Overview of the Safety Element Update Team
- Overview of Related County Planning Efforts
- What is a Safety Element?
- Why update the Safety Element?
- Role of stakeholders and public feedback

This memorandum summarizes the participants, other relevant and integrated County planning efforts, provides answers to public questions, and presents the results of a public poll given at the end of the workshop.

PARTICIPANTS

Sixteen individuals participated in the first workshop, in addition to County Staff and their consultants. Notable guests included:

- Brian Glass, SCCFD
- Carlos Alcantar, Cal Fire
- Marcus Hernandez, Cal Fire
- Richard Blanchard, President San Antonio Hills HOA
- Sidney French, Lexington Hills-Call of the Wild
- Topher Byrd, Cal Fire
- Julie Weiss, Palo Alto
- Christine Luong, Palo Alto
- Dede Smullen, SCCC FireSafe Council
- Diana Miller, Dept of Aging and Adult Services
- Marlee Smith, SVLG
- Marty Estrada, Caras
- Rebecca Garcia, South County Collaborative

- Dashiell Leeds, Sierra Club
- Kevin Conant, PG&E
- Nathan Rainey, Palo Alto

COUNTY PLANNING EFFORTS UNDERWAY

The Safety Element Update is occurring at the same time as other substantial planning efforts for the County including the Housing Element Update, Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP). As these efforts have overlapping goals and objectives or inform one another, the County is expending substantial effort to ensure these efforts are coordinated. As the *Question-and-Answer* period of the workshop included several questions regarding these three planning efforts, a link to the relevant websites has been provided:

Housing Element Update

<https://plandev.sccgov.org/ordinances-codes/general-plan/housing-element-update-2023-2031>

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

<https://www.sccfd.org/santa-clara-county-community-wildfire-protection-plan/>

Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP)

<https://emergencymanagement.sccgov.org/multi-jurisdictional-hazard-mitigation-plan-mjhmp>

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Questions from the public fell into five categories:

- Project Goals, Schedule, and Relationship to other Planning Efforts
- Safety Element Analyses
- Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Outreach and Agency Coordination

Project Goals, Schedule, and Relationship to other Planning Efforts

1. When does the Housing Element Update go to the Board of Supervisors?

The Board of Supervisors adopted an update to the County Housing Element for the 2023-2031 planning period on October 17, 2023. The County is currently working with the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to finalize and certify the Housing Element Update.

2. What is the County Goal when this safety plan will be truly in effect – I know Aaron said that the general safety plan is a long-term process, but does the county have a benchmark when they would like to see this as a reality.

The intent is to have the Safety Element approved by the Board of Supervisors in the middle of 2024. Once approved, the County will start implementing all of the policies, programs, and actions.

The Safety Element is essentially a view from 30,000 feet whereas other plans such as the CWPP and MJHMP implement the broader Safety Element policies. So, once the Safety Element is approved, the community will start to see other projects and programs rolled out through other mechanisms, plans, and projects.

- 3. When you say 'unincorporated' does that include the east foothills and wider Mt. Hamilton community? I noticed most of the projects mentioned in the beginning were in the west side of the valley so wasn't sure if there was a jurisdictional issue*

Yes. The incorporated community includes cities that have defined city limits. Parcels that do not reside within those city boundaries are therefore in the unincorporated area of the County. When you look at the East Foothills and Alum Rock, there is an intertwining of the City of San Jose and the unincorporated parts of the County – and while overlapping – these areas are in the Safety Element. Most of the Diablo Range, including the Mount Hamilton area, is unincorporated and covered by the County's Safety Element. This is in addition to other urban pockets (such as Burbank and Fruitdale), the majority of Stanford's campus, most of the Santa Cruz Mountains (including Lexington Heights neighborhoods), and much of the South Valley (including San Martin), which are also unincorporated.

Safety Element Analyses

- 4. How will the level of risk be evaluated for the various hazards, specifically wildfire*

By statute, the County is required to incorporate the risk mapping that CalFIRE has already prepared, and is currently updating, for all jurisdictions. These CalFire maps illustrate the State Responsibility Areas and the Fire Hazard Severity Zones. The County is required to include that map, but that doesn't mean we can incorporate other risk information pertaining to hazards from reputable sources. Depending on timing, there may be an opportunity to incorporate the latest information from CalFire.

CalFIRE will be releasing the next version of the Fire Severity Map in February 2023. There is an existing effort to map the vegetation in the high fire severity zone with three counties: Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz. This data will be at a 5-meter scale of analysis and the CWPP will specifically use that new information.

- 5. Can you describe how you will address the new evacuation requirements - will this be County wide, where local jurisdictions can use for our own Safety elements.*

This evacuation effort is not a County-wide analysis as it is outside the scope of the Safety Element, which is limited to the unincorporated areas of the County. For the incorporated areas of the County, the local jurisdictions (Cities) have their own Safety Elements with evacuation plans, in addition to the recently adopted Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan that coordinates emergency planning across jurisdictions within the County.

- 6. Are evacuation routes already defined? If so - where can we find them?*

The County is coordinating with all departments responsible for evacuation to identify the routes. Using the CalFIRE metric of 30 parcels for a subdivision, the County will also identify all of the limited access locations due to ingress/egress.

7. *I also believe AB 747 also has other evacuation plan requirements of the Safety Plan, other than what you presented in SB 99.*

As for AB 747, it is not part of the Safety Element Update. That analysis looks at evacuation scenarios which is really moving from a planning side of the house to emergency management of hazardous events. The AB 747 analysis will build upon the work performed as part of the Safety Element Update.

8. *Which climate change considerations will be included?*

The County has done a lot of work related to climate change evaluating hazards of concern such as extreme heat, wildfire, sea level rise, and flooding. The Safety Element Update will build off of the prior work that has been completed and develop a strong policy framework that allows the County to address climate change issues and concerns through the development process.

9. *Is there anything new that the County is looking to Implement in this Safety Element general plan.*

There will be information and policies primarily surrounding wildfire, climate change, climate adaptation, evacuation, emergency management, as those are the newest requirements. The analysis will consider current goals and policies and the specific requirements and gaps of Statute 65302G.

10. *Will you be reaching out to the Cal Fire Land Use Planning Program? A no-cost resource to the County of Santa Clara and Atlas Planning that specializes in assisting with Safety Element Updates and complying with State requirements.*

As part of the Safety Element preparation process, the County will have ongoing engagement with the Cal Fire Land Use Planning Program will be engaged. Due to the presence of State Responsibility Areas within the County, coordination is required to ensure compliance with Senate Bill 1241.

11. *Will the outreach required by CA GOV 65302.5 and CA GOV 65352 be taking place prior to adoption of the Safety Element?"*

Outreach associated with the Safety Element update is intended to meet the outreach requirements identified in the California Government Code. Much of this will be accomplished through the required environmental review process in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

CWPP

12. *Who is funding the CWPP update?*

The CWPP is fully funded by CalFIRE. The Santa Clara Fire Safe Council received a CalFire Grant for \$250,000. It is funding for Phase 1, including the Story Map and the flash Community meetings at the Fire Safe Council meeting. The Story Map will be a tool provided to the community that will allow them to not only understand more about the CWPP and the process, but also the projects that contributed to it.

13. What is Phase 2 of the CWPP update? Will that be after the Safety Element is completed?

Phase 2 of the CWPP update is a reference to a grant awarded for a County Coordinator position. The funding is from Cal Fire and Santa Clara County FireSafe Council was awarded a grant for this position in 2023. The Santa Clara County FireSafe Council will use this opportunity, in part, to help track the progress and actions as documented in the final release of the CWPP. The FireSafe Council will serve as the County Coordinator, collaborating with agency and annex partners to track and communicate progress on their CWPP initiatives. This effort is separate from the Safety Element and not tied to its timing.

MJHMP

14. What is a microgrid?

A microgrid is a self-contained electrical network that allows you to generate your own electricity on-site and use it when you need it. The intention behind having microgrids is to assist with reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and they enable integration of renewable energy sources and supporting and modernizing the local electricity distribution system.

15. Will the MJHMP qualify as a project under CEQA?

CEQA is intended to inform government decision-makers and the public about the potential environmental effects of proposed activities and to prevent significant, avoidable environmental damage. The MJHMP, a planning product, identifies several mitigation actions or projects, that may or may not require a CEQA review. The need for a CEQA review is determined on a case-by-case basis and is typically required if there are any physical impacts on the environment.

Outreach and Agency Coordination

16. How is the County Office of Sustainability involved in the climate adaptation planning? As a follow-up to my previous question, are local city sustainability organizations involved in the process?

The Office of Sustainability provides policy and planning tools and technical assistance to County departments and partners to integrate climate hazard considerations and resiliency improvements into operations and infrastructure, and fosters networks to advance local and regional community resiliency solutions. This is accomplished through the following:

- [Silicon Valley 2.0 Climate Change Preparedness Tool](#): OOS conducts and maintains a countywide climate hazard assessment and web-based tool to identify vulnerable assets, locations, and populations across the County and provides resources, data and expertise to assist with County and partner adaptation efforts.
- County Climate Collaborative: OOS facilitates and coordinates countywide and cross-jurisdictional resilience efforts through the Climate Collaborative a community of practice comprised of stakeholders from public agencies, academia, and CBOs working together to guide and coordinate climate action and adaptation planning across the region.

For more information, see the County's [Sustainability Master Plan, Goal 2](#).

17. *How is the County planning in supporting mitigation efforts and services to fund local non-profits, which have been affected the most. Is one of the priorities for the county safety plan to provide mitigation efforts to non-profits to improve emergency plans to support the marginalized communities in our area. Such as the creation of a safety community hub that non-profits can facilitate, train, provide workshops, listening sessions and the creation of an action plan, so the community would be prepared and have the tools to combat mitigation efforts.*

These are programmatic aspects as to how the Safety Element is implemented. These may be integrated into the MJHMP. One way to address is with larger scale policies such a focus on better engagement and involvement by the community and its representative organizations.

18. *Creating a network of non-profits in the coordination of a safety plan to combat these mitigation efforts that can be done on a quarterly basis. I would like to see this as part of the safety plan recommendations.*

This recommendation will be considered, and a potential policy drafted and included in the Safety Element.

WORKSHOP #1 POLLING QUESTIONS

Question 1

Have you experienced a hazardous event since living in Santa Clara County?

- Yes – 89%
- No – 11%
- Unsure – 0%

Question 2

In the past 5 years, what hazardous event has had the greatest impact on your life and home?

- Extreme Heat - 17%
- Drought – 17%
- Wildfire + Smoke – 56%
- Flooding – 6%
- Earthquake/Landslide – 6%
- None of the above – 0%

Question 3

Do you currently have emergency preparedness supplies ready in the event of a hazard?

- Yes – 67%
- No – 28%
- Unsure – 6%

Question 4

Are you aware of County services and programs intended to support community preparedness?

- Yes – 61%
- No – 28%
- Unsure – 11%