

## Communication from Public

**Name:** Rhonda Herbel

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**Council File No:** 10-2468-S2

**Comments for Public Posting:** Sept 16, 2025 City of Los Angeles, Public Safety Committee Re: Council file 0-2468-S2 Honorable Committee Members: Please refer to the attached comments. I implore you to not relinquish control of local implementation standards of fire regulations and to urge the California Board to continue to allow the local agencies to implement experience and science based local standards vs co-opting decades of experience with what amounts to "zero consideration" of the impacts. They should not be permitted to now simply co-opt the process. They were supposed to have consulted with multiple stakeholder groups and it appears they have done essentially nothing meaningful except now accelerate the ministerial checking of boxes at the 11th hour since they were kicked in the behind by the Governor. To acquiesce now will have too many negative consequences. I support the observations made in the Sept 8, 2025 letter from Community Forestry Advisory Committee (CFAC) and have some additional observations included. Thank you

Sept 16, 2025

City of Los Angeles, Public Safety Committee

Re: Council file 0-2468-S2

Honorable Committee Members:

I implore you, please do not abdicate control over the implementation of fire regulations here on the local level. **You must urge the California board to permit local agencies to set the detailed implementation standards in the fire zones.**

We already have well considered and comprehensive regulations in place, which strive to balance public health needs without obliterating what is left of our environment and without exacerbating the problems which include:

More silt runoff (and blowing) into the streets, shortening the street surface lifecycles, clogging storm drains and seasonal drainages, diminished rainwater capture, water quality, slope instability, increased airborne particulate matter, (especially with the predictable increase in use of blowers both gas powered and electric used in order to not have “any” leaves anywhere), loss of shade not only from trees but from shrubs, meaning significant increase in desiccation, “breaking” the drought resistance ecology of native plant species through damaged soil health which in turn results in more dead plants and trees (especially absent increased irrigation), reflected heat, (especially with recommendations to use concrete and gravel adjacent to structures), loss of yet more pollinators such as birds, butterflies through loss of native trees and shrubs on which they naturally depend, loss of scenic and recreational resources.

**We have already witnessed neighboring hillside property owners bring in crews to use shovels and rakes to scrape the hillside** from top to bottom and then shovel dirt and rocks in the bins and haul off. That was **followed by using gas powered leaf blowers on the hillside from top to bottom, and all around, for multiple hours, sending dirt clouds hundreds of feet into the air and throughout the neighborhood** (not to mention the gas fumes). Attempting to call LAPD was fruitless as usual. This went on for three weekends in a row starting in August, after they failed their initial clearance requirements, and I suspect they are not quite done yet. A fairly steep hillside of fairly healthy vegetation of multiple acres, I fear what will continue to occur there now. It’s not only the issue of the scraping the hillside and blowing everything in the air, but it’s also the issue of hours upon hours of bone-jarring noise. We already have this problem every day in our neighborhoods, including Sundays now, and it’s not going to get better, it will probably be twice as bad if the State implementation plan is left to stand. If you look at the current proposed State regulations, you will see the Zone 1 discusses the removal of “all” dead

leaves. Yet further on they reiterate that the clearance should not be down to the bare earth and excessive disturbance of the soil should be avoided. So how is that possible? **Their own guidelines conflict with each other. You cannot both remove “all” organic matter and also avoid the erosion and disturbance and promotion of yet more invasive weeds.** No wonder we are seeing people scraping the hillsides.

The proposed implementation at the **California state level has obviously been given no real factual or scientific consideration.** It’s as if they did nothing for five years and now they got kicked in the behind by the Governor so they just want to check the box and slam it through. This one and only last minute public meeting is a complete farce, clearly only meant to check off a required box.

The **State has obviously not done its job.** If left to the State then we will all be faced with so many more problems than we start with. This is a knee-jerk reaction and a fact-free solution, not a reasonable and well considered one, not based on science and rational thought.

I support the factual, experience based and science based observations such as those offered in the letter of Sept 8, 2025 to the Public Safety Committee from the Community Forestry Advisory Committee (CFAC).

I would offer some additional observations and possible recommendations here:

- 1) Increase the penalties and shorten the response time for chronic non-compliant property owners who do not even attempt the most basic compliance on a regular basis. The property owners who fail to do ANY of their fire clearance of annual grasses and weeds on time on a repeated basis are given much too much leniency. We’re not talking about nuanced decisions of shrub placement here, we’re talking about just non-native invasive grasses and weeds left to languish. Multiple notices and visits from inspectors, months pass, years pass, only then are crews brought in to do the clearance. Many of these people know they can simply ignore it and even if a fee for clearance gets tacked onto their property taxes, they then have years to let that slide before they are faced with a lien sale by the state. There are plenty of land speculators following these practices. I would dare say I suspect a lot of the combination land speculators turned Cannabis growing operations “under the radar” are culprits in the foothill areas, going undetected by inspectors.

One of the biggest problems is simply that the resources need to be dedicated and refocused to enable local agencies to do the job of enforcement of the existing regulations more consistently, and the scofflaws need to stop getting a free pass. Yet now, the State’s approach of “just rip it all out” is going to create such chaos and destruction it will create more challenges, more costs, not fewer.

If the **utility companies** are not keeping the easement areas clear of weeds or dry brush, and we end up with wind-driven fires like Eaton, how is this the fault of the individual property owners who keep their landscapes watered and reasonably maintained?

If the **chronic illegal fireworks** start a fire, and we end up with the wind-driven fire like Palisades, how is that the fault of the individual property owners who keep their landscapes watered and reasonably maintained and who are not setting off illegal fireworks?

It's bitterly offensive that we, as owners of multiple parcels in the VHFSZ put so much effort into vegetative management and land stewardship throughout the year, nearly every day we are doing something to maintain our properties, trimming, dead wood removal, maintaining minimal leaf layers, ensuring sufficient but not excessive moisture kept for health of trees and shrubs, yet so many of the other properties that changed hands in recent years were left unattended and they just play the game of the due process timelines in the existing enforcement mechanisms. We have even gone ahead and cleared grasses and weeds from sections of our neighbors hillside parcels that are nearest to ours just to help alleviate the risk since the owners were doing nothing but getting violation notices which they ignored for months.

**Over the years our efforts to be good land stewards have rewarded not only us, but the larger neighborhood with improved livability and even recreational opportunities by having a pleasant place to walk, ride, unwind, enjoy some beauty and peace. Under the State plan, this will all be destroyed not only for us, but for all the others who have benefitted and others who have done similar land stewardship in their neighborhoods.** The City's land use plan Open Space Element has historically relied heavily on "privately held open space" for compliance. This ill-considered plan by the State will go a long way towards nullifying that compliance.

- 2) **Give some actual attention to the construction standards like setbacks, to minimize the effect of fire transmission from building to building. Example: For ADU conversions or construction, require remediation where the roof lines are literally just inches away from the neighbors roof lines, including in the VHFSZ. Require fire sprinklers.** A perfect example is an ADU garage conversion project going on right now just a couple hundred feet from us in the VHFSZ where the roof eaves are just inches from the neighbor. Not exaggerating, they are just inches away. The walls are perhaps between 18 to 24 inches but not the rooflines. There appears to be a long history on that property and without going into all the ugly details of what has been observed over the past year, the issue is that nearly everything is now done without physical visits from inspectors and the applicants can basically get away with whatever they want perhaps as long as they point their camera carefully. They are also not required to install fire

sprinklers because they are technically not also in the “Hillside” area. **There is not enough attention being paid to the construction standards in the urban to wildland interface zones, hillsides, and annexed communities.** Many of the foothill communities were annexed into the City of LA before there was much in the way of building standards and a lot of the annexed areas are the Foothill communities in various Council Districts. Yet back when the ADU regs were adopted, it was all just slammed through without giving due consideration to the unique issues in the annexed and foothill communities and the VHFSZ which often extends past the “Hillside area” now. That was a really big mistake that should be rectified. As I suggested years ago, the ADUs should have been subject to discretionary approval in the VHFSZ and particularly hillside areas of the annexed communities. The on-site pre-inspection should have been required and still should be required in these areas where there is likely to be such a wide variation in prior existing construction standards. Yet it just keeps going forward, the bad practices continue every day.

- 3) **What about exemptions or special processes for cultural/historical resources or protected species?** There is no mention of any carve-out to give special attention to the retention of cultural resources, let alone species of trees and shrubs protected by current ordinances.

**There is so much focus on the matter of “continuous canopy” with respect to trees and yet we have this ongoing push to create all these “continuous canopy” of rooftops which will create a much bigger fire risk than a green tree (which is more likely to help slow it down).** One of the first things I noticed when it came to the Eaton and Palisades fires is the aftermath photos where you can see that the trees didn’t burn but all the houses around them did. It’s not a fluke. Trees and shrubs send roots down and throughout the soil, tapping into moisture and redistributing it among the plant community members, not just to themselves. **Are the people in the Palisades and Eaton Canyon now going to be faced with eliminating the trees that in many cases may have actually helped save some of the homes?**

Respectfully,

Rhonda Herbel

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