

Housing Allocations and Fire Hazard in Marin County District 4

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September 4, 2025

Overview

Wildfire hazard is increasing across California and Marin County in particular. Preventative planning and proactive mitigation are critical for successful responses to inevitable wildfire in the state. Simultaneously, California's housing crisis creates an urgent demand for new affordable housing development. Housing planning decisions are being made in the midst of complicated fire mitigation policies. This research seeks to understand the current situation for and interactions between housing development and fire hazard within District 4 of Marin County.

This memo outlines the 2023-31 housing site allocation as determined within the comprehensive plan, site specific fire hazard, preventative work being done, and potential areas of concern for housing development moving forward. It highlights potential impacts of increased fire hazard in District 4 of Marin county, changing housing regulations, and uncertain enforcement of fire mitigation practices.

Two additional resources were created as part of this project:

- A [Marin County District 4 Housing and Fire Hazard Webmap](#) for a more detailed spatial view of hazards and their overlay with housing sites; and
- A [Marin County District 4 Fire Hazard and Housing Element Inventory](#) providing qualitative fire hazard metrics for each site along with the total number of units planned for each site.

Key Findings

- Many sites rezoned to fulfill housing need face synergistic fire hazards
- 2025 Fire Hazard Severity Zone maps reveal that several sites have escalated from moderate to high fire hazard, including in Bolinas, Forest Knolls, Lagunitas, and Stinson Beach
- Rollbacks to CEQA, key environmental disclosure legislation, reduce legal requirements for analysis of fire hazard on future residential development sites
- Areas with both face synergistic hazards from very high fire hazard, evacuation difficulty, and the wildland urban interface

Housing Allocation in unincorporated Marin County within District 4

Housing planning throughout the state is conducted within the context of the Regional Housing Allocation Process (RHNA), which assigns regional allocations of housing expectations on an eight year cycle. The most recent Marin County Housing Element Update was adopted January 24 2023, and assigned 683 housing units across 29 sites to the unincorporated areas of District 4. Allocated sites include underutilized sites, vacant, and nonvacant. Progress on development is limited so far. One site in the District, Downtown Project in Bolinas, has submitted a permit for a 4 unit apartment building, and two sites are slated for county planned

affordable housing projects to be completed by 2027: Oak Hill apartments in San Quentin for 230 units and Point Reyes Coast Guard for 54 units.

The housing element is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), finalized in December 2022, which comprehensively assesses the environmental hazards posed by the proposed housing sites. This document also assesses the Safety Element Update which documents myriad policy proposals to ensure the safety of new housing development. Key county code includes restrictions against development on high or very high fire hazard severity zones, and the EIR emphasizes that permitting of future development would be subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review.

Fire Hazards and Housing Sites

Fire hazard is assessed extensively in the EIR, and proposed housing site impacts from fire are determined to be less than significant. However, recent developments in fire hazard data and CEQA requirements have changed the developmental context. The EIR considers fire hazard with the metrics of Fire Hazard Severity Zones (FHSZ) and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). FHSZ data used in the EIR comes from the mid 1980s and early 1990s and places all District 4 housing sites within moderate severity zones. CalFire recently updated these maps between 2024 and 2025 significantly increasing fire hazard throughout West Marin. New maps indicate 9 District 4 housing sites in high FHSZ and 3 in very high FHSZ. This includes a total of 107 planned units for the area. With one exception, every site in the District falls within the WUI, placing many housing allocated locations in both the WUI and high FHSZ.

Additionally, landmark CEQA reform legislation passed in June 2025 directly impacts the amount of hazard assessment required for newly permitted development. AB 130 and SB 131 now exempt urban infill housing development from CEQA requirements with very few exceptions. As most sites in the element have not begun permitting and fall into this category, this deeply impacts the amount of environmental assessment required to obtain building permits for these sites despite worsening fire hazard.

Fire Risk Reduction Efforts and Evacuation Planning

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) and Marin County fire mitigation ordinances provide immense fire risk prevention, adaptation, and assessment. A first of its kind evacuation state-of-the science review and evacuation assessment conducted by MWPA and completed in 2023 identify evacuation risk of every road in the county, sorting difficulty into four quartiles by a numerous factors. A qualitative review of this data identifies several housing site areas in 4th quartile difficulty for evacuation including Bolinas, Pt. Reyes Station, and Stinson Beach. Further investigation of the factors driving evacuation risk in each area, provided by MWPA, is necessary to determine mitigation strategies best suited to each area.

Comprehensive efforts by MWPA deeply reduce fire risk to new development through things like home evaluations, evacuation planning, and housing building material requirements; however, the efficacy of these can be significantly limited by homeowner willingness to comply and lack of jurisdictional capacity to fund and enforce homeowner behaviors mitigation measures.

Ultimately, this report highlights the need to continuously evaluate affordable housing decision making in response to evolving fire hazard and regulatory contexts. In light of updated fire hazard information, rezoned sites are now vulnerable to decreased CEQA regulation. This research emphasizes the importance of collaboration between housing planning and fire prevention and adaptation authorities.

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