

FROM: Jeff Maxwell, Fire Chief, Zayante Fire Protection District
TO: SCC Planning Commission & Board of Supervisors RE: Limited Access Camping Ordinance

Honorable Commissions and Supervisors:

May 8, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to review the proposed Limited Access Camping Ordinance. My first impression is that I am surprised that this subject is before the Planning Commission with only County Fire Marshal input. Although highly respected I anticipate the proposed designated area by definition could easily impact multiple Fire Protection Districts throughout the County of Santa Cruz each with their own Fire Marshal and Fire Code process. Omitting feedback from Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Felton, Zayante, Scotts Valley, and Central Fire Districts leading up to the last minute likely contributed to the process concerns articulated at the May 8 Commission meeting.

My oral comments were technologically challenged with the feedback existing in the virtual platform. That said, Excluding the Authorities Having Jurisdiction is not a good starting point. I expressed specific concern that Staff has expressed only an awareness of the Fire Permit and Review process and that those Fire related concerns are not properly addressed in a ministerial review process allowing for Zoning clearance. In all other development aspects Fire reviews, inspects and permits development. When Staff says « we envision a fire process » it tells me there is not one. If it is not codified it will not be corrected later.

The Zayante Fire District also is concerned with disparate impact in already leveraged communities such as Lompico where more than a dozen LICA sites have been identified by map. In a community ranked 4th in problematic evacuations for communities in California – adding more complexity and ignition sources is unacceptable.

The Fire District requests removal of TPZ and RA zoning from the Ordinance.

The Fire District requests applying High Fire Severity Zones as an exclusion. Lessons from CZU should be obvious as most of the CZU Fire was in HFSZ fuel models. As an alternative consider exploration of the suggested a standalone Farm Stay Ordinance focused on the Coastal Zone and not in the rural mountains.

Please remove the language of « Burn Days » as that process has no relevance or bearing and only adds confusion in future implementation.

A lasting impression is Staff acknowledging that no one Site fits all scenario's and specifically reinforces the Fire Districts desire to be codified in the review and permitting process. Each site will require a subject matter expert to evaluate conditions and mitigations necessary to operate safely.

Previously submitted comments addressing Low Impact Camping Ordinance specifically related to fire protection and fire code:

- The proposed ordinance makes no accommodation for campsite connectivity to report emergencies. This would be significant in the event of an escaped fire or a medical emergency.
- The proposed ordinance lacks on sight accountability when only requiring a responsible point of contact within 15 miles and 60 minutes to respond to issues on site.
- The proposed ordinance does refer to adhering to the Fire Code but should specify critical standards for adherence to 7.92.505.2 to road signage ; 503.7 – Gate standards ; 307.4.2 recreational fire standards.
- The Ordinance does not require site mapping or preplan documentation be provided to the fire authority of jurisdiction allowing responders to navigate to emergencies in these unimproved rural areas.
- Within section (IV) « accommodations » there is allowance for canvas tents, yurts and domes in combination with overnight stays ranging out to 14 days. It is easily conceivable that without oversight these accommodations drift from transitory to permanent populations. These structures also contribute to fire load without improved fire protection resources.
- As a reminder, campfires are prohibited under Chapter 7.92

In summary, my concerns are focused on a lack of site accountability, ensuring acceptable access, site mapping, signage and most importantly there is no prerequisite for camp sites to have the means to summon assistance from 911. I appreciate the efforts made by Staff to acknowledge the risk to public safety from the threat of fire. In light of the poor reconstruction performance rates after the CZU Fire I would offer we should learn from those tragic losses and do better for our community.

I do not find adequate measures to insure professional and competent fire review and permitting of proposed LICA applications and request the addition of a Fire review and permitting process be included in the ministerial zoning and environmental process presented.

Respectfully,

Jeff Maxwell, Fire Chief