

Where Do We Go From Here?

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We (planners) haven't taken fire hazards seriously enough

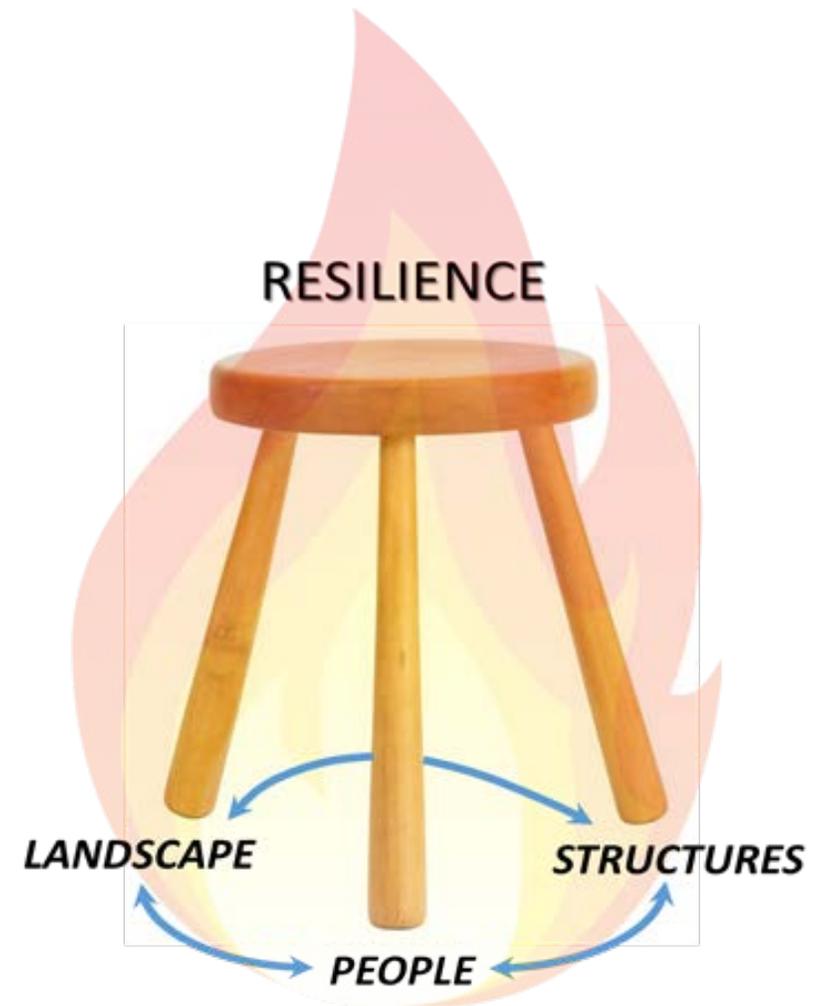
- Left up to fire suppression agencies, but ...
 - Constrained by regulation & institutional culture
 - Focus on project-specific mitigation, not holistic planning approach
 - Seldom asked: is this the right place?
- We need to learn more about fire behavior and community vulnerability
- Not enough focus on preparation and maintenance after project built and occupied

What do we need to do differently?

Three-legged Stools

- A planners' framework: Design, Preparation and Maintenance
- Tools: Comprehensive Planning, Current Planning, Code Compliance

Goal: a more holistic planning framework that uses tools familiar to planners



[Source: Max A. Moritz]

Resources

- New Planners Advisory Service (PAS) Report: *Planning the Wildland-Urban Interface* (By Molly Mowery, AICP, Anna Read, AICP, Kelly Johnson, AICP and Tareq Wafaie, AICP, PAS Report 594, 2019)
- SB 182 (Jackson)
- OPR Technical Advisory
- Personal Experience





American Planning Association

Creating Great Communities for All

PAS Report 594

- What is the wildland-urban interface?
 - *“Any developed area where conditions affecting the combustibility of both natural and cultivated vegetation (wildland fuels) and structures or infrastructure (built fuels) allow for the ignition and spread of fire through the combined fuels.”*
 - *Intermix* WUI areas and *Interface* WUI areas; different vulnerability means different planning approaches
- 30 percent of Californians already live in the WUI
 - Desirable areas: environmental amenities, privacy, proximity to recreation, **affordability**

PAS REPORT 594

PLANNING THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

Molly Mowery, AICP, Anna Read, AICP, Kelly Johnston, RPF, and Tareq Wafale, AICP

Vulnerability: Not Uniform at Community or Individual Lot Scale

Proximity to ladder fuels

- Oak woodlands vs conifer forest
- Past fire-exclusion

Mid-slope location

Development Characteristics

- Wood fences
- Cantilevered decks
- Flammable landscaping
- Non-ignition resistant roofs and siding
- “Ignition-resistant” homes are not fire-proof

Vulnerability:
Some
parameters not
easily
controlled
through design
processes



Rain gutters



Outdoor furniture



Firewood/scrap wood piles



Weather patterns

Can't be controlled, but
can be understood &
planned for



Preparation and maintenance

How Can Planners Use this Knowledge?

Wildfire Planning at every scale

- Community
- Neighborhood/Subdivision
- Building and lot

Planners usually focus on Community and Neighborhood scale

- Many effective measures and outcomes influenced at lot scale; maintenance is key
- Fire protection professionals say: “start at the house and work outward”

A Holistic Approach Using Familiar Tools



Do your homework: research



Engage the Community



Identify Hazards (Spatial and Qualitative/Quantitative)



Understand local fire history



Understand local fire ecology



Use this process to develop goals, objectives and policies that work in your community

Neighborhood- Scale Hazard Mitigation: Fuel Reduction



Expensive



Needs neighborhood-scale leadership



Resident concerns about loss of privacy and “natural” setting

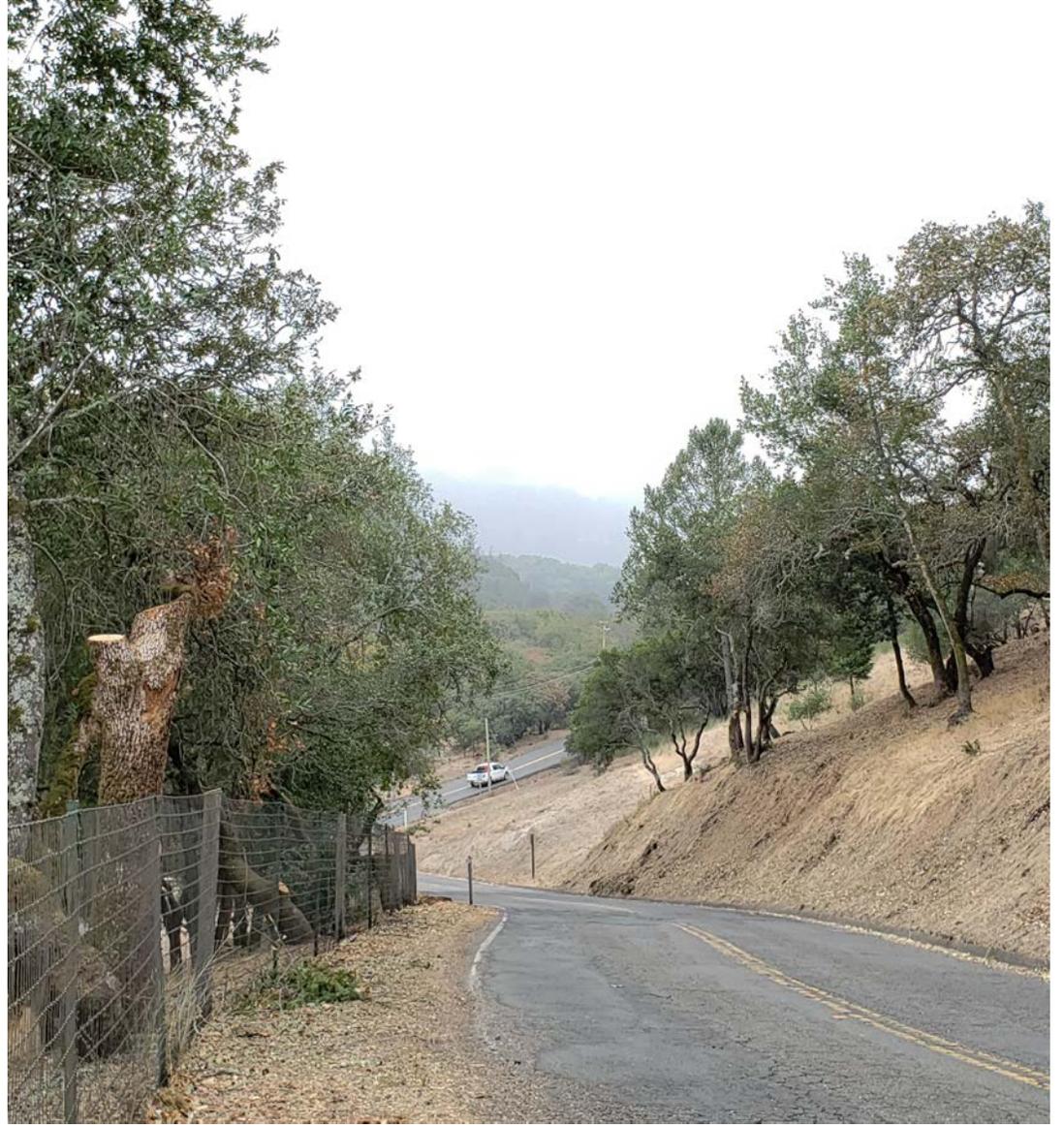


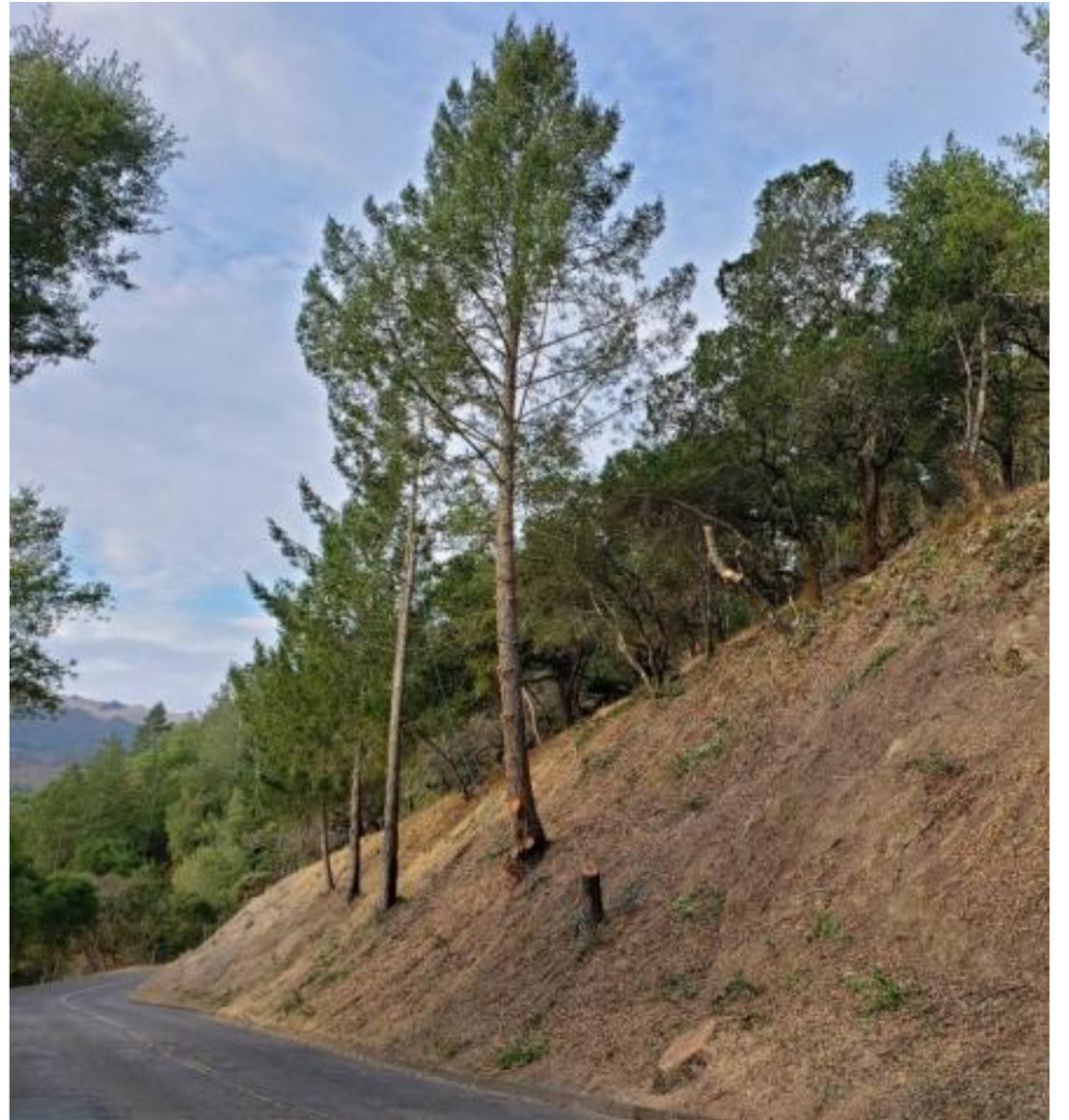
Requires maintenance in perpetuity



May change design and visual impact expectations











Implications
for Design
Review
decisions



How Might Planning Practice Change in California? SB 182

- A new normal: California's wildfire problems are getting worse and need aggressive solutions
- Uses some of the planning tools and principles in PAS Report 594
- Improve safety of WUI communities by strengthening existing development and careful planning in siting and design of new development

SB 182: New Requirements for State Agencies

- Office of the State Fire Marshal
 - Update Wildfire Severity Zone Maps
 - Update wildfire protection standards (e.g. defensible space, EVAs, building standards, “community design and layout”)
 - Develop and use a new wildfire “risk model” to quantify hazards at community and parcel scale
 - Identify areas “where new residential development poses **exceptional risk** to future occupants” and to fire and public safety personnel

SB 182: New Requirements for State Agencies

- Governor's Office of Planning and Research
 - Identify local codes, policies & best planning practices in very high-risk areas, wildfire risk reduction and preparedness
 - Local retrofit strategies
 - Establish a clearinghouse for local agency best-practices

SB 182: New Safety Element Requirements

- Update the Safety Element with a “comprehensive retrofit strategy to reduce risk and damage during wildfires”
 - Include goals and milestones, identify potential funding sources
 - Include process for inventorying vulnerable structures in need of fire-hardening retrofit
 - Identify developments that have only one emergency evacuation route
- Focused on existing development in vulnerable communities; state law already requires updating the Safety Element to address wildfire hazards

SB 182: New Land Use Element Requirements

- Update the General Plan Land Use Element
 - Applies only in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones
 - Goals, objectives & policies to protect lives and property from “unreasonable” risk of wildfire
 - Consistency with Safety Element and Local Hazard Mitigation Plan
 - Include feasible implementation measures

SB 182 Local Agency Accountability

- Land Use Element provisions must be reviewed at least every 8 years (with HE revision)
- Local agencies make findings that wildfire risk reduction standards have been implemented or that agencies are making “adequate progress”
- Findings subject to review by BOF and local fire protection agencies
- BOF will notify agencies if they are not in compliance with state law; may notify Attorney General
- Interested parties have standing to sue local agencies for compliance

SB 182 Zoning Consistency and Findings Required

- Local agencies must update their zoning ordinance to conform with updated Land Use Element
- Findings required to approve any new discretionary development (including tentative maps) and any ministerial approval that results in new residence
 - Findings must show that “the project and all structures within the project are protected from wildfire risk in accordance with [SB 182] wildfire risk reduction standards”
 - Until 12/31/2025, approval can be based on a finding of “adequate progress” toward full implementation of standards

New Development Standards in Very High Hazard Areas

- Standards for projects of any size:
 - Comply with all applicable fire protection regulations (WUI building code, PRC § 4290, etc.)
 - Conform with a “wildland fire hazard assessment and wildfire hazard mitigation plan”
 - Must have an enforcement program to ensure ongoing compliance
 - Comply with regulations “relating to the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations”

New Development Standards in Very High Hazard Areas

- Standards for developments of 9 units or more must comply with all-projects standards, **plus:**
 - Site-specific fire protection plan “to resist the encroachment of uncontrolled fire”
 - Development layout that “reduces wildfire risk to the greatest extent practicable” (clustering, fire breaks, etc.)
 - “Low-risk fire safety area” for shelter-in-place
 - Funding mechanism to maintain common areas; units subject to assessment
 - Development can be “reasonably accessed and served” for fire protection

New Development Standards in Very High Hazard Areas

- Projects of 100 units or more must comply with all-projects and 9+ unit standards, **plus:**
 - Must be consistent with all applicable recommendations in OPR Guidance document
 - Comply with any additional wildfire risk reduction standards adopted by the State Fire Marshal

Where We End Up . . .



- Better Understanding of fire behavior & fire ecology means better planning using familiar tools
- Communities and individual residents have essential role in ongoing safety
- Not “set and forget” – maintain resilience features at a community scale