



Todd Gloria
Mayor
City of San Diego

Sean Elo-Rivera
Council President
San Diego City Council

April 3, 2025

RE: Fire Safety

Dear Honorable Elo-Rivera, Gloria,

The Palisades and Eaton Fires exposed serious vulnerabilities that are present in San Diego. The four fires that occurred in San Diego this month make it clear that the time to act on fire safety is now. The Normal Heights Community Planning Group (NHCPG) is concerned about the state of development in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ). The main concerns are infill projects, evacuation plans, water supply, and brush abatement.

At the time of writing, the Community Planners Committee (CPC), Linda Vista CPG, and Mid-Cities Kental CPG have all agreed that urban wildfire safety must be addressed ASAP. At the January meeting of the CPC, many members drew attention to high-density ADU projects, meaning four or more ADUs, being built abutting canyons and hills. As was seen in the Eaton and Palisades fires, when buildings abutting these topographical features catch fire, the flames spread quickly. In San Diego, this risk is compounded by allowing ADUs to be built without setbacks, raising serious concerns about our First Responders' ability to save structures and residents' ability to escape safely.

In relation to density, questions surround planned evacuation routes. Canyons and hills naturally lend themselves to dead ends and cul-de-sacs. These features trap residents, leaving few options for timely evacuation. Even if infill development is happening without these road features, not enough transportation options have been put in place to offset the newly built density.

Finally, residents have stated that their Fire Councils have been hamstrung by the complexity of responsibility for brush abatement. With the City's pending budget issues, it is fair to be concerned that the City will not have the resources to manage this on its own without community partnerships.

Normal Heights, in particular, is sensitive to unresolved risk mitigation plans after the 1985



Normal Heights fire, which promised brush abatement, evacuation planning, and updated water infrastructure. Today, nearly all of Normal Heights is served by the same water system that failed us 40 years ago.

Until these concerns are addressed, the NHCPG requests that **all infill projects in VHFHSZs that more than double the dwelling units on a parcel be halted**. While this moratorium takes place, the NHCPG would like to work with the Mayor and Council Offices to find a compromise on the types of development allowed in VHFHSZs, evacuation routes for all communities abutting such zones, a partnership between communities and the City for better brush management, and a plan to address the shortfall in water infrastructure. Ignoring these glaring problems will only lead to severe emergencies, loss of property, loss of life, and litigation. The members of the NHCPG look forward to a collaborative effort to address these problems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Coogan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" and last name "Coogan" clearly distinguishable.

Paul Coogan
Chair, Normal Heights Community Planning Group