

Introduction

California Government Code Section 65302(b) mandates local municipalities to include within their General Plans a Safety Element

“For the protection of the community from any unreasonable risks associated with the effects of seismically induced surface rupture, ground shaking, ground failure, tsunami, seiche, and dam failure; slope instability leading to mudslides and landslides; subsidence, liquefaction and other seismic hazards identified pursuant to Chapter 7.8 of the Public Resources Code, and other geologic hazards known to the legislative body; flooding; and wild land and urban fires. The safety element shall include mapping of known seismic and other known geologic hazards. It shall also address evacuation routes, peak load water supply requirements, and minimum road widths and brush clearances around structures, as those items related to identified fire and geologic hazards.”

The Safety Element addresses both natural and manmade hazards such as wildfire, earthquakes, landslides, crime, traffic and hazardous materials/wastes contamination. In dealing with these issues, it is prudent to consider prevention as the first step in hazard mitigation. Prevention may be accomplished by the elimination of the hazard, isolation/avoidance of the hazard, or by the regulation of land uses and structures in known hazard areas. The hazard must be planned for when prevention is not possible. Emergency planning includes the formulation of strategies to minimize human injury, property damage, and economic and social disruption. It also addresses measures necessary to return the functions of the City to normal conditions soon after a disaster.

The Safety Element establishes policies that address public safety issues in the City. The Element also serves as a Safety Plan, identifying standards and policies to protect public safety

and outlining facilities and services that will serve the emergency needs of the City.

The Safety Element indicates the location of known hazard areas and available evacuation routes. It indicates peak water supply requirements, minimum road standards, brush clearances around structures, and other factors affecting safety procedures. Finally, the Element addresses other natural hazards and disasters that may occur in the planning area.

Early Efforts to Annex La Habra Heights

La Habra's attempt to annex portions of the East Heights caused quite a stir among residents of the East Heights in the 1970's. The Mayor of La Habra contended that their fire and police departments frequently assisted La Habra Heights pending arrival of Los Angeles County fire and police personnel. This was unfortunately true in some instances, since the nearest Los Angeles County Fire Station's response time was 15 minutes. The "East Heights" residents were concerned and a La Habra City Council meeting on the issue was packed, standing room only. Both sides of the issue were discussed, sometimes emotionally. Despite that participation, the La Habra City Council authorized a request to the County to alter the border between the Counties so that annexation could take place. At the County Hearing on the matter, our Supervisor, Pete Schabarum, along with all the other Supervisors, denied the request to change the boundary line. Annexation to La Habra was now impossible.

Issues and Policies

The major issues to be addressed in the Safety Element for La Habra Heights are summarized in this section.

- The hillside areas that comprise most of La Habra Heights pose wildfire, landslide, erosion, flood and debris flow hazards. Programs that will be effective in reducing the level of risk, particularly from fire, must be regularly reviewed, continued and strengthened.

- The geology of the region largely determines the presence of natural

hazards in La Habra Heights. Seismic hazards are created by the Whittier fault and the more than 95 potentially active faults in the Los Angeles region. Other earthquake faults that could affect La Habra Heights include the Elsinore/Chino fault, the Elysian Park Fold and Thrust Belt, Newport-Inglewood, Sierra Madre, Palos Verdes, San Jacinto, San Andreas, and Norwalk faults. Hazards associated with earthquakes include surface rupture, ground failure, slope failure, liquefaction, seismic waves, structural collapse, and infrastructure damage. The 1987 earthquake centered in the nearby Whittier Narrows area has given the City recent experience with an earthquake disaster.

- Fire, crime, vehicular accidents and hazardous material accidents are man-made hazards in the area. Electrical systems, power lines, and gas and oil lines and tanks and other facilities have a potential for fire as well as contamination. Crime incidence undermines the safety and security of the community. In La Habra Heights, the majority of crime consists of petty theft, residential burglary, auto theft, and vehicle burglary.
- The City's law enforcement agency, the City Fire Department, paramedic and ambulance service, and local hospitals provide emergency services for local residents. The City's Emergency Response Plan needs to be updated periodically. Public awareness programs can aid in reducing injury and property damage during disaster and emergencies by informing and educating citizens of potential hazards before they happen.

These issues and opportunities provide the basis for the policies included in the Safety Element.

Early Firefighting in "the Heights"
Prior to 1942, the nearest fire station to "the Heights" was located in San Dimas. During this period, the method of fighting fires involved the use of crews equipped with water buckets and wet sacks to beat back the fire until crews from the San Dimas station arrived.

The policies included in the Safety Element respond to the different safety concerns that are present in the City. The policies established by the City address protection from fire, driving and crime hazards, the provision of adequate safety services, protection from seismic and other natural hazards and the regulation of hazardous materials use and disposal. The policies are intended to prevent hazardous conditions, to protect residents from harm, and to prepare the City in the event of unavoidable disasters.

The unique beauty and character of La Habra Heights result largely from its winding roads, natural landform and densely vegetated hills and valleys. The hills and valleys in turn result from the underlying tectonic activity. Residential lots are large, with substantial portions left ungraded. Access to homes is often through a series of narrow, winding public and private roads and driveways, often poorly marked. The community is 90 percent built out, with the average home over 40 years old. Limited opportunity exists to redress some of these infrastructure hazards through controls on new development.

Issue - Fire Hazards

The dense vegetation found throughout La Habra Heights coupled with very steep slopes results in increased threat of wildfire. The entire City of La Habra Heights is within a Zone 4 Fire Hazard designation. The Zone 4 designation is applied by the L.A. County Fire Marshall in accord with the California Fire Code, and denotes areas of Very High Fire Hazard Severity.

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This designation applies to areas of steep slopes, high fuel loads and fire conducive climate. Steep canyons are largely undeveloped and, as a consequence, are often densely packed with native and exotic plant species.

Fire Department Before Incorporation

The nearest County fire station experienced a 15 minute response time. Our volunteers usually had a fire under control before the County personnel arrived. Supervisor Kenneth Hahn attempted to force our community into the County Fire District and eliminate our volunteer effort. Our Supervisor, Pete Schabarum successfully resisted this attempt. However, the Board of Supervisors adopted the policy of including any parcel on which development of four or more houses into the Fire District. Patches of "Fire District" parcels began to proliferate but our volunteers continued to answer all calls and suppressed fire until the County Fire personnel arrived. Inevitably, some "turf" arguments did occur.

The local water distribution system generally meets all capacity and distribution requirements. However, total storage capacity is presently reported to be 30 percent less than the Metropolitan Water District recommendation. Further, the water system's peak delivery capability meets the City requirement of 750 gallons per minute (gpm) for two hours but does not meet County requirements of 1,500 gpm for two hours.

The age of the community has resulted in mature stands of essentially "wild" trees and shrubs. The fuel load in these areas can become extreme. Further, unmaintained brush along roadways presents a starting point for larger fires. Finally, narrow, steep, poorly identified and sharply curved roads and driveways are the norm, increasing the difficulty in response to fires and evacuation.

Goal 12. Reduce potential fire hazard and recognize geological hazards

Safety Element Policy 1. The City, through its Fire and Public Works Departments, shall

continuously and vigorously enforce a program of brush and grass clearance as required by law on all lands, public and private, developed and undeveloped, along roadways and around any structure to such distance as established by the City.

Safety Element Policy 2. Building design standards for both new and significant remodeling projects shall incorporate aggressive fire prevention and suppression designs in accord with Fire Zone 4 standards.

Safety Element Policy 3. Fire Department equipment and personnel training should be specific to the narrow, steep, winding, dark and poorly marked streets and driveways of La Habra Heights.

Safety Element Policy 4. The City will continue to ensure that the Fire Department has resources adequate to comply with response times established by the City and the Fire Department.

Safety Element Policy 5. Street names and residential addresses shall be visible and unambiguous.

Safety Element Policy 6. The City should work closely with the La Habra Heights County Water District to ensure adequate fire flow and reserve capacity for all areas of the City.

Safety Element Policy 7. The City shall monitor the diligence of the Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority brush clearance and fire prevention activities on their properties within and adjacent to the City.

Safety Element Policy 8. The Fire Department shall maintain an inventory of all swimming pools and other significant water sources within the City and attempt to obtain owner consent to utilize such sources in the event of emergency need. Further, the City shall encourage owners of such water sources

to obtain pumps adequate to provide local fire protection in an emergency.

Safety Element Policy 9. The City should consider the adequacy and location of the one Fire Department facility in the City in light of response times.

Safety Element Policy 10. The Fire Department shall review all development plans to ensure construction methods and activities are in accordance with standards and are not conducted in periods of high fire hazard.

Beginning of the Volunteer Fire Department

In the spring of 1942, Clement E. Levins became the "father" of the fire department by suggesting to a number of friends that fire protection was the number one priority of "the Heights." The fire department was established on October 8, 1942. A fund raiser was held to purchase the department's first fire truck. This first truck (a Seagrave fire truck) was purchased in 1945. In 1946 an Army surplus fire truck was added to the inventory followed shortly by the acquisition of a 4-wheel drive jeep water carrier.

Issue - Geologic Hazards

La Habra Heights is located in the western Puente Hills, which was formed of seabed deposits uplifted and faulted over at least the last several hundred thousand years. The Whittier Fault traverses the entire city from east to west. The consequence of the geologic history is seen in the steep and, in many cases, landslide-susceptible slopes. Further, the proximity of the Whittier Fault provides energy sufficient to liquefy susceptible low-lying soils, trigger landslides or significantly damage structures. The surface geology is complicated by its geologic history, and soils susceptible to shrink-swell behavior or erosional sensitivity are common. These geologic conditions present numerous constraints to development. Unreinforced concrete or masonry structures are particularly susceptible to failure during earthquake shaking. Fortunately, an inventory

of non-residential structures in the City reveals there are no unreinforced masonry structures.

Safety Element Policy 11. Development that requires load-bearing foundations shall include site-specific analysis of underlying soil conditions and potential seismic effect on the structure.

Safety Element Policy 12. The City shall maintain a program to encourage all existing residences to have automatic seismic-safety shut off valves on the gas supply lines.

Safety Element Policy 13. Development shall be constrained in areas of historic landslides or in slope easement zones identified by the USGS, California Department of Conservation, or by L.A. County (refer to Exhibit 5-1).

Safety Element Policy 14. The City shall maintain a map showing all constrained building zones including the Alquist Priolo Zone and other zones adjacent to fault traces discovered during construction of other projects.

Safety Element Policy 15. The City through its Emergency Preparedness Committee shall regularly inform the community of the proper strategy for seismic risk reduction to their residences.

Safety Element Policy 16. The City shall promote the study, adoption, and review of regulations designed to ensure appropriate and safe development in hazardous areas.

Issue - Flood Hazards

The City of La Habra Heights has no known areas of severe flooding. Therefore, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides no mapped flood zones requiring discussion. However, the geologic history and terrain characteristics of La Habra Heights result in numerous valleys and other areas where

channeled water may pose localized flood hazards. Further, the City has only limited infrastructure designed to efficiently contain or channel floodwater. It is not economically feasible to develop such facilities in the already developed community. Areas in which localized flood hazard or ponding may result can be delineated based upon topography and size of watershed, as shown in Exhibit 5-1.

Safety Element Policy 17. The City shall maintain a map showing flood constrained building zones. Development in such areas shall include appropriate hydrologic analysis and remediation measures.

Safety Element Policy 18. The City shall request that the La Habra Heights County Water District provide analysis of local flood potential from each of its reservoir tanks.

Safety Element Policy 19. New impervious coverage shall drain into onsite impoundments that are adequate to contain all runoff as required by law.

Issue - Driving Hazards

The agricultural history of La Habra Heights, coupled with the natural terrain and lower-density development has resulted in roadways that are narrow, winding, with limited sight distance and no shoulders. The roads are essentially "lanes" or "country roads" as contrasted to the typical Southern California residential streets.

Motorists may drive down the center of the many one-way lanes, abruptly encountering another vehicle around blind corners. Brush and debris can encroach onto the roadway, further limiting drivable width. Any pavement damage encourages drivers to move away from the damage and into the path of oncoming vehicles. Roadway shoulders may be on the edge of steep slopes and can be broken down by oversize or long wheelbase vehicles. Also, the road edges serve as storm water channels and damage to

these water guides result in further damage to the integrity of both the pavements and to the structural capacity of the edge of the roadway as erosion occurs. Finally, the lack of shoulders requires that pedestrians, bike riders and equestrians use the roadways as paths. In most areas there is not room for these users to get off of the lane in the face of oncoming traffic. Therefore, the roads do double duty as paths and must thus be classified as lanes or country roads with multi-user traffic and appropriate speed limits.

Regional growth must not be permitted to result in "cut-through" traffic onto La Habra Heights lanes and country roads. The routes without shoulders and substantial sight distances are adequate only for residential traffic. The existing residential developments coupled with the underlying geologic conditions preclude any significant roadway widening or straightening to ameliorate these constraints.

Goal 10. Assure that local and regional traffic demands are accommodated in a manner consistent with the unique rural environment of La Habra Heights.

Safety Element Policy 20. The City shall continuously enforce a program of brush and debris clearance along the edges of all roadways, public and private.

Safety Element Policy 21. The City shall regularly inspect all roads and make provisions for the timely repair of all damage to existing pavement that could result in loss of driving surface.

Safety Element Policy 22. The City shall prohibit use of roadways for routine disposal of water such as from swimming pools, filters, washing machines, irrigation systems, and other household devices.

Safety Element Policy 23. The City's policing agency shall enforce speed limits on all roads.

Safety Element Policy 24. The City shall continue to study and implement traffic calming on Hacienda Road and Harbor Boulevard and other roadways.

Safety Element Policy 25. The City shall strongly resist any expansion of traffic loads and prohibit the expansion in the number of lanes and lane widths on both Hacienda Road and Harbor Boulevard. The through traffic that would result on the lanes and country roads of the City would cause significant ecological damage and increased traffic-related accidents and roadway deterioration, further increasing the risk of traffic accidents.

Safety Element Policy 26. The City or designee shall monitor any increase in the level of traffic on local lanes and roads resulting from spill-over congestion on Hacienda Road and Harbor Boulevard and develop preventative or remedial measures.

Safety Element Policy 27. The City will develop an ordinance to define, prohibit, and penalize nuisances created by illegal street and/or roadside parking or, if found appropriate, to ban such parking entirely in all or part of the City to the extent permitted by law.

Safety Element Policy 28. The City shall strongly discourage non-residential uses to limit the growth of traffic.

Other Safety Objectives

La Habra Heights, like all cities, has objectives to maintain a safe environment for its residents. Issues include crime, natural disasters, hazardous waste pollution, and availability of emergency service.

Issue - Crime and Police Services

La Habra Heights, being a small residential community, has a low crime rate. The City has effectively utilized contract law enforcement services since incorporation. As adjacent areas

continue to increase in population, the probability of crime increases due to non-residents also increases.

Safety Element Policy 29. The City shall regularly review law enforcement services to determine the adequacy and quality of service and should consider a mechanism to encourage resident input to the City regarding their satisfaction with the services.

Safety Element Policy 30. The City shall continue to vigorously publicize and support neighborhood watch programs.

Safety Element Policy 31. The City shall continue to support active volunteer programs to assist law enforcement officials in crime prevention and law enforcement throughout the City, including in open space areas.

Safety Element Policy 32. The City shall continue its program of rapid removal of any graffiti to discourage crime and gang presence in the City.

Safety Element Policy 33. The City shall monitor the diligence of Puente Hills Landfill Native Habitat Preservation Authority and other public agencies in policing their properties within and adjacent to the City.

Safety Element Policy 34. The City shall closely monitor those activities that may attract large numbers of people and develop ordinances that will address their negative impacts (such as traffic, crime or fire hazards).

Issue - Natural Disasters

Regional fire or seismic events can damage large areas of the City within a short time. Essential services such as water, fire protection and even access to supplies could be significantly diminished for extended periods. Further, emergency services may be overburdened or totally unavailable from outside sources.

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Safety Element Policy 35. The City shall actively promote and support the continued operation of the La Habra Heights Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Safety Element Policy 36. The City shall regularly review its emergency medical and/or paramedic capabilities, including provision of increased Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT) and paramedic capabilities within the Fire Department.

Safety Element Policy 37. Promote emergency preparedness through public education and awareness programs on safety, earthquake preparedness, crime prevention, and fire hazard prevention.

Safety Element Policy 38. The City should identify emergency resources including doctors and other medical personnel who live within the City who could be available in an emergency if the City is isolated from outside support.

Safety Element Policy 39. The City Fire Department and Law Enforcement Agency shall, during emergencies, maintain the designated major thoroughfares as evacuation routes (refer to Exhibit 5-1).

Safety Element Policy 40. The City should yearly mail or otherwise make available to all residents a summary of emergency preparedness plans and procedures.

Issue - Hazardous Wastes

Hazardous materials present health risks due to contamination, prolonged exposure, or potential explosion. While there are safety precautions for hazardous materials use and disposal, the mishandling or accidental release of these materials can compromise the health and safety of residents. The City is home to numerous oil production facilities as well as oil and high and low pressure gas lines.

Safety Element Policy 41. Support the enforcement of state and federal environmental pollution control laws. The City shall work with the Fire Department to require any hazardous materials users and generators to prepare procedures for responding to accidental spills and emergencies.

Safety Element Policy 42. Promote the proper disposal of hazardous materials. At the same time, publicize and support programs to allow residents to properly dispose of small quantities of household hazardous wastes.

Safety Element Policy 43. The City shall designate routes for trucks carrying hazardous materials and to the extent permitted by law prohibit those trucks from using City lanes, country roads and Hacienda Road (refer to Exhibit 4-1).

Safety Element Policy 44. Work with the Fire Department and adjacent cities on emergency response plans for hazardous material accidents.

Safety Element Policy 45. The City Fire Department should perform twice-yearly inspections of resource facilities to minimize the chance of hazardous waste contamination or fire.

Safety Element Policy 46. The City shall require each oil and gas facility operator to provide long term remediation plans and guarantees for their facilities.

Issue - Emergency Services

The primary sources of emergency services appropriate to La Habra Heights are the Fire Department Emergency Medical Response teams, outside ambulance and paramedic services and the City's law enforcement agency. Medical emergencies are the most commonly needed emergency response.

Safety Element Policy 47. Continue to support the Fire Department efforts in the provision of Emergency Medical Services. Consider the establishment of in-City ambulance and paramedic services.

Safety Element Policy 48. Continue to publicize the proper use of the 911 emergency dispatch service.

Safety Element Policy 49. The City shall publicize and support programs to provide clearly visible street and address identification for all structures.

Safety Element Policy 50. The City should consider changing its zip code to prevent confusion during emergencies or other disasters when outside emergency response services shall be required.

Safety Element Policy 51. A significant increase in regional traffic through the City would threaten to deprive City residents of timely access to emergency services, and shall be resisted.

Safety Element Policy 52. La Habra Heights shall resist the expansion of regional traffic loads throughout the City because of the threat to public health and safety that would result from increased response times for emergency vehicles.

Issue - Government Mandates and Interference

The non-commercial nature of the City of La Habra Heights limits resources that are available to provide services critical to its residents. Government mandates imposed by state and national governments require expenditures by the City on programs not directly beneficial to residents. The result is that services that residents expect to be paid out of taxes, such as road maintenance and emergency services, must be paid by special assessments, taxes or other means

Safety Element Policy 53. Strongly support efforts to minimize state and federal mandates that interfere with local service delivery and seek reimbursement for such mandates pursuant to state law.

Why Become an Incorporated City?

One would think that after a massive effort involving more than 100 citizens crafting a Community General Plan, all would be peaceful and happy. However, several problems were not solved. First, our Volunteer Fire Department was weakened by the lack of new or near new fire fighting equipment, including reliable fire engines. Only about one-half of the citizens contributed annually and the department had no ability to finance purchase of needed equipment. The Los Angeles County Fire Department was increasingly responsible for fire and medical aid as parcels of 4 or more units were created. It appeared that a successful attack on the volunteer effort could be soon made. Second, the home burglary rate skyrocketed due to (a) large distances between homes, (b) homes concealed from neighbors view by foliage, and (c) only 8 hours of Sheriff patrol time. The word was out that we were vulnerable to successful daytime burglary. Third, County Building and Safety (where building permits are issued) was moved from Whittier to downtown L.A. Some builders did not bother to make that trip, and building inspection personnel were distantly located. Two prior attempts to incorporate failed since voting rights were on the basis of property values. However, the statute concerning voting rights was changed

Safety Plan

The graphic depiction of the City of La Habra Heights official policy relative to environmental hazards is presented on Exhibit 5-1, Safety Plan. The development policies and standards described earlier in Safety Element provide the foundation for Exhibit 5-1.

This map illustrates those areas within the City that are impacted by natural and manmade hazards, and that should be considered in future land use planning. The information illustrated in the Safety Plan includes existing seismic hazards, soil hazards and flood hazards that impact the community. These hazards are identified to alert the public to the naturally-occurring hazards that are to be mitigated in

order to reduce the risk to life and property in the City. The key components of the Safety Plan includes the following:

Seismic Risk Study Zones. The Safety Plan indicates those areas that have been identified by the State of California Geological Survey as being within areas that could be subject to liquefaction or landslides resulting from an earthquake. Future development within these areas must conform to the specific requirements outlined in the Government Code. The State also requires that Safety Elements prepared by local governments consider the information contained in the applicable seismic hazard map.

Alquist-Priolo Special Study Zone. Because the Whittier Fault is considered to be an active fault, land uses along the fault trace are subject to the requirements of the Alquist-Priolo Special Study Zone. If a property is undeveloped, a geotechnical study will be required as part of the development review process. If a property is already developed, the disclosure of the fault's location with respect to the property is required. For new development, any new building construction must be "set-back" a specified distance from the fault trace.

Potential Local Flooding. While the City is not included within any designated 100 year or 500 year flood zone, those areas shown in Exhibit 5-1 may be subject to localized flooding.

Evacuation Routes. The four key roadways that would be used in the event of an order for emergency evacuation are delineated in Exhibit 5-1. The designated emergency evacuation routes include Hacienda Road, Harbor Boulevard, East Road and West Road.

Emergency Shelters. In the event of a major damaging earthquake or other emergency, there are a number of buildings that have been designated as emergency shelters. These include City Hall, the Community Center, the Hacienda Golf Club, and local churches.

Hazardous Materials Transport Route. The only roadway in the City where there is a potential for the transport of hazardous materials is Harbor Boulevard.

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