



Town of Fairfax Planning Commission Hearing

Adoption of Updated General Plan Safety and Land Use Elements
2010 – 2030 General Plan

June 26, 2025

Background

- The last comprehensive update to the Town of Fairfax General Plan was in 2012
- Some targeted updates are now required to the Land Use, Town Center and Public Safety elements, triggered by adoption of the Housing Element in December of 2023
- Additional Safety Element updates are needed to address new State laws enacted since 2012

Schedule

- Previous Planning Commission Meetings
 - Introduced October 2024
 - February 20, 2025, study session
 - April 17, 2025 Public Hearing (discussed, public hearing held, tabled)
 - May 29, 2025 Study Session, Public Input
- Adoption Timeline
 - June 26, 2025 Public Hearing, Planning Commission
 - July 16, 2025 Public Hearing, Town Council
- Project Funding
 - Not funded in the FY 2025/2026 budget
 - Current fiscal year ends June 30, 2025

Meeting Objectives

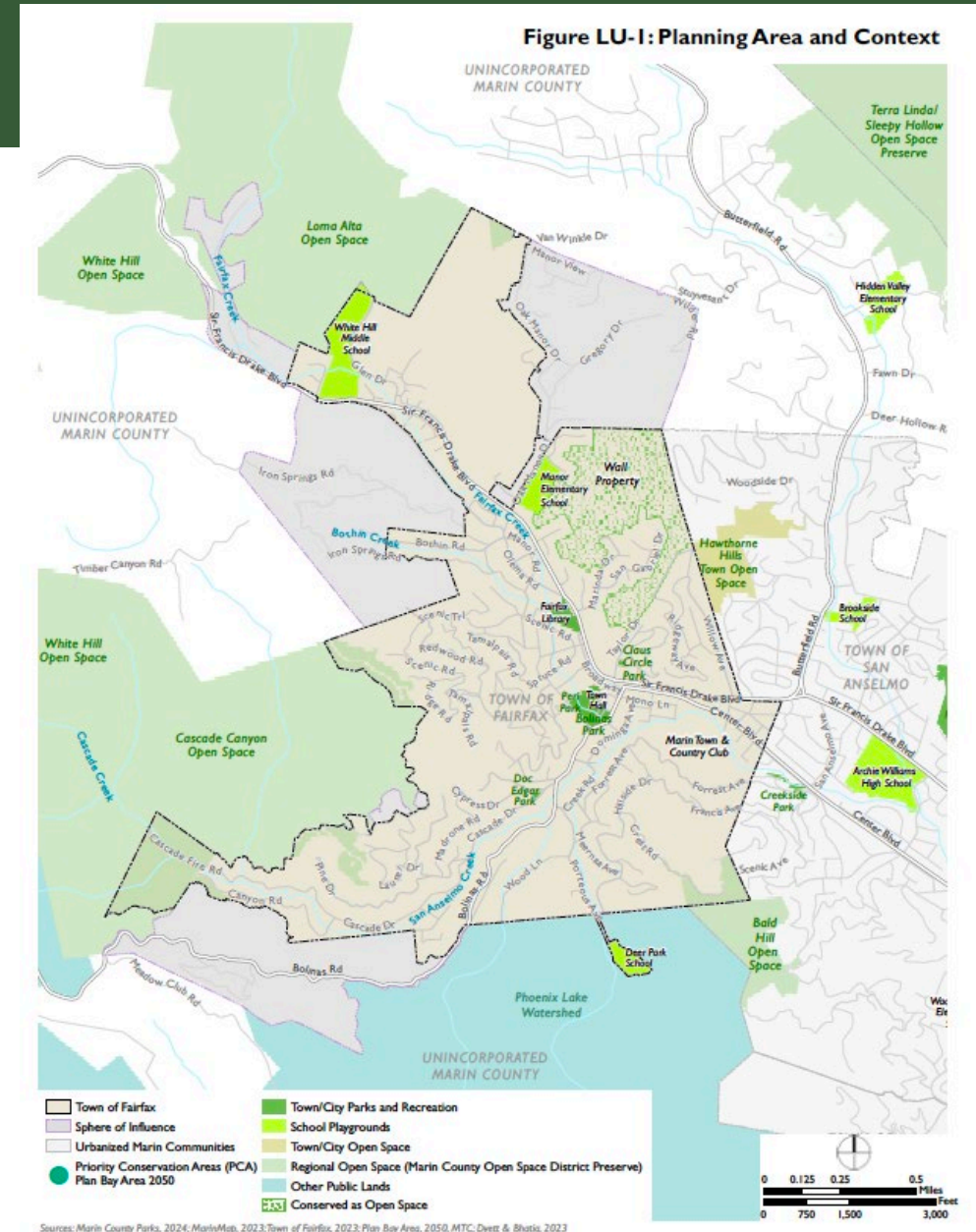
1. Review Planning Commission comments from prior meetings and confirm recommended revisions to the Safety and Land Use Elements
2. Hear comments from the public
3. Receive a recommendation that the Town Council adopt the updated Safety and Land Use Elements

Safety Element Revisions

- Address new legal requirements for the Safety Element
 - Map and address risk in Fire Hazard Severity Zones (Gov. Code Section 65302.(g)(3))
 - Climate vulnerability assessment and related strategies (SB379)
 - Emergency evacuation capacity (SB99 and AB747)
- Refresh data and mapping
- Update the goals and reorganize the Safety Element to respond to new requirements
- Update policies and programs to delete items the Town has completed and add new policies/programs to address current requirements and best practices

Land Use Element Revisions

- Revisions to ensure compliance with State law (ex: add General Plan Land Use designations)
- Ensure consistency across all General Plan Element, including with updated Housing and Safety Elements
- Updating and integrating Town Center Element as a subsection of the Land Use Element to remove conflicts with the Housing Element and Council Resolution 17-41 (2017)



Meeting Procedure

- Prior comments from the Planning Commission and related revisions to Safety and Land Use Elements summarized in a punch list
- Review punch list items and confirm Commission recommendations

Next Steps

- Town Council public hearing scheduled of July 16, 2025 (moved to 3rd Wednesday due to July 4th Holiday)

Punch List – Safety Element

- Clarify what constitutes “New Development;” define and break down into parts as necessary.

The term “development” is defined in the glossary of the General Plan and used throughout the document. Clarifications can be made in the glossary on p.GL-3 to characterize the way it is used in the General Plan as follows

Development or Project. Any activity occurring on land and in or under water including placement or construction of any solid material or structure; construction of roadways and other infrastructure; discharge or disposal of dredged material or any other waste material; grading, dredging, or mining, subdivision or change in the density or intensity of use of land; change in the intensity of use of water; construction, reconstruction, demolition, or alteration to the size of any structure, public or private; and the removal or harvesting of vegetation for other than agricultural purpose but excluding routine repair and maintenance activities. The term "new development" used in policies and programs in this General Plan refers to new construction, redevelopment of previously developed property, and substantial remodels of existing buildings. Specific requirements applicable to new construction, redevelopment of previously developed property, and substantial remodels of existing buildings may be further defined in the Town Code.

- Clarify what “Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)” is.

The following text can be added to the Safety Element on p.23 after the second paragraph under Public Safety Services:

Design of the built environment can also help prevent crime, reduce the fear of crime, and improve the quality of life in urban areas. Research has shown that the most effective deterrent to criminal activity is the risk of being caught, and design of public spaces that places more eyes on the street and limits access points can create safer environments. Strategies for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) include locating windows to overlook sidewalks and parking lots, increasing pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and selectively installing fencing, landscaping, or lighting to control access. Well-maintained buildings and grounds also signal alert, active owners and can deter criminal activity.

- On the first page of safety element, outdated language related to area of Town within high fire severity zones should be revised together with the description of the factors used by CAL FIRE in determining areas of high and very high wildfire risk severity.

Much of the area west of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and north of Bolinas Road virtually the whole of the community is categorized as a High Fire Hazard Severity Zone by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) due to the presence of fire fuels, steep topography, prevailing weather patterns, access and other factors because of the town's steep slopes, which increases wildfire susceptibility and may hinder firefighting efforts.

- **The various organizations involved in emergency preparation and response in Marin County may not be fully and accurately reflected in the Safety Element. For example, the role of Ready Marin should be discussed and the responsibilities of MWPA and RVFD should be reviewed and clarified as needed.**

Through the Firewise program, Fire Safe Marin provides residents who organize as Firewise communities with resources and support for personal preparedness, alerts and warning, and strategies to make their community more fire-resistant. ReadyMarin, a public emergency preparedness program overseen by the Marin County Office of Emergency Management in collaboration with local emergency response partners, also provides programs and services to help residents and businesses plan and prepare for emergencies. Through the activities of ReadyMarin partners, Membership in Central Marin Neighborhood Response Groups also continues to grow in Fairfax, bringing together volunteers who help connect with and support their neighbors before, during, and after disasters of all kinds. ~~RVFD also provides~~ Free Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training is also available that to teaches residents how to take care of themselves, their family, and community until first responders can assist.

- **References to the former Marin County Office of Emergency Services, now renamed Office of Emergency Management should be corrected.**

S-3.1.1 Periodically update the Emergency Operations Plan with technical assistance from the Marin County Office of Emergency Services Management. [NEW]

- RVFD pointed out there is no mechanism for registration. Instead RFVD encourages neighbors to help each other and suggested the Town can support this with outreach via email blasts and newsletters.

S-3.7.3 Periodically conduct outreach to community groups in Fairfax, such as Firewise Communities or Neighborhood Response Groups, to promote a "help your neighbors" approach that accounts for residents in their areas with access and functional needs in community resilience building initiatives ~~encourage residents with access and functional needs to register with the Office of Emergency Services to ensure that their needs are incorporated into all emergency response plans. [NEW]~~

- Commissioners questioned whether references to Nixle should remain in the Safety Element and pointed out that the Town does not directly use Alert Marin so Policy S-3.9 should be updated.

Text on p.16 will be revised as follows:

OEM has the authority to establish an emergency operations center to serve as the location from which centralized emergency management can be performed during a major emergency or disaster, facilitating a coordinated response by community, local, state, and federal agencies. OEM maintains the Marin County Emergency Portal, a website which houses the latest information on emergencies, and operates the ~~countywide emergency alert systems~~: Alert-Marin, the county's primary system to alert residents of emergencies in which the public may need to evacuate, shelter in place, or take some other protective action; and. Other public safety agencies in Marin County use Nixle, which provides other, typically less urgent information including major traffic disruptions, drift smoke from a distant fire, and to let the public know about missing persons.

Policy S-3.9 will be revised as follows:

S-3.9 Support the Use of Alert Marin, the countywide alert and early warning systems (~~Alert Marin and Nixle~~), to notify residents by phone, text, or email of extreme weather conditions and/or the need to evacuate in the event of emergency. The system should also be used to broadcast the location of evacuation centers, particularly for residents of vulnerable areas and neighborhoods with constrained emergency access

- **Lack of cell coverage.** The text discusses that certain “dead zones” exist in Fairfax, but this should be broadened to mention “holes” in cell coverage existing throughout the Town. A process to identify dead zones would be helpful.

Areas with limited coverage were identified with reference to coverage maps from all major carriers. Coverage is dynamic and continually evolving, so a level of flexibility in the policy to provide latitude for implementation is recommended.

P.19: Although not fully reflected in MWPA scenario planning tool, some locations in Fairfax, such as areas along Cascade Drive and the northern part of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, have limited cellphone coverage, which can make access to information difficult if the power is out following a natural hazard event.

- **A commissioner recommended actions to build the resilience of local businesses to disasters. San Anselmo General Plan Safety Element cited as a reference.**

Policies/Programs S-2-7 through S-2.8.4 address community preparedness and apply broadly to all segments of the community, including residents and businesses. Some clarifications can be made as noted to specifically reference businesses. San Anselmo's Element does not have any concrete strategies beyond raising awareness and policies are less specific than in this draft. Statewide, it is regional agencies and fire departments that have primary responsibility for programs to assist businesses. Examples include:

- ReadySetPrep (City of San Diego Fire-Rescue Department), a business-focused extension of the city's Ready San Diego initiative that provides customizable continuity planning templates, emergency supply checklists, and interactive training modules tailored to different industries. Employee engagement in preparedness is encouraged through toolkits and practice drills.
- Business Emergency Resiliency Training (BERT) is a public-private collaboration led by fire departments and emergency services in Orange County. Especially useful for small- to medium-sized businesses with limited in-house expertise, BERT offers live workshops and certification programs teaching businesses how to build emergency operations plans, conduct drills, and coordinate with first responders.
- FIREWISE Business Communities – NFPA / Local Fire Agency Partnership. Though traditionally residential, some California fire departments are adapting FIREWISE principles to commercial properties in Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) zones. This program offers businesses participation in risk assessments, defensible space creation, and mitigation grants.

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Policy/Program edits:

S-2.7 Promote community awareness and understanding of threat hazards, disaster response, and steps that can be taken to reduce personal and business risk by...

S-2.8 Proactively engage community members residents and businesses in supporting and helping coordinate collaborative town-wide efforts to prepare residents to respond to emergencies of all kinds.

S-1.15.2 Encourage the formation of Firewise community groups within Fairfax, where residents and businesses work together to prepare themselves, their homes and their properties against the threat of wildfire with guidance from Fire Safe Marin. [NEW]

- Policy S-1.19 only references post-fire recovery; recovery from other disasters should be addresses as well.

The policy will be edited as follows and relocated under Goal S-2 which deals with community resilience; Policies S-1.20 thru S.1-24 will be renumbered accordingly:

S-2.9 Work with responsible agencies and nongovernmental organizations to plan for post-fire disaster recovery in a manner that reduces further losses or damages from future fires.

- **A commissioner questioned the need for neighborhood watch programs.**

S-4.7 Employ community-based policing strategies and encourage [the establishment of neighborhood watch programs in] partnerships with between community groups and the Fairfax Police Department.

- **Commissioners requested that identification of supplemental sources of emergency water supply (for fire suppression) be maintained as policy or program in the General Plan.**

NEW PROGRAM S-1.18.1 Work with the Ross Valley Fire Department to identify additional sources of local water supply in Fairfax that can be used to supplement the supply available for fire suppression in the event of an emergency.

- Consider a new program to evaluate the feasibility of undergrounding powerlines with help from the Town.

Town resources cannot be used for individual property improvements; however, other strategies could be used to underground power line, such as creating a special district.

NEW PROGRAM S-2.2.2 Explore the feasibility of establishing assessment districts or other mechanisms to fund the undergrounding of utility lines, recognizing that undergrounding reduces risks during fires, earthquakes, and storms, improves the town's aesthetics, and reduces utility company maintenance costs for tree trimming.

- Commissioners recommended rewording Program S-3.3.1 to clarify it applies to more than SB99 roads:

S-3.3.1 Pursue funding to facilitate structural retrofits, roadway improvements, and abatement of vegetative hazards, including in existing residential neighborhoods without two points of emergency ingress/egress.”

Punch List – Land Use Element

- Clarify that “open space” is not only “surrounding” the town; open space is important with the Town limits are well.

The following edits will be made on p.1:

Today Fairfax retains a village-like quality, with a charming downtown, distinct neighborhoods, and large areas of surrounding visible open space within and surrounding the community.

Additionally, the following text will be added after the first paragraph on p.3:

Priority Conservation Areas

Within and around Fairfax, important areas of natural open space have been classified as Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). PCAs are regionally significant areas to be protected and improved and include natural habitats, farms and ranchlands, recreation areas, urban green spaces and locations that can help fight the effects of climate change. Working with the Fairfax Open Space Committee the Town of Fairfax has nominated several PCAs within and adjacent to the town limits of Fairfax. Local governments can nominate PCAs, but it is up to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) Executive Board to establish PCAs, which often cross jurisdictional boundaries. As of June, 2025, 80 PCAs were adopted by ABAG, but more PCA may be nominated after this date. MTC/ABAG maintains a website on PCAs, which is updated periodically <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/land-use/priority-conservation-areas-pcas>. As of June 2025, not all PCA boundaries have been established and are undergoing revisions. The ABAG Executive Board intends to act on new and revised PCAs in the Fall of 2025.

- The definition of the planning area and the Sphere of Influence could be clarified. Dixon was referenced as a good example.

To address this, the following edits will be made on p.1 of the Land Use Element.

PLANNING AREA

The planning area is defined as the land area addressed by the General Plan, including land within Town limits and the Sphere of Influence (SOI) outside Town limits as shown on **Figure LU-1**. The boundary of the Planning Area was determined in response to State law requiring each local jurisdiction to include in its General Plan all territory within the boundaries of the incorporated area as well as “any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning” (California Government Code Section 65300). The Fairfax planning area comprises approximately 2,040 acres (3.19 square miles) of incorporated and unincorporated land.

The existing Town limits encompass Of this, approximately 1,435 acres (2.24 square miles), or 70 percent of the planning area, is incorporated land within the legal jurisdiction of the Town of Fairfax. The existing uses within the Town limits include residential and commercial developments, as well as public facilities including parks, schools, and government offices. The Sphere of Influence (SOI) is defined as the ultimate physical boundary and service area of the town, and it encompasses both incorporated and unincorporated territory that is envisioned to be the town’s ultimate service area. The Marin County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) has jurisdiction over defining Fairfax’s SOI and acts on annexations The SOI is an area outside of the Fairfax jurisdictional boundary, or Town limits, that designates the Town’s probable future boundary and service area. Fairfax’s SOI encompasses approximately 605 acres (0.95 square miles) of unincorporated land within the County of Marin outside of the Town limits within unincorporated Marin County, or 30 percent of the total land located in the planning area.

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The Marin Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) has jurisdiction over defining Fairfax's SOI and acts on annexations and the approval of service contracts outside Town limits. The purpose of the SOI is to coordinate and shape logical and orderly development while discouraging urban sprawl and the premature conversion of agricultural and open space lands by preventing overlapping jurisdictions and duplication of services. While individual jurisdictions establish their own planning goals, on a regional level, the LAFCo for each California county helps coordinate the efficient provision of services for the benefit of area residents and property owners. ~~The planning area boundary was determined in response to State law, which requires each city and town to include all territory within the boundaries of the incorporated area as well as "any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency's judgement bears relation to its planning," within the general plan planning area.~~ The Town only has jurisdiction within the Town limits, although the policy framework of the Land Use Element address coordination with the County and other jurisdictions in the region for conservation and development of land in the SOI.

- Commissioners recommended clarifying where to find the land use designations within the Element:

P. 3, last paragraph - clarify where land use designations are: "Described below, each designation includes standards for density or intensity of use."

- **Correct a typo on p.9:**

Originally gifted to Charles Snowden Fairfax, for whom the Town is named, the property was operated as a popular sports and recreation club between 1944 and 1972 with baseball diamonds, a sunbathing lawn, picnic areas, and swimming pools as well as an outdoor bandstand and dance floor called The Redwood Bowl, from which live dance music was broadcast throughout the western United States on Saturday nights.

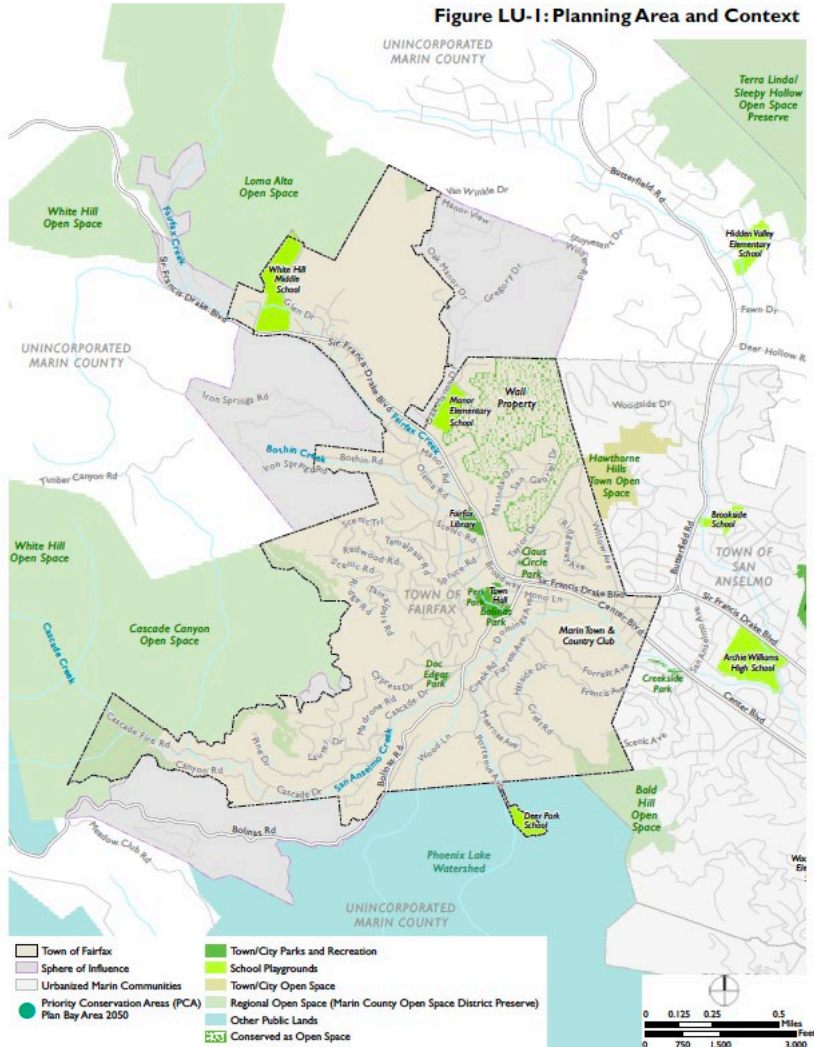
- **Commissioners recommended clarifications to the guidance for the future Town Center Area Plan to be created under Program LU-3.1.1:**

LU-3.1.1 Adopt and implement a Town Center Area Plan with the following objectives:

- Integrate a vibrant mix of retail, restaurant, entertainment, commercial and residential uses;
- Enhance walkability and build pedestrian and bicycle connections to and within the Town Center Area;
- Foster opportunities for people to meet and gather, including through the incorporation of plazas, green spaces, paseos, terraces, and outdoor dining spaces;
- Establish a comprehensive parking management program for the area; and
- Build a distinctive visual presence for the Town Center Area as viewed by passersby on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and strengthen sense of place with gateway design features, branded distinctive amenities, landscaping and greenery.

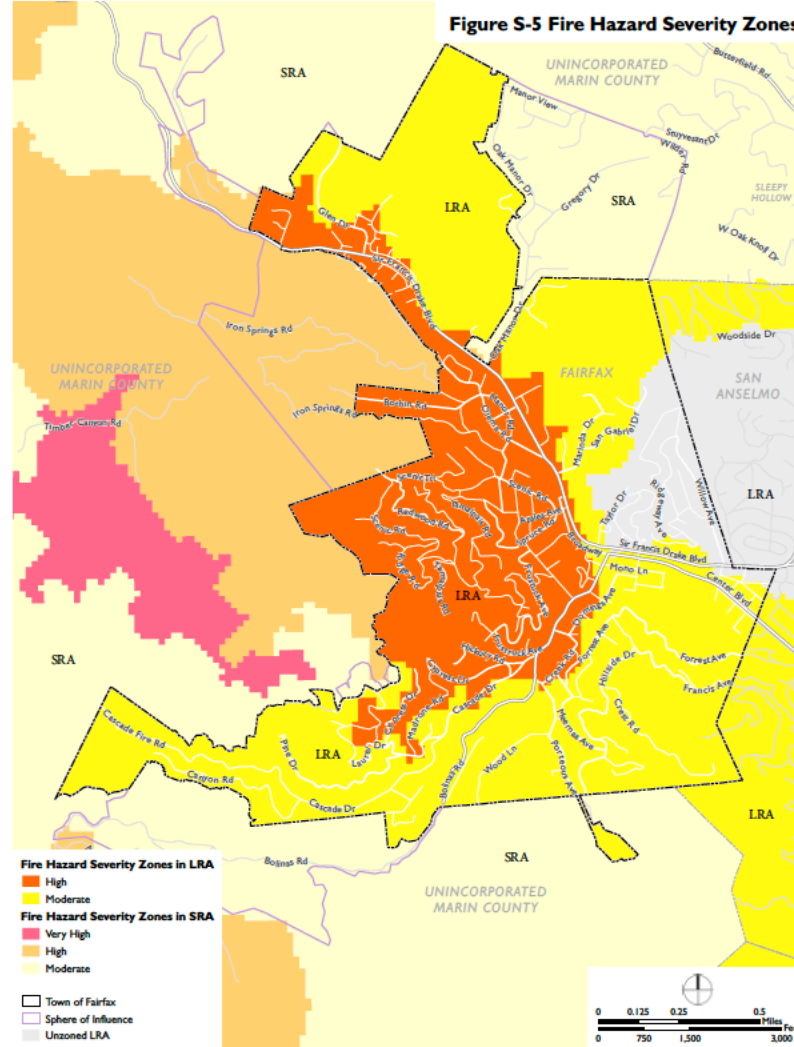
Revised Maps

Figure LU-1: Planning Area and Context



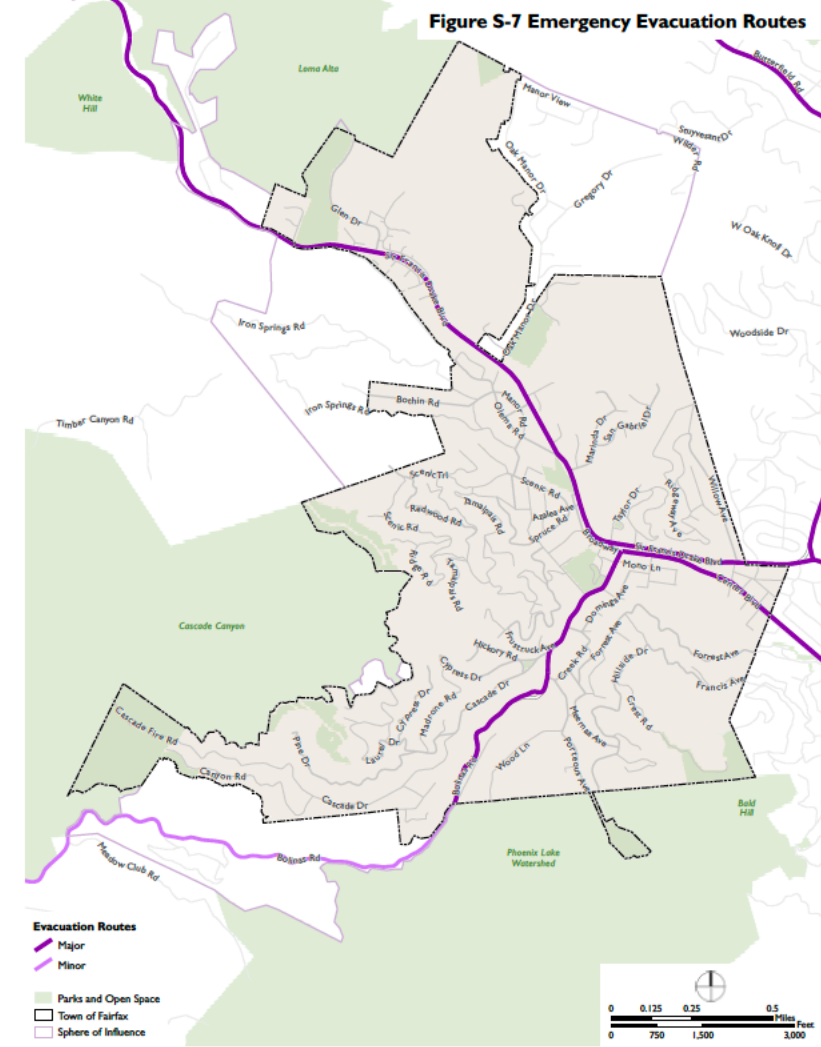
Sources: Marin County Parks, 2024; MarinMap, 2023; Town of Fairfax, 2023; Plan Bay Area, 2050; MTC; Dyett & Bhatta, 2023

Figure S-5 Fire Hazard Severity Zones



Sources: PHSZ in SRA and LRA, CalFire GIS Data, 2024 & 2025; MarinMap, 2022; Marin County GIS, 2022; Town of Fairfax, 2022; Dyett & Bhatta, 2022

Figure S-7 Emergency Evacuation Routes



Sources: MarinWildfire, 2023; MarinMap, 2022; Marin County GIS, 2022; Town of Fairfax, 2022; Dyett & Bhatta, 2022