BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON

CLIMATE ACTION AND FIRE-SAFE RECOVERY





Initial Recommendations and Draft Action Plans for
The Resilient and Sustainable Rebuilding of Los Angeles County

May 1st, 2025

Introduction

The January 7 fires changed the face of Los Angeles, representing one of the worst US climate disasters since Hurricane Katrina in terms of cost, and serving as a harbinger of future risks facing the region in terms of extreme drought, weather, heat, and fire. Recovery of our region must go beyond rebuilding. Without bold, coordinated action, we risk further displacement, rising insurance costs, and deepening community vulnerability to future climate events.

That's why the Blue Ribbon Commission was formed.

Our initial recommendations and draft action plans are presented below for policymakers; yet we believe they will inform all stakeholders as we strive to embrace this once-in-a-generation challenge to rebuild fire-impacted communities and housing with greater resilience and sustainability. By acting decisively, Greater Los Angeles can become a model for climate-resilient recovery—protecting future generations from compounding climate threats, and serving as an example that will be seen by the world during the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.



Goal of Initial Recommendations and Draft Action Plans

The initial recommendations and draft action plans are intended to:

- > Inform real time decisions being made in the halls of local government across Los Angeles and in the State Capitol, and better allow the Commission to engage policymakers as they deliberate the state budget, state and local legislation, and executive and regulatory action;
- > Further engage with the affected communities as well as other key stakeholders (e.g., other rebuilding initiatives, lenders, insurance companies, philanthropic funders) to further refine, detail, and add to the final resilient rebuilding recommendations and action plans to be released in June.

Background

Established by Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath in February 2025, the <u>Blue Ribbon Commission for Climate Action and Fire-Safe Recovery</u> brings together a broad range of independent experts and community leaders. The Commission's goal: to deliver actionable and timely recommendations for how the City of Los Angeles, Cities of Pasadena, Malibu, and other affected municipalities, the County of LA, the State of California, the federal government, and key partners can lead a climate-resilient rebuilding effort.

The Commission's aim is to enable communities to rise out of the ashes stronger, including by helping:

- Residents, neighborhoods, and our region rebuild single family homes, multi-family housing, schools, places of
 worship, community buildings, commercial buildings, and infrastructure in a more resilient, sustainable manner to
 better ensure long-term survivability and insurability;
- Retrofit existing homes, businesses, and infrastructure in at-risk communities, while supporting the well-being of residents, workers, and community members; and
- Advance regionwide climate mitigation and resilience measures and investments to reduce risks from other climate shocks and disasters.

The Commission kicked off our work with a two-day retreat on February 28 and March 1, 2025 in collaboration with our research support partners at UCLA, forming six initial working groups on critical topics (i.e., energy, water, building codes, governance and finance, community resilience and wellness, and land use). A short release of early action recommendations was as issued March 18, 2025 to policymakers (see appendix).

Commission's Initial Recommendations and Draft Action Plans

In this release, the Commission offers a list of initial recommendations, presented in an executive summary drawn from the detailed draft action plans along with the early action recommendations. The draft action plans are organized by thematic working group.



These initial recommendations represent priority opportunities for policymakers to pursue sustainability, resilience, risk mitigation, and climate action in near-term decision making. The Commission will augment and deepen these recommendations in response to feedback, questions and ideas from the affected communities, policymakers, and key stakeholders as we continue this stage of our work over the next several weeks.

To draft these recommendations and action plan, the Commission has drawn on a wide range of expertise. Individual Commissioners brought their own knowledge and expertise, and deliberated with one another in working groups. The Commission reviewed work from other rebuilding focused organizations across the region, and consulted with subject matter experts, advocacy organizations, policymakers, and community members leading efforts in the fire-devastated neighborhoods. Our work has been further informed and strengthened by research support from UCLA, whose team prepared background materials and briefings, provided legal and policy expertise, and coordinated dialogues with experts in areas including fire mitigation and equitable disaster recovery.

In addition to direct engagement with affected community residents and leaders, the Commission and UCLA are also working with the Department of Angels to engage with community members around key topic areas (e.g., residents and block captains from the Palisades and Altadena neighborhoods shared their interest in, questions, and needs around all-electric homes). Continued community engagement is planned in the coming days and weeks.

Commission's Next Steps for Developing Final Recommendations and Action Plan

The Commission is committed to helping communities get the tools and solutions they need to advance resilient rebuilding and a sustainable recovery in the fire-ravaged areas, while enhancing future economic growth, better protecting communities from a variety of climate risks (e.g., extreme heat, drought, weather, fire), and ensuring the sustainability of the entire region.

Our mandate is clear as the only group established explicitly to focus on the resilient and sustainable rebuilding of Los Angeles: we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity and responsibility to rebuild communities in a way that reduces vulnerabilities to climate hazards while working toward a stronger, safer, and more resilient region. By doing so, we can help rebuild lives and communities while creating a national—and global—model for climate-resilient disaster recovery. (NOTE: several of the recommended actions will also help our region be more resilient in the face of ever present seismic risks).

Over the next several weeks, the Commission will continue to refine and finalize the recommendations and action plans by:

- Deepening our engagement with and obtaining feedback from representatives from the Palisades, Malibu, Altadena and other fire-affected communities;
- Presenting our recommendations to and engaging in dialogue with policymakers, other recovery and rebuilding initiatives and groups, stakeholders (e.g., insurance industry, lenders, housing organizations), utilities, and others;
- Drawing upon UCLA's research to refine strategies for rebuilding neighborhoods and infrastructure in an equitable and resilient manner.

The Commission's Final Recommendations and Action Plans for Resilient and Sustainable Rebuilding will be released in June 2025, along with the research and findings from UCLA. Please visit the Commission's <u>website</u> to learn more and provide questions, feedback, and suggestions.

Note on Public Health: Soil Clean Up and Monitoring, Need for Clear Guidance

As the Commission's focus is on LA County's climate resilient and equitable rebuilding and recovery, we have only put forth select recommendations related to clean-up and monitoring requirements. We acknowledge the importance of soil testing and safety, which is key not only to public health and public trust but also to securing financing for home construction.

In the early action recommendations of March 18, the Commission highlighted the need to **provide clear public health guidance to returning residents and others** (e.g., insurers, property owners) with clear, consistent standards for evaluating and remediating airborne, water-borne, and soil risks in fire zones. We continue to emphasize the need for this clear guidance as an essential first step for any rebuilding.



The Blue Ribbon Commission (Commission) was chartered as an independent commission of experts to develop and issue recommendations for climate action and fire safe recovery to all relevant policymakers across the County of Los Angeles. Based on the mandate for the Commission, the Commission developed the initial recommendations and draft action plans below. The initial recommendations in the executive summary are drawn and synthesized from across working group draft action plans and the early action recommendations.

Following the summary are the draft detailed action plans for each working group topic area, which are being issued and shared now to solicit feedback as the Commission's work continues. As noted above, the Commission will engage in direct conversations and also welcomes feedback and questions at our <u>website</u>. Based on feedback and further engagement, each working group will further detail and/or add to their recommendations and draft action plans (e.g., refining details, adding responsible parties, developing additional recommendations) in the coming weeks.

When rebuilt and newly constructed homes are constructed using the latest building and energy codes along with the best science related to wildfire home ignitions and conflagration, the neighborhood and individual property owners will increase their insurability. The recommendations on materials (e.g., Chapter 7A practices, fire-resistant and energy efficient high performance windows with tempered glass) and landscaping (e.g., Zone Zero) are the elements we have heard from experts that insurers want to see in the homes for which they choose to write policies. Other recommendations (e.g., distributed energy and water systems, buffer zones) enhance not only resiliency, but also survivability and defensibility of housing, other properties, and neighborhoods.

As part of our initial stage, the Commission recommends the following for consideration by local and state policymakers along with community members, philanthropic organizations, utilities, and other key stakeholders:



Establish Regional Entities for Coordinated Action

To streamline complex recovery efforts, prioritize and support the return of all residents and businesses, enable rebuilding by displaced homeowners, and implement proactive, large-scale fire mitigation, the Commission recommends the following to be established via state legislation:

- A. Create a Resilient Rebuilding Authority/ies for affected areas with powers that include tax increment financing and use of federal, state, and philanthropic funds to: purchase lots at a fair price for land banking; select builders to reconstruct properties to resilient rebuilding standards and sell homes with first look provided to returning residents and their families; manage and/or coordinate rebuilding and related logistics and costs;seek to enhance financing options with aim to help those families that lack ability to cover costs of rebuilding on their own; create economies of scale for acquiring equipment and materials; and carry out other activities that enhance property insurability and promote a resilient and sustainable recovery.
- B. Establish an LA County Fire Control District with dedicated funding for proactive, regional wildfire mitigation, including buffer zones and coordinated retrofits for vulnerable neighborhoods.



Mandate Enhanced Fire-Resilient Building Standards to Improve Safety and Property Insurability, Fast Track Review and Approval of High Performance Homes, Educate Stakeholders

To significantly reduce structural vulnerability to wildfire and enhance insurability of structures and homes, the Commission recommends that City, County, and state government:

- A. Set policy to require all reconstruction to meet, at minimum, Chapter 7A building codes to maximize protection across burn areas and other vulnerable high-risk zones throughout LA County.
- B. Implement Zone 0 defensible space requirements with provisions to enhance sustainable implementation and other higher defensible space standards.
- C. Require permit review for landscape design in burn areas and other high-risk zones to ensure defensible space and appropriate native and drought tolerant plant palettes while supporting healthy tree canopy.
- D. Create a County-level fast-track process for fire resistant, climate resistant rebuilding (e.g., distributed energy and water systems, all electric homes) of homes and structures through permitting and incentives for property owners. While it is recommended at least for those properties requiring variances and reviews beyond like-for-like, doing so for all reconstruction would parallel what the City established through Executive Order No.5 and encourage property owners and communities to access the related benefits (e.g., back up water and power during emergencies, \$9,000 in estimated cost savings for all electric versus dual fuel).
- E. Educate homeowners and provide training for architects, engineers, and contractors on the relevant California and local high performance building code requirements (e.g., Title 24 energy code, Chapter 7A, landscaping) and the benefits including increased resiliency (e.g., distributed energy and water sources for blackouts or future fire warnings, high performance windows and structures that improve efficiency and reduce fire risk), lower energy bills and enhanced fire protection.



Accelerate Transition to Clean, Resilient Energy and Modernize the Grid

To lower long-term energy costs, reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change, improve air quality, enhance grid stability and reliability, and increase resilience, the Commission recommends that City, County, and state governments:

A. Create a set of City- and County-level master permit and/or pre-approved designs for fire-resistant, all electric homes (e.g., passive homes) and building systems. This should include an

instant permit for electrical system designs (e.g., solar and battery storage) that are pre-approved by fire department and building officials. These resources can augment the existing rebuilding efforts (e.g., County-led process for architects to submit plans for pre-approval) by adding key resiliency, and/or energy requirements.

- B. If self certification is allowed by the City and County for licensed professionals, require that architects, engineers and contractors have received training in resilient building design and construction including fire resistance, electrification, and the energy code.
- C. Require electric utilities to provide electrical capacity and infrastructure that is sufficient to support high penetration of building decarbonization and transportation electrification, and to interconnect clean distributed energy resources (DERs) at the property and neighborhood level.
- D. If regulators approve undergrounding, finance strategic undergrounding of electricity infrastructure in the burn areas in a manner that minimizes the cost burden for rate payers, and prioritizes other wildfire-vulnerable areas in planning for future undergrounding.
- E. Prioritize investment in and integration of DERs in utility planning including utilizing virtual power plants (VPP) and vehicle-to-grid and -home (V2G, V2H) and provide incentives and support for DER installation during reconstruction.
- F. Establish community-scale microgrids centered around key locations (e.g., schools, community centers) that support critical loads (e.g., pumps for cisterns to douse properties, refrigeration of medicine, cooling needs during extreme heat, device charging, communications systems) for future blackouts or power shutoff events.
- G. Upgrade communication networks to be resilient alongside distribution grid improvements and ensure they can be operational during power shutoffs.

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Strengthen Water System Resilience and Safety

To ensure reliable water supply for daily use and critical firefighting needs, especially during climate-driven and seismic events, the Commission recommends water utilities be supported in carrying out the following for burn areas, and where needed, County-wide:

- A. Conduct comprehensive vulnerability assessments of water and sewer infrastructure, and upgrade systems to meet modern fire flow requirements.
- B. Prioritize local water capture and storage along with non-fossil backup power sources at the structure and neighborhood level.
- C. Ensure robust post-fire water quality testing and communication protocols along with updated fire protection standards.
- D. Establish ways to charge customers who most benefit from greatly enhanced system resilience investments to cover the cost of those investments, rather than charging all customers within a system equally regardless of how they benefit from that investment.
- E. Utilize vulnerability assessments to set prioritized lists of water resilient capital improvements with budgets and timeframes. Seek state funding/grants to construct resiliency improvements.
- F. Protect water infrastructure and the environment through specific erosion control measures and naturebased solutions.
- G. As needed, enhance firefighting water supply, such as deploying temporary water solutions and coordinating helicopter refill locations.
- Evaluate, formalize and improve shared access to water resources between water districts for resilience and firefighting.
- Encourage external sprinklers paired with on-site, non-potable, distributed water systems (i.e., cisterns) along with battery storage, including at parks and schools, for irrigation and dousing during high fire risk events as well as to augment fire fighting capacity.
- J. Assess wastewater treatment and conveyance alternatives and make recommendations for building climate resilient infrastructure on the Pacific Coast Highway.
- K. Protect system pressure via accessible shut-off valves.
- Form partnerships to support smaller, resourceconstrained utilities.
- M. Evaluate progress on the multiple water resilience recommendations included in the 2018 Woolsey Fire report.



Bolster Community Health, Equity, and Preparedness

To address the immediate and near-term human impacts of the fires, the Commission recommends to relevant local agencies to:

- A. Provide essential health/safety supplies (PPE) and multilingual education for cleanup workers.
- B. Fund expanded and accessible mental health services for all affected residents by partnering with philanthropic organizations.
- C. Support the physical health of organized groups of volunteer firefighters and recovery workers by providing free medical screenings and related services.



Enhance Insurability, Reimbursability, and Financial Tools

To help ensure resilient rebuilding efforts are financially viable for low and moderate-income residential and commercial property owners and address systemic insurance challenges including market instability and insurance affordability and availability, the Commission recommends:

- A. Clarify coverage and timelines for insured survivors. The Governor, Insurance Commissioner, and state legislature need to ensure survivors can get clear information about coverage and payout timelines to make informed rebuilding decisions.
- Ensure future insurability for rebuilt wildfire-resistant homes and structures. Policymakers must provide a framework for insurers to offer coverage for rebuilt homes-and as necessary, provide incentives for wildfire-resistant designs and wildfire risk mitigationhelping ensure homeowners, builders, and others will build homes that meet these standards and enhance insurability. When homes are reconstructed using the best science related to wildfire home ignitions and conflagration, the neighborhood and individual properties increase their insurability. The recommendations on building strategies and materials (e.g., Chapter 7A practices, fire-resistant and energy efficient high performance windows with tempered glass) and landscaping (e.g., Zone 0) are the elements insurers want to see in the homes for which they choose to underwrite policies.
- C. Avoid waivers to mandatory building codes as "laws and ordinances" riders in standard insurance

- policies require insurers to pay out the costs of compliance and meeting code. Waiving code pushes costs to homeowners who will have to cover the costs of building to more resilient, high performance standards in newer building codes.
- D. Provide income-based, stackable financial incentives for resilient rebuilding. The legislature and Governor should provide—via the state, local government, utilities and/or the proposed Resilient Rebuilding Authority/ies—cash incentives and/or tax credits that increase and/or are based on income for reconstruction per single-family home, and similar incentives for multi-family units, to support all electric, distributed water and energy systems, and fire-resistant building and landscaping. Such incentives and credits will complement local utility incentives and allow for stacking of other incentives for distributed water and energy (e.g., cisterns, solar, battery storage), and efficient electric appliances.
- E. Establish a consortium–via the proposed Resilient Rebuilding Authority/ies and/or in collaboration with local governments–including community development financial institutions (CDFIs), philanthropic organizations, lenders, and other partners to raise catalytic capital for blended finance solutions to better help low to moderate income families return to their homes and neighborhoods, rebuild resilient multifamily rental and for sale housing, and drive investment into community assets for an equitable, sustainable recovery.

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