

## NHCA Board of Directors

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March 8, 2021

Nancy Skinner, State Senator  
District 9  
1515 Clay Street, Suite 2202  
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Senator Skinner

The North Hills Community Association represents 3500 households in the North Oakland Hills where the 1991 Tunnel Fire destroyed hundreds of homes and caused 25 deaths, the majority of them people who were trapped in their vehicles or attempting to direct traffic in the crowded narrow roads. Since then, we have worked with residents to educate them about creating defensible space, hardening their homes, and preparing for evacuation. We've also worked with Oakland elected officials and all of the City departments (Fire, Police, Public Works, and Transportation) to make sure that wildfire prevention is a priority for the City, to provide resources and to craft policies and procedures that support that priority. This partnership has worked effectively to decrease the likelihood of wildfire ignition and propagation.

### Climate Change and Evacuation Challenges

Fire frequency, intensity, and speed have increased over the last three decades due to warmer temperatures and more extreme weather conditions, meaning that fires spread so quickly that firefighters have often had to change their goal from suppression--protecting structures--to evacuation--protecting lives. We have followed the lead of the Oakland Fire Department to focus our efforts on evacuation, working on enforcement of current parking restrictions on the roads that are too narrow for two-way traffic (residents evacuating at the same time as first responders are moving towards the hazard) and identification of additional streets where restrictions should be considered. There are so many "pinch points" that the City is using crowd-sourcing to prioritize these reviews; we're asking residents to practice more than one evacuation route to identify the perennial obstacles. Everyone is doing the best they can with the resources available; by any measure, there's more work to do to make people safe.

### Haphazard Parking and Limited Access for Larger Emergency Vehicles

We appreciate the housing challenges faced by our fellow Oakland and California residents and the efforts at the local, county, state, and federal levels to increase the housing supply, especially for unsheltered and low-income residents. In our area, we've observed a trend that now involves unrelated individuals pooling their resources to rent or even purchase single family homes, without public transportation or safe walking routes. That means more people per household and therefore more residents who use cars to drive to work or school and which equates to more vehicles parking in areas other than the two off-street parking spaces required of each residence. At the same time, we are trying to limit the number of vehicles parking on streets so that first responders can access homes in emergencies. The modest increase in population density we're experiencing is at odds with the goal of less on-street parking and safe

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streets. The streets in much of the hill area are twisting and narrow (substandard by general City standards) without sidewalks. Long-range visibility is hampered by the very twists and turns that are designed into the streets to achieve reasonable grades and lot access.


When we look at SB9 and SB10, we understand the desire to open up neighborhoods and increase housing density, but we don't see any attention to an evaluation of the infrastructure--primarily roads, but also services from city departments that are already overwhelmed--that would be required to make additional residents safe. There are several ways that this legislation could be amended to address the infrastructure required to support increased population density; we've already lost our only neighborhood elementary school due to budget cuts and are fighting now to keep our fire house open since fire season from last 2020 is not yet over. Given the Legislature's sense of urgency and the uncertainty of infrastructure resources at this time, a more straightforward and less expensive fix would be to exempt areas designated by CalFire as "Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone or High Hazard Zones" until such time as an evaluation by the local Fire Marshall ascertains its safety and much tougher fire-resistant codes for building homes are adopted.

#### **State-Wide Issue**

In the State as a whole, there are over 3 million homes that are constructed inside what is termed the Wildlife Urban Interface WUI – that equates to about 11 million people. Nearly 2 million of these homes are in the Very High Fire Danger area or High Hazard Area. These areas are extremely fire prone areas as discussed above. Should the state encourage more density in these areas without adequate resources and with the continued trend of prolonged drought periods that climate change brings, we think it is probably not a wise course. Higher density in fire prone areas will result in more deaths as has been experienced in some of the most tragic fires in the state in the last few years.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Steven Hanson  
Chair

cc: Buffy Wicks, State Assembly Member  
Nancy Skinner, State Senator  
Dan Kalb, City Council Member  
Sheng Thao, City Council Member  
Rebecca Kaplan, Council Member at Large  
City of Oakland Fire Chief, Melinda Drayton  
City Administrator, Ed Reiskin