



PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: September 8, 2025

ITEM NUMBER: NB-1

**SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION REGARDING GENERAL PLAN SAFETY
ELEMENT TECHNICAL UPDATE**

**FROM: ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT/
PLANNING DIVISION**

PRESENTATION BY: AMBER GREGG, CONTRACT PLANNER

**FOR FURTHER
INFORMATION**

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RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive the staff presentation and provide feedback on the Safety Element technical update.

BACKGROUND

The Safety Element is one of the seven mandatory elements of the City's General Plan, required by State law. Its purpose is to protect the community from risks associated with natural and human-made hazards such as earthquakes, wildfires, flooding, hazardous materials, and emergency preparedness.

State law requires that jurisdictions periodically update their Safety Element to ensure consistency with the most recent Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP), the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) Guidelines, and updated hazard mapping by State and Federal agencies.

California Government Code 65302.15(a) requires upon the next revision of a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan on or after January 1, 2022, a local jurisdiction's safety element be reviewed and updated as necessary to identify evacuation routes and their capacity, safety, and viability under a range of emergency scenarios. The City of Costa Mesa adopted its most recent Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) in 2023, prepared by Atlas Consulting. In alignment with this plan, the City is preparing a technical update to the

Safety Element, also developed by Atlas Consulting, to ensure hazard-related data, maps, and policies remain current and accurate.

The Safety Element update is not a policy overhaul, but a technical update to incorporate the following key information:

- Cal Fire - Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps (updated in 2025);
- FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (last updated in 2022);
- 2023 LHMP findings and mitigation measures.

These updates ensure that the City maintains compliance with State Planning Law and provides the most current hazard and safety information to guide land use decisions, protect public health and safety, and support eligibility for State and Federal funding for hazard mitigation.

DESCRIPTION

The purpose of this discussion is to present the purpose of a Safety Element, the components of the draft technical update to the Safety Element to the Planning Commission for informational purposes, provide opportunity for questions and public discussion, and receive feedback from the Planning Commission and the public.

Why Cities Update Safety Elements

State law (Gov. Code §§ 65302(g), 65302.6) requires Safety Elements to be kept current with the most recent hazard information. Updating the Safety Element ensures:

- **Consistency with the LHMP:** Safety Elements must reflect adopted LHMPs to streamline hazard mitigation planning.
- **Integration of Updated Hazard Data:** Incorporation of Cal Fire and FEMA maps ensures that risk assessments are based on the latest scientific data.
- **Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness:** Aligning policies and data with current hazard conditions allows the City to better prepare for and respond to emergencies.
- **Funding Eligibility:** Maintaining an up-to-date Safety Element helps preserve the City's eligibility for State and Federal hazard mitigation and disaster recovery funds.

Scope of the Technical Update

The Safety Element update is focused on ensuring that existing goals and policies remain relevant and that technical references, maps, and baseline conditions are up to date. Key areas addressed include:

1. **Wildfire Hazards** – Integration of Cal Fire’s 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps. Cal Fire’s 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps are significant because it marks the first time that portions of the City of Costa Mesa have been designated as Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

2. **Flood Hazards** – Updates to reflect FEMA’s revised Flood Insurance Rate Maps.

FEMA periodically updates the Flood Insurance Rate Maps to reflect existing conditions and updated weather patterns.

3. **Seismic & Geologic Hazards** – Confirmation of existing references and consistency with the State Geologic Hazards information.

4. **Hazardous Materials & Climate Change Risks** – Updated baseline conditions (last updated in 2015) consistent with the 2023 LHMP.

No major policy changes are proposed at this time; the intent is to ensure consistency, accuracy, and technical validity.

Next Steps

Staff anticipates presenting the Safety Element Updates to the Planning Commission for formal recommendation to the City Council during the first quarter of 2026.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

This informational session does not require environmental review. The technical update will be evaluated for consistency with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) prior to Planning Commission and City Council adoption.

PUBLIC NOTICE

There is no public notice requirement for a discussion item. However, all General Plan Amendment reviews are subject to public hearing notices pursuant to State law and the Municipal Code and noticing will be provided for future public hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council.

CONCLUSION

The Safety Element technical update ensures that Costa Mesa’s General Plan remains consistent with State law, the City’s 2023 LHMP, and updated hazard mapping resources. This update is an important step in maintaining community safety, improving hazard preparedness, and ensuring eligibility for State and Federal disaster assistance.

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission receive and file the presentation and provide input as desired.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Link to Costa Mesa Safety Element, adopted 2015:
http://ftp.costamesaca.gov/costamesaca/generalplan2015-2035/adopted/08_FinalDraft_SafetyElement.pdf
2. Link to Costa Mesa Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, adopted 2023:
<https://www.costamesaca.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/52032/637992796596200000>
3. Cal Fire 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Map
4. FEMA 2022 Flood Insurance Map