



American Planning Association  
**California Chapter**

*Creating Great Communities*

March 16, 2021

Senator Mike McGuire  
State Capitol, Room 5061  
Sacramento, California 95814

SUBJECT:        **Support for SB 12 (McGuire) – Wildfire Planning and Mitigation in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ)**

Dear Senator McGuire:

The American Planning Association, California Chapter (APA California) is pleased to support your bill, SB 12, which makes a number of important changes regarding planning for and permitting development in the very high fire hazard severity zones (VHFHSZ).

Over the past few years, California has faced the deadliest and most destructive fires in California’s history. Sadly, these and many other wildfires in the recent past have become the state’s “new normal,” and in turn, cities and counties must do more to prepare. This means recasting how land use planning is done in fire-prone areas and ensuring local jurisdictions are supported with funding to make critical changes.

### **Planning**

APA California supports state action that requires local governments to use good land use planning to reduce wildfire risk for new development by considering reducing density in outlying fire-prone areas and discouraging upzonings and new subdivisions in fire hazard areas. Cities and counties with VHFHSZ in their jurisdiction should focus housing development in the least hazardous areas when possible, which may mean increasing density in those less-hazardous areas. They also need to include robust fire hazard mitigation measures for all new developments within the VHFHSZs. SB 12 will require local jurisdictions to make changes to the land use and safety elements of the General Plan to help implement these sound planning principles.

The planning changes in SB 12 include important wildfire risk reduction standards to be applied to new developments, including decisions about whether or not new development should even be approved in the VHFHSZ. The bill also requires local governments to create a comprehensive retrofit strategy, identify high fire risk areas within the jurisdiction and provides a robust list of data and analysis based on the Office of Planning and Research’s (OPR) “Fire Hazard Planning – General Plan Technical Advice Series.” SB 12 will also require jurisdictions to develop overlay zones in their zoning ordinance to ensure consistency with the General Plan.

### **Funding**

Another critical piece of the puzzle is adequate funding. SB 12 proposes a number of planning changes that will require extensive work, much of it in smaller jurisdictions with limited staff resources. Retrofitting is also another costly but important issue that must be addressed. Existing development in these areas are very vulnerable, and important retrofitting just won’t happen without funding. However costly, funding will be a long-term investment in the preservation and safety of California’s communities. APA



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California hopes that these critical issues remain a priority for legislative attention and as the bill moves, that the Legislature will consider more funding support to help jurisdictions comply with these new requirements to reduce the destruction that future wildfires may cause.

APA California commends your commitment to this issue. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that California will continue to face more intense wildfires (and other natural disasters) in the future. Planning must be done now to protect homes and lives. All of the elements of SB 12 are critical components of the discussion that, together with additional funding support, we hope will better prepare our communities for the wildfires that we know will be part of California's future. For those reasons, APA California stands in support of SB 12.

If you have any questions, please contact Lauren De Valencia, Stefan/George Associates, APA California's lobbyist, at 916 443-5301, [lauren@stefangeorge.com](mailto:lauren@stefangeorge.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Eric Phillips' with a long, sweeping underline.

Eric Phillips  
Vice President Policy and Legislation  
APA California

cc: Senate Governance and Finance Committee  
Senate Housing Committee  
Senate Republican Caucus  
The Governor  
The Office of Planning and Research  
The Department of Housing and Community Development