

Dear Mayor and City Council,

In June you charged the City Manager with creating a working group of Berkeley residents and stakeholders to review the vegetation management portion of the Fire Code to ensure that it is clear, reflects unique local conditions, and incorporates the best available fire science (inclusive of any more conservative code adopted by the California Board of Forestry). The charge included returning with additional amendments to the City Council before December 31, 2025, as part of the Fire Department's Triennial Fire Code Update Process.

The Berkeley Zone Zero / Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Working Group was first convened on August 20, 2025. At that time, Fire Department staff explained that we would need to complete our work before October 2nd in order to allow review of all proposed changes and meet the December 31st deadline. On this very tight schedule, the group held eight (8) public meetings and engaged in a detailed review process that has produced proposed revisions to the municipal fire code. These revisions are designed to:

- Clarify definitions
- Refine vegetation management requirements, defensible space provisions, and ongoing maintenance standards.
- Align Berkeley's fire prevention framework with the California State Fire Code, while reviewing the current deliberations from the California Fire and Forestry Commission.

While we are satisfied that the existing language is clearer and more consistent as a result of these revisions, the limited mission and compressed timeframe meant that we were not able to fully consider all unique local conditions or incorporate all of the best available fire science. Critically, the California Board of Forestry has not yet issued the final Zone 0 regulations, so we were unable to evaluate how those forthcoming requirements—and any associated exceptions—should shape Berkeley's code. Since Berkeley is required by state law to be as strict as state code, the scope of potential exceptions has also not been fully explored.

As much as we have accomplished in a relatively short period, there remains important work ahead. We intend to continue our work in the following areas:

- Incorporating existing, new, and emerging science related to vegetation management, erosion concerns, and long-term ecological impacts.
- Ensuring the local code reflects unique local conditions.
- Reviewing final regulations and recommendations from the State Fire and Forestry Commission and Zone Zero Subcommittee.

- Creating detailed community guidelines and instruction booklet to assist residents in understanding and complying with the new standards.

Additional work needs to be done on these issues:

- Reviewing enforcement and appeals processes to avoid overly punitive penalties, while ensuring strong compliance, strengthening compliance pathways, and updating penalty structures, including enforcement and accountability.
- Addressing the ongoing threat of eucalyptus and other high-risk vegetation within Berkeley.
- Considering EMBER compliance costs

The proposed revisions reflect a balance of technical standards; however, further work is needed to review all pertinent aspects of the WUI code and regulations.

We thank you for your attention and continued support of this critical work.

Respectfully submitted,

Unanimously signed by members of the WUI Workgroup