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8. Civic Center Community Fire Safety Action Plan¹

8.1. Civic Center Description

This planning unit includes the neighborhoods of Malibu Country Estates, Malibu Knolls, Malibu Canyon condominium complexes (Maison de Ville, Malibu Canyon Village, Malibu Pacifica), and the Civic Center (educational, government, business district).

The Civic Center Planning Unit is situated in the City of Malibu north of Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) between Malibu Creek to the east and Malibu Jewish Center and Synagogue to the west. The Pacific Coast Highway forms the southern border. Private lands lie to the north, with the exception of state park lands located due north of Malibu Knolls. The Civic Center Planning Unit is 0.8 mile in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include nearly 270 single-family homes and condominiums, a synagogue and cultural center, two churches, two preschools, a private elementary school, public elementary school, veterinary hospital, dressage facility, gas station, private tennis club, plant nursery, gym, movie theater, labor exchange, telecommunications company, building supplier, medical and dental offices, two large business and retail complexes with eateries (Cross Creek Plaza and Malibu Country Mart) hosting more than 70 businesses, professional and personal services offices, Hughes Research Laboratory, City Hall, Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29, Los Angeles County Courthouse, satellite District Attorney offices, Los Angeles County Public Library, Papa Jack's Skate Park (City of Malibu), and a municipal stormwater treatment facility. Properties and homes vary in size.

The three condominium complexes are zoned six units per acre. Malibu Country Estates have quarter-acre lots.² Malibu Knolls homes are zoned 1 acre with lots one-half to 4 acres.³ Real estate values range from \$349,000 to \$2 million for condominiums, and from \$1.2 million for undeveloped lots and homes to \$6 million for larger estates.⁴

8.1.1. Civic Center Wildfire Environment

Five Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHAs) are designated for the Civic Center unit. They are the following open spaces: 1) adjacent to and south of Civic Center Way, east of Malibu Canyon Road, north of PCH; surrounding Hughes Research Laboratory; 2) and 3) areas due north and south of Malibu Knolls; 4) north of Civic Center Way and west of Stuart Ranch Road; and 5) the Malibu Creek corridor. These ESHAs include pristine chaparral, coastal sage scrub, riparian, and wetland habitat.⁵

There are several opportunities for recreation in this community. Developed types include swimming, tennis, and dressage. Passive recreation types are walking, running, and bicycling. The 15-acre Legacy Park—a city park

¹ This document was written by Julie Clark De Blasio, Principal of Sweetgrass Environmental Consulting, in conjunction with ForEverGreen Forestry.

² California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 3: Dan Blocker to Malibu Pier*, Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file], www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

³ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *Land Use Map 3: Dan Blocker to Malibu Pier*, Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file], www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

⁴ PublishHomes.com, “Luxury homes in Malibu,” <http://www.publishhomes.com>, (accessed February 21, 2010).

⁵ California Coastal Commission Technical Services, San Francisco, CA (Revised 2002), *ESHA and Marine Resources Map 3: Dan Blocker to Malibu Pier*. Local Coastal Program – City of Malibu [Data file], www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/1603/

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currently under construction—is designed to combine recreation with water quality protection. The park will feature stormwater detention basins, constructed intermittent wetlands, and riparian habitat while improving water quality as well as restoring and protecting natural resources in Malibu Creek, Malibu Lagoon, and Surfrider Beach.⁶

Ingress and egress is from the thoroughfares of Malibu Canyon Road and PCH. Few roads are interconnected and most are cul-de-sacs. Several homes or neighborhoods are gated.

CAL FIRE designated the entire Santa Monica Mountains region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The Civic Center Planning Unit is included. This determination by the state is based on factors such as fire weather, slope, and fuel loading, among others.

The Civic Center Planning Unit experienced many wildfires over the last century: Topanga/Escondido (1913); 30,000-acre Malibu-Latigo complex (1935); Woodland Hills #65 (October 6, 1943); 18,000-acre Liberty with losses incurred in Malibu Country Estates and Civic Center areas (November 28, 1958) with more than 100 homes lost between US 101 and the coast; 28,201-acre Wright (October 23, 1978) with 403 homes lost and 10 fatalities from US 101 to the beach; 5,197-acre Piuma (October 14, 1985); Old Topanga (November 2, 1993) with 400 homes lost and three fatalities in the burn area; Calabasas (October 21, 1996); and Canyon (October 21, 2007) with four homes, a church, and at least four businesses lost in the Civic Center Planning Unit.^{7,8,9}

Homes in the Civic Center area have a variable age-class. Older structures are often wooden type. Newer construction types include plaster, stucco, and cement. Many homes, regardless of age, have wooden decks and/or fences. Mature ornamental vegetation is found throughout the entire unit and is predominant in Malibu Knolls. Flammable and fibrous tropical species are common at Hughes Research Laboratory, the condominium developments, and Malibu Country Estates. Many older homes have been remodeled. Most structures in the Civic Center unit are not retrofitted to current California Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Fire and Building Standards.¹⁰

Utilities in Malibu Country Estates and Civic Center are subterranean. Vegetation encroaches upon many power lines in Malibu Knolls. Malibu Country Estates has a View Protection and Preservation ordinance that is part of their overlay district; it was made an ordinance in 2007.^{11,12} A benefit is that it appears to have dually served in ameliorating fire threat in the neighborhood through ornamental vegetation management.¹³ A traffic study conducted a few years ago for Malibu Knolls concluded that plants obscured the view of motorists, and that Edison power poles needed vegetation clearing.¹⁴

⁶ Vic Peterson (July 31, 2006), “Legacy Park update and approval for issuance of the request for proposals on the Malibu Civic Center Integrated Water Quality Management Plan to be implemented for the Legacy site.” In City of Malibu Council Agenda Report.

⁷ Mike Davis (1998), “The Case for Letting Malibu Burn.” In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt): pp. 93–147.

⁸ J. Friedman (October 31, 2007), “Malibu fire damages run the gamut,” *Malibu Times*.

⁹ Robert .S. Taylor, Biogeographer/Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

¹⁰ State of California, Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

¹¹ City of Malibu (n.d.), City of Malibu resolution index, <http://www.ci.malibu.ca.us/download/index.cfm/fuseaction/download/cid/13947/> (accessed June 17, 2010).

¹² Hiro Koutchounian, Malibu Country Estates Homeowners Association, personal communication, May 2010.

¹³ O. Damavandi (June 3, 2009), “View protection task force at odds over plan,” *Malibu Times*.

¹⁴ City of Malibu: Malibu Public Safety Committee (May 30, 2001), Minutes: special meeting – draft Malibu Knolls traffic study.

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Municipal water supply is through Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29 in Malibu. Conveyance is along a transmission main that follows PCH, with water stored in tanks located on the upland side of the highway. Los Angeles County adopted mandatory water conservation measures in 2009. Threats to the water supply include infrastructural age and lack of capital funds to upgrade, increased demand from new development, emergency use such as during wildfire events, and electrical failure during wildfire events that may inhibit access to water.¹⁵⁻¹⁶

The Civic Center Planning Unit recently was ordered by the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board to prohibit on-site septic systems. This prohibition goes into effect November 2015 for commercial facilities and 2019 for residences.¹⁷ The Legacy Park project will have on-site water treatment. Los Angeles County Waterworks No. 29 will lead and manage this project with the purpose of wastewater reclamation and reuse for Malibu. The design will employ a gravity collection system and septic tank effluent pumps that meet all requirements of California administrative code for water quality discharge standards for reclaimed water use.¹⁸ The change from septic to a sanitary sewer system is projected to save 80,000 gallons of effluent from being discharged to the Malibu Creek watershed.¹⁹ The treated water may serve to augment the available water supply.

Los Angeles County Fire Station #88 is located south of this planning unit.

8.2. Civic Center Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines, trees, traffic, and landslides. Most streets in this unit are cul-de-sacs. Some homes and condominiums are gated.

Malibu Country Estates has a limited preferential parking ordinance. This restricts daily congestion in the neighborhood and will contribute to ease of ingress and egress during emergencies.²⁰



Evacuation from the Civic Center Planning Unit will travel either eastward or westward along PCH, depending on law enforcement recommendations based on fire behavior, wind pattern, traffic, and ingress of emergency vehicles. In some cases, and only by the advice of the sheriff, Malibu Canyon Road might be an option. Law enforcement planners should give special considerations to

large groups that might need to be evacuated from Webster Elementary School, Our Lady of Malibu Catholic

¹⁵ Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy/Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (September 2, 2009), *Malibu Parks Public Access Enhancement Plan – Public Works Plan Draft Environmental Impact Report – Water Supply*.

¹⁶ Arthur Schimke, Regional Water Service Superintendent, Waterworks and Sewer Maintenance Division, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works, personal communication, April–June 2010.

¹⁷ Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (November 18, 2009), “Amendment to the water quality control plan for the Los Angeles region to prohibit on-site wastewater disposal systems (OWDSs) in the Malibu Civic Center area,” http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb4/press_room/announcements/public-hearing-Malibu/index.shtml.

¹⁸ R. Crites and R. Beggs (2008), “Water recycling in small communities extended on conserved potable water supplies.” In: *Proceedings of the Water Environment Federation WEFTEC 2008. Session 11-20*: pp. 1395–1402 (8).

¹⁹ B. Douglas, Questa Engineering Corp (February 11, 2003), “Bacteria TMDL for Malibu Creek Watershed” to T. Fleming, USEPA, http://epa.gov/region09/water/tmdl/malibu/rtc_malibu_bacteria.pdf.

²⁰ A. Brenoff (November 11, 2007), “Neighborly advice: where the surf meets the suburbs,” *Malibu Times*.

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Church and School, Malibu Presbyterian Church and School, Civic Center businesses and government offices, and the equestrian center on Cross Creek Road.

Possible evacuation areas located within the Civic Center Planning Unit that should be investigated by local law enforcement and fire departments include: Hughes Research Laboratory, parking lots at the county facilities, Legacy Park, the 15-acre disced undeveloped La Paz property due east and extending north from Papa Jack’s Skate Park, and the tennis club.

8.3. Civic Center Community Meeting Summary

The Civic Center meeting was held in the City of Malibu Council Chambers on November 2, 2009. No residents and four non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be seen on Map II.8-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.8-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- Civic Center courthouse and library
- City Hall complex
- Commercial vineyard and winery
- Cross Creek business center
- Edison substation
- Our Lady of Malibu Church and School
- Malibu Country Mart/business district
- Malibu Glass
- Malibu Presbyterian Church and School
- Veterinary and medical commercial complex
- Webster Elementary School

8.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects

The following items are community-identified projects from the community meeting. Attendees were encouraged to “think big,” and not be concerned about project cost or property ownership for the project brainstorming process. Following the brainstorming, attendees prioritized projects based on which were most realistic and most important. These projects can be seen on Map II.8-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.8-2. CIVIC CENTER: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

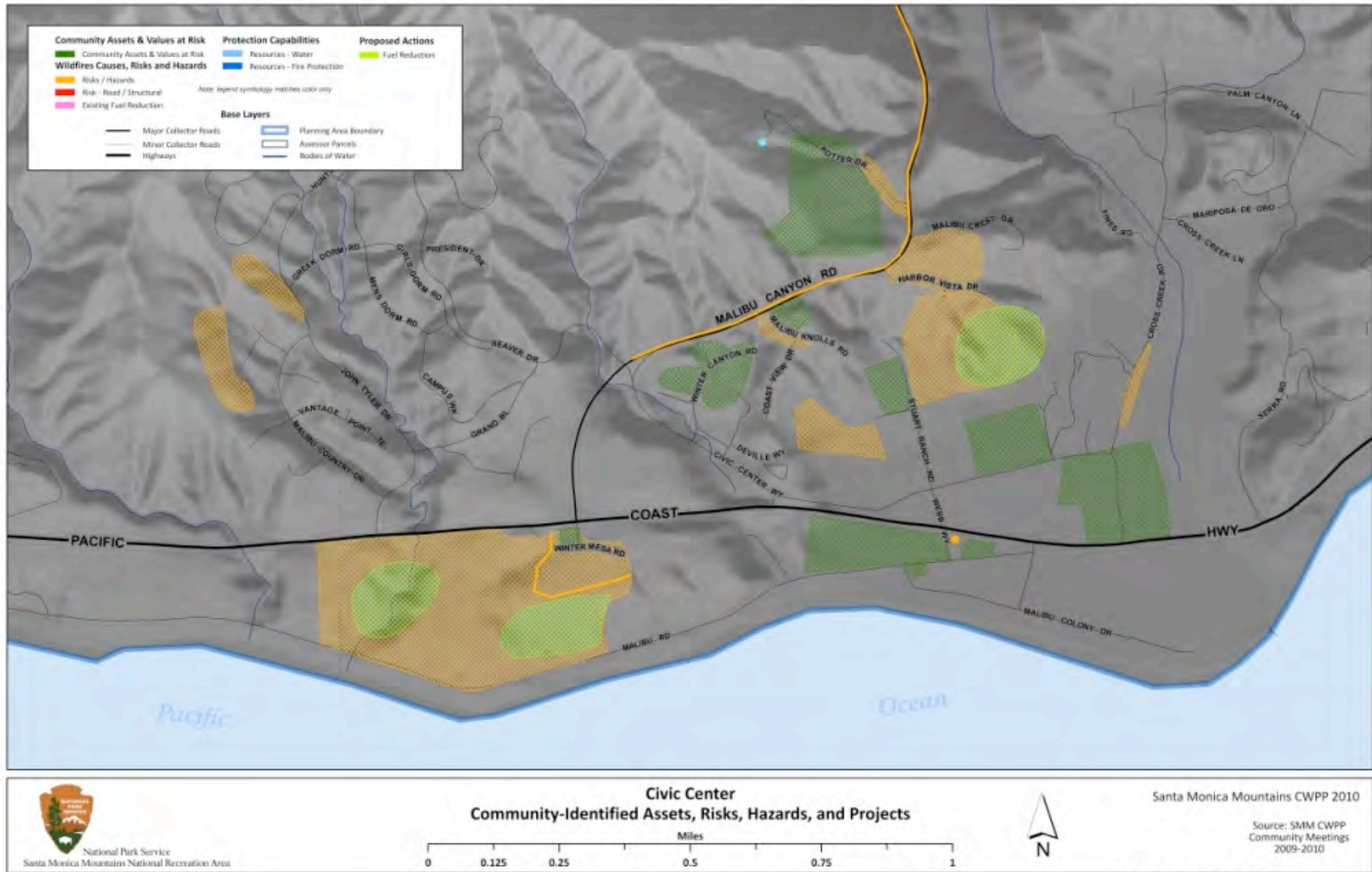
IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK	VOTES
Better fire department response, command/control – communication efficiency, deployment of resources	Fire Protection		1
Hazard fuels clearance local contact	Fuel Reduction / Policy		1
Fuel reduction	Fuel Reduction		
Fuel reduction on state property	Fuel Reduction		
Hazardous tree removal program around homes	Fuel Reduction		

8.4. Civic Center Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Civic Center Planning Unit.

- Form a local Fire Safe Council (FSC) or join with other nearby FSCs. This structure will facilitate community wildfire preparedness. Work with the California Fire Safe Council to create a local FSC that will work best for this area. One option is a larger Malibu-wide FSC that could have representatives from each of the different neighborhoods and homeowner's associations (HOAs).
- Residents reduce urban fuels in the home ignition zone based on the Conservation Principles and Best Management Practices outlined in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of this CWPP. Fuels maintenance should be a routine and ongoing practice for all homes and landscapes in the Santa Monica Mountains. This is especially important in the Harbor Vista and Malibu Crest Drive areas. This includes: ensuring structures are resistant to heat and embers, maintaining all vegetation "from the house out," and removing anything in this zone that might ignite and spread fire.
- Hughes Research Laboratories reduce hazardous fuels on Potter Drive.
- Ensure that at least one team from each homeowner's association or neighborhood undergoes Malibu Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training. This is the vehicle to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the fire department.
- Implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program through a FSC, HOA, or other community organization starting in the residential neighborhoods on the hills and in priority order:
 - Along main evacuation routes,
 - Along the spur roads to main evacuation roads, especially Harbor Vista Drive, Malibu Crest Drive, and Malibu Knolls Road,
 - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home,
 - School district maintain palm trees behind buildings,
 - Trees in or near power lines.
- Local nursery reduce fuels along perimeter to minimize threat to neighboring homes.
- Work through a new FSC or existing HOA or other neighborhood structure to begin a local community education and preparedness campaign. This can be done in cooperation with other area FSCs and/or the City of Malibu, Los Angeles County Fire Department, and the National Park Service.
- Work with law enforcement and Los Angeles County Fire Department through a FSC, HOA, or other neighborhood-level association to develop a local evacuation plan. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions.
- Explore community purchase and installation of Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) building products to upgrade homes to current WUI building standards.
- All residents upgrade homes to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.

MAP II.8-1. CIVIC CENTER: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS²¹



²¹ This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.