FIRE ADAPTED COMMUNITIES LEARNING NETWORK

A quick guide for community leaders

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Using Plans and Regulations to Increase Community Fire Adaptation: Summary

Wildfire disasters are often shaped by a number of factors in the built and natural environment, including topography, fuel continuity, fuel type (e.g., vegetation, structures, attachments), development patterns, land use and ingress and egress. Plans and regulations provide communities with tools to influence many of these factors, ultimately to enhance resiliency and fire adaptation. This set of quick guides introduces opportunities to integrate wildfire into planning and regulatory approaches, shares insights on where they apply and how they work, and provides tips on how they may complement other fire adapted community strategies.

Different plans and regulations are appropriate for different development patterns.
Photo: Molly Mowery, WPI

Throughout this quick guide series, "planning" refers to a wide variety of approaches that enable a community to make better land use and development decisions. Planning is a process that often involves a number of stakeholders, including county or city planning department staff, technical experts, agencies, property owners and other interested members of the public. Plans and regulations are the outcomes of a planning process and serve as tools to guide and implement a community's decisions. They can be effective at addressing wildfire risk to both existing and future development through different mechanisms.

There is no magic formula to guarantee plan or code adoption, but there are a few common denominators for success:

- Engage the public early in the planning process.
- Invite and listen to opposing stakeholder viewpoints.
- Ensure the timing is right. (Does the community have more important priorities right now?)
- Budget for adequate staff capacity and resources (e.g., equipment, consultants, maps and other funding assistance) necessary to implement policies, regulations and associated efforts.
- View the process as a series of steps. Often plans and regulations take on an evolutionary process, and it may be easier to get some of what you want now and push for more later.
- Combine with other FAC efforts, including outreach and education programs, to continually enhance public awareness of the need to address wildfire risk.
- Finally, learn from others. QG 3.3 highlights planning and regulatory tools in action in communities throughout the country.

Plans provide the foundation for taking action. Through goals, policies, objectives and implementation strategies, successful plans serve as a roadmap to meet a well-defined vision of the future. A variety of plans may be useful for working toward community wildfire resilience, including emergency response and hazard-oriented plans,

community and neighborhood plans, resilience and sustainability plans, and other topical plans that may be relevant (e.g., transportation, infrastructure, urban forest plans). To understand how wildfire fits into these plans, see QG 3.1.

Regulations are the means by which many plans become a reality—they are an official rule, law or order issued by an executive authority or governmental regulatory agency. A number of codes are at a community's disposal for implementing regulations, including the building code, fire code, land use/development code and zoning/subdivision code. Standalone codes, such as a wildland-urban interface code, are also an option. QG 3.2 builds on the planning process described in QG 3.1, providing guidance for identifying and adopting wildfire regulations.

The effectiveness of a plan or regulation often depends on a variety of factors, including community buy-in, priority or justification for the proposal, appropriateness (e.g., how far-reaching the action may be on the community), capacity to maintain the plan, capacity to enforce the regulation (when applicable), internal agency support and coordination with other plans.

Resources

Hazard Mitigation Planning Resources

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides a number of resources focused on local mitigation planning, including a recently developed guide to help communities analyze local plans and integrate the local natural hazard mitigation plan into a community's comprehensive plan.
https://www.fema.gov/hazard-mitigation-planning-resources#

Community Wildfire Safety Through Regulation – A best practices guide for planners and regulators

This is a free resource produced by the National Fire Protection Association that offers planners and public officials technical and legal justifications for adopting wildfire regulations. http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/outdoors/wildland-fires/reports-case-studies-and-guides

American Planning Association Hazards Planning Center

The American Planning Association provides information, webinars, and other materials on topics related to planning, resiliency, and recovery. Many of these resources are available to the public and are free of charge.
https://www.planning.org/nationalcenters/hazards/

Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire Program

The new Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire Program provides communities with increased capacity to address technical planning efforts. Program contact: Molly Mowery, email: molly@wildfireplanning.com

Safe Growth Audit

The safe growth audit is a planning tool that helps communities understand how current policies, ordinances and plans may affect public safety in terms of natural hazards and future development.
http://facnetwork.org/safe-growth-audits-another-effective-tool-for-the-fac-practitioner/

General Plan Technical Advice Series: Fire Hazard Planning

Individual states may have their own laws and guidance for wildfire planning, however, a recently published technical advice series by the California Governor's Office of Planning and Research offers land use professionals guidance on wildfire hazard planning requirements and planning mitigation tools. Much of this guidance could be considered best practice for others. http://www.opr.ca.gov/docs/Final_6.26.15.pdf

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