



CITY OF GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM

Report: Adoption of Glendale General Plan's 2025 Safety Element Update

1. Resolution to adopt the 2025 Safety Element Update and California Environmental Quality Act Exemption findings pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15301(b).

COUNCIL ACTION

Item Type: Action Item

Approved for April 1, 2025 **calendar**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In compliance with recent State legislation, the City is revising its 2003 Safety Element to include updated information on natural hazards such as wildfires and floods, as well as evacuation and emergency preparedness and response. Recent State Law also requires the Safety Element to identify how these and other hazards in Glendale are exacerbated by climate change, and what populations, locations, and community features (natural assets and built infrastructure) are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards and changing climate conditions. Staff and the City's consultants have updated the 2003 Safety Element to meet these new State mandates. The 2025 Safety Element Update, highlighting the changes using strikeouts for deletions and underlines for additions, is attached as Exhibit 1 to this report. Staff has determined that the policy updates to the Safety Element are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

RECOMMENDATION

Community Development Department staff respectfully recommend that the City Council adopt the 2025 Safety Element Update as drafted.

The Planning Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 5, 2025, unanimously recommended that the City Council adopted the 2025 Safety Element Update and adopt CEQA exemption findings.

ANALYSIS

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Background

The Safety Element is a state-mandated General Plan element that must identify potential natural and human-created hazards that could affect Glendale's residents, businesses, and services. The goal of the Safety Element is to establish a framework that anticipates these hazards and prepares the community to minimize exposure to these risks. The Safety Element also seeks to ensure that safety factors are integrated into the planning and decision-making process through the creation of policies for future development.

The current Safety Element was adopted in August 2003 and includes goals and policies related to the following topics: seismic and geologic hazards, flooding hazards, fire hazards, hazardous materials, terrorism, civil disobedience and crime, dangerous animals and plants, and disaster preparedness, recovery and emergency response. The 2003 Safety Element also features a summary of safety-related regulations and policies and local conditions that affect safety in Glendale, such as areas subject to seismic, flood, and fire risk.

In the past few years, California has prioritized mitigating climate change impacts and building more resilient communities, and the State Legislature has passed several bills (described below) requiring updating safety elements to account for these priorities. This new legislation requires jurisdictions to prepare specific technical studies and develop policies that address communities who are vulnerable to climate change, emergency evacuation, and wildfire risks:

- Senate Bill 379 Climate Adaptation: Requires the Safety Element to include climate adaptation and resiliency strategies and a set of goals, policies, objectives, and implementation measures based on a climate change vulnerability assessment.
- Senate Bill 1035 General Plans: Requires cities and counties to update their Safety Element with new information on flood hazards, fire hazards, or climate adaptation or resilience.
- Senate Bill 1241 State Responsibility Areas and Very High Fire Severity Zones: Requires review and update of the Safety Element to address the risk of fire in State Responsibility Areas and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones.

- Senate Bill 99 Residential Emergency Evacuation Routes: Requires all cities and counties to update their Safety Element to include information identifying residential developments in any hazard area identified in the Safety Element that do not have at least two emergency evacuation routes.
- Assembly Bill 747 and Assembly Bill 1409: Requires all cities and counties to identify evacuation routes and evacuation locations in the Safety Element and evaluate evacuation route capacity (e.g., the amount of traffic a roadway can handle in an emergency), safety, and viability (e.g., ability to function during an emergency scenario) under a range of emergency scenarios.
- Assembly Bill 1638: Requires emergency response agencies that serve jurisdictions where 5% or more of the population speaks a language other than English to provide information in that language in the event of an emergency.

These new requirements allow for safety elements to be better designed for agencies to further implementation efforts to prevent increased hazard risks such as wildfire and urban heat, as well as enhance emergency response and evacuation.

To meet legislative requirements, the City amended its Professional Services Agreement with Rincon Consultants, Inc. in November 2023 to update the General Plan Safety Element as part of the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP) preparation. In September 2022, the City had hired Rincon to develop a "Qualified" CAAP, which sets Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals for 2030 and a net-zero emissions target by 2050 and provides a framework to track progress. The original CAAP scope included preparing a climate vulnerability analysis to assess risks across community sectors based on climate change projections, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity; this analysis was used as the basis for the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (CCVA) required for the Safety Element Update. The amended contract for the Safety Element Update also included preparation of the required Emergency Evacuation Analysis in compliance State legislation. While the CAAP is still being finalized and will be presented to the Sustainability Commission for recommendation and then to City Council for adoption, the 2025 Safety Element Update addressing State legislation requirements has been completed and is being presented to City Council for adoption. It is important to evaluate the proposed goals, policies, and actions in the 2025 Safety Element Update, as they will provide direction on how the City will prepare for future hazards associated with natural disasters and climate change.

2025 Safety Element Update

As noted above, the 2025 Safety Element Update is informed by the CCVA (Exhibit 2) prepared by Rincon and the Emergency Evacuation Analysis (Exhibit 3) prepared by Kittelson & Associates (sub-consultant to Rincon). Both analyses are included as appendices to the Safety Element.

Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment

The CCVA (Appendix B to the Safety Element and Exhibit 2 to this staff report) was developed in accordance with California's Office of Emergency Services' 2020 California Adaptation Planning Guide. The climate vulnerability analysis identifies, categorizes, and prioritizes risks across communities and populations based on exposure (assessed using climate change projections), sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. The CCVA evaluates climate change impacts relevant to the City and identifies populations and physical assets, such as natural and recreational resources, buildings and facilities, and infrastructure and critical services, that are most vulnerable to these impacts. Such analysis allows for targeted mitigation and adaptation strategies to be developed for the most vulnerable areas and sectors that can then be included as policies and programs within the updated Safety Element.

Emergency Evacuation Analysis

Kittelson & Associates prepared an Emergency Evacuation Assessment (Appendix C to the Safety Element and Exhibit 3 to this staff report) to comply with AB 747 and SB 99. The Assessment evaluates two evacuation event scenarios to estimate roadway capacity constraints and travel time considerations during evacuations, helping identify locations of greater traffic congestion potential and the need for additional control measures in the event of an evacuation. The two evacuation scenarios are:

- Wildfire Scenario #1 – Wildfire ignites in the Verdugo Mountains/San Rafael Hills in east Glendale
- Landslide Scenario #2 – Landslide occurs in the San Gabriel Mountains in north Glendale

The analysis evaluated "no evacuation" (i.e. current baseline conditions) and "evacuation" travel times in both the base year (current year with current conditions) and future year (2040 with projected development) during the highest levels of traffic and congestion (PM peak hour). The future analysis anticipates volume of traffic generated based on maximum development allowable under the current General Plan in Glendale and traffic generated by the 2040 demographic forecasts for the entire region provided by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG).

The analysis details travel time comparisons for base year and future year from identified neighborhood areas using the current roadway network to identified evacuation destinations. These assumptions combine to provide a "worst case" analysis. Areas of congestion are identified, along with a menu of actions that the City can implement to reduce traffic congestion during evacuations. The detailed analysis resulted in planning considerations and strategies to enhance roadway and intersection capacity, as well as communication strategies, that can be used to help shape policies and actions for the City in preparation for and during evacuations; such policies and actions (programs) have been incorporated into the Safety Element Update. Implementation of these potential strategies to help better prepare the City for possible

natural disasters is timely, given the increasing awareness of and need for emergency preparedness following the Eaton and Palisades Fires earlier this year in January.

Safety Element Recommendations

In compliance with State legislation, the 2025 Safety Element Update expands upon the natural hazards analyses contained in the current 2003 Safety Element for fire, seismic, and flood risk, and provides updated policies and actions to build capacity and increase resilience to these hazards. The 2025 Update includes new figures for seismic risk, liquefaction risk, flood and dam inundation risk, and wildfire risk, based on the latest available data. New figures showing evacuation routes and single-access residential neighborhoods have also been added to the Element. Based on the input from the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, a new “Climate Change” section has been developed and added to the Safety Element, with a new goal (Goal 5. Reduce social and physical vulnerabilities resulting from the increasing risks of climate change) and corresponding policies and programs for climate change resilience. The 2025 Safety Element Update also includes new and revised policies and actions to address wildfire risk as part of Section 3.3 Fire Hazards, and disaster response and preparedness, community outreach and education, emergency evacuation, and single-access residential neighborhoods as part of Section 3.8 Disaster Preparedness, Recovery and Emergency Response. The updated policies and actions are intended to help prepare for and further ensure the safety of all community members during emergencies, especially vulnerable populations. A detailed outline of the proposed changes is attached to this Staff Report as Exhibit 4.

CAL FIRE Review

The City was also required to conduct early coordination with participating State agencies, such as with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to ultimately receive certification of the Safety Element from the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. This State mandate applies whenever a city or county within the Local Responsibility Area or areas identified within a State Responsibility Area, contain an area designated as a very high fire hazard severity zone (VHFHSZ). A significant percentage of the City’s hillside areas are designated as a VHFHSZ (CCVA, Figure 10); therefore, certification is necessary to ensure the City is in compliance with State law. Staff received early coordination review comments from Cal Fire in November 2024. The minor requested modifications were made and resubmitted to Cal Fire. With all review comments adequately addressed, Cal Fire forwarded the draft Safety Element to the Board of Forestry for certification in January 2025. The Board of Forestry approved the City's draft on January 21, 2025 (Exhibit 5).

Planning Commission

The Final Draft of the 2025 Safety Element Update, appendices and attachments were presented to the Planning Commission at a duly noticed meeting on March 5, 2025.

Following review of the material and a detailed PowerPoint Presentation by City staff, the Planning Commission unanimously voted to recommend approval of the 2025 Safety Element Update by City Council (Exhibit 6).

Updated Fire Hazard Map

CAL FIRE released updated maps for Southern California on March 24, 2025. As a result, the City has revised Plate P-3 “Wildfire Hazard Severity Zones and Critical Facilities” (Exhibit 10) to align with the State’s adjustments to fire hazard severity zones. This updated map will be included in the final Safety Element, with no changes needed to the proposed text for the new policies and programs in Section 3.3, "Fire Hazards."

STAKEHOLDERS/OUTREACH

The consultant team and City Planning staff hosted public outreach booths at four City-sponsored events at the start of the update process. These included:

- Earth Day Event at Verdugo Park – April 4, 2024
- Fire Day Event at Station 21 – May 1, 2024
- Building & Safety Open House May 15, 2024
- Climate Café Open House at Central Library – May 18, 2024

A summary of the public outreach at the pop-up events is attached as Exhibit 7.

Once finalized, the Public Review Draft, as well as the technical appendices, were posted on the City’s General Plan website and on the GlendalePlan.com website on November 18, 2024, for a 30-day public comment period. That same day, an email blast with the 2025 Safety Element Update public comment information, including the weblink, was sent to all of the GlendalePlan.com subscribers and Planning contact list (including all neighborhood associations); information on the public comment period was also posted on CDD’s social media. A total of two emails were received during the 30-day public comment period which ended on December 18, 2024; these are attached as Exhibit 8.

The public hearing notice for Planning Commission was publicized in accordance with GMC 30.61.030 Hearings and Public Notices - General Plan Amendments, and an email blast with the Planning Commission public notice was sent to all of the GlendalePlan.com subscribers and Planning contact list on February 10th and 26th, 2024. There were no callers or speakers at Planning Commission, and no comment letters were received.

The City Council Hearing was also publicized in accordance with GMC 30.61.030. Email blasts with the public notice were sent on March 12, 2025, and the information was posted on social media.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA/NEPA)

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, the proposed General Plan Safety Element update has been determined to be an exempt project pursuant to Section 15060(c)(2) in that the proposed amendments, which are primarily limited to policy modifications and updates in compliance with Government Code Section 65302(g)(1) through (g)(9) related to climate change, evacuations and wildfire risks, are not anticipated to result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, nor will the proposed changes have the potential for causing significant effect on the environment. Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382, "significant effect on the environment" means "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment. A social or economic change related to a physical change may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant." The proposed Safety Element update is in compliance with current State General Plan requirements, will not substantially affect, potentially substantially affect, or change the City's land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic resources as all potential changes have been thoroughly considered, and will act to protect the environment by minimizing the potential spread of wildfire or any other natural disasters.

Updates to the Safety Element update include programs aimed at reducing the loss of life, injury, private property damage, infrastructure damage, economic losses, social dislocation, and other impacts resulting from fire and/or landslide hazards. These programs include the installation of traffic signal pre-emption devices for fire response at critical intersections, the installation of signal battery backups to maintain signal operations during power outages, the installation of traffic counters and/or CCTV cameras on freeways, and the installation of netting and vegetation to stabilize hillside slopes with landslide potential. Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 (b) and (f), the proposed actions involve minor alterations to "Existing Facilities", specifically, publicly owned utilities used to provide electric power, natural gas, sewerage, or other public utilities, and the addition of safety or health protection devices, either during construction or in conjunction with existing structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, including navigational devices.

The Safety Element update is further anticipated to result in the reduction of potential short-and long-term community risks resulting from fires, floods, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, climate change, and other related hazards. The Project is exempt from CEQA

for the reasons outlined in the State CEQA Guideline section cited above; staff has prepared and will file a Notice of Exemption following the Council’s adoption of the proposed CEQA exemption (see Exhibit 9).

CAMPAIGN DISCLOSURE

This item is exempt from campaign disclosure requirements.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Alternative 1: The City Council may not adopt the 2025 Safety Element Update.

Alternative 2: The City Council may adopt the 2025 Safety Element Update with changes as directed by Council.

Alternative 3: The City Council may consider any other alternative proposed by staff.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Submitted by:

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Prepared by:

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Approved by:

Roubik R. Golanian, P.E., City Manager

EXHIBITS/ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft 2025 Safety Element (without Appendices: Appendix A has not been amended, and Appendix B - Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment and Appendix C - Evaluation Analysis are attached as Exhibits 2 and 3, respectively)
2. Appendix B - Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment
3. Appendix C - Evacuation Analysis
4. Detailed Outline of Proposed Amendments to the Safety Element
5. Board of Forestry and Fire Protection’s General Plan Safety Element Assessment
6. Planning Commission Resolution, dated March 5, 2025
7. Pop-Up Events – Public Outreach Summary
8. Emails received during the 30-Day Public Comment Period
9. CEQA Notice of Exemption
10. Updated Plate P-3 Wildfire Hazard Severity Zones and Critical Facilities, incorporating CAL FIRE’s March 24, 2025 mapping updates