

Town of Los Gatos Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee Report

December 1, 2020



**Town of Los Gatos
110 East Main Street
Los Gatos, CA 95030**

Prepared by
Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee

Coordinated with
Santa Clara County Fire Department

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Committee Introduction and Goals

Los Gatos is listed as a Community at Risk from wildfires on the Federal and the California Fire Alliance list of Communities at Risk in Santa Clara County. Wildfires occur in the vicinity of Los Gatos and present a significant danger to people and property within the Town. The Town of Los Gatos considers wildfire mitigation to be a top tier priority for the safety of its citizens and an economic imperative.

Recognizing this significant risk, the Los Gatos Town Council convened an Ad Hoc Wildfire Committee to study a broad variety of wildfire mitigation policy and project options to improve the Town's wildfire resiliency. The Committee consisted of Mayor Marcia Jensen, Vice Mayor Barbara Spector, Assistant Fire Chief Brian Glass, Community Member Rob Stump, Community Member Brad Gordon, Assistant Town Manager Arn Andrews, and Parks and Public Works Director Matt Morley. Mr. Stump chaired the Committee.

The Committee's goal was to identify a variety of mitigation strategies that could be implemented within the next two years and three to five-year timeframes, and collectively identify strategies that may assist in reducing wildfire risk while improving community preparedness in response to wildfire. The Committee examined best practices of similar communities within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), lessons learned from recent fires, and other relevant areas of wildfire science. The following report identifies areas for emphasis of future Council wildfire mitigation efforts.

This report describes the Los Gatos WUI and then identifies specific mitigation topics. For each topic, goals, action items, and metrics are identified.

Key Terms

Defensible Space An area around the perimeter of structures in which vegetation, debris, and other types of combustible fuels are treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the rate and intensity of potentially approaching wildfire or fire escaping from structures.

Hillside Collector Streets A low-to-moderate-capacity road which serves to move traffic from local streets to arterial roads. Unlike arterials, collector streets are designed to provide access to residential properties.

Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) A concept of the home ignition zone was developed by a retired USDA Forest Service fire scientist in the late 1990s, following some breakthrough experimental research into how homes ignite due to the effects of radiant heat. The HIZ is divided into three zones; immediate (0 to 5 feet), intermediate zone (5 to 30 feet), extended zone (30 to 100 feet).

Temporary Refuge Areas (TRAs) Pre-identified area(s) where firefighters and members of the public can immediately take refuge for temporary shelter and short-term relief in the event that access to an established safety zone is compromised.

Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) State law requires that all local jurisdictions identify Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones within their jurisdictions. Inclusion within these zones is based on vegetation density, slope severity and other relevant factors that contribute to fire severity.

Wildland Fire Specialist Conducts inspections for residents living in the high fire hazard areas, providing information, advice, and assistance to property owners. Initiates defensible space surveys and develops and maintains a positive and productive dialog with the community. Identifies and coordinates hazard abatement projects to mitigate the effects of wildfire within the District.

Los Gatos Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)

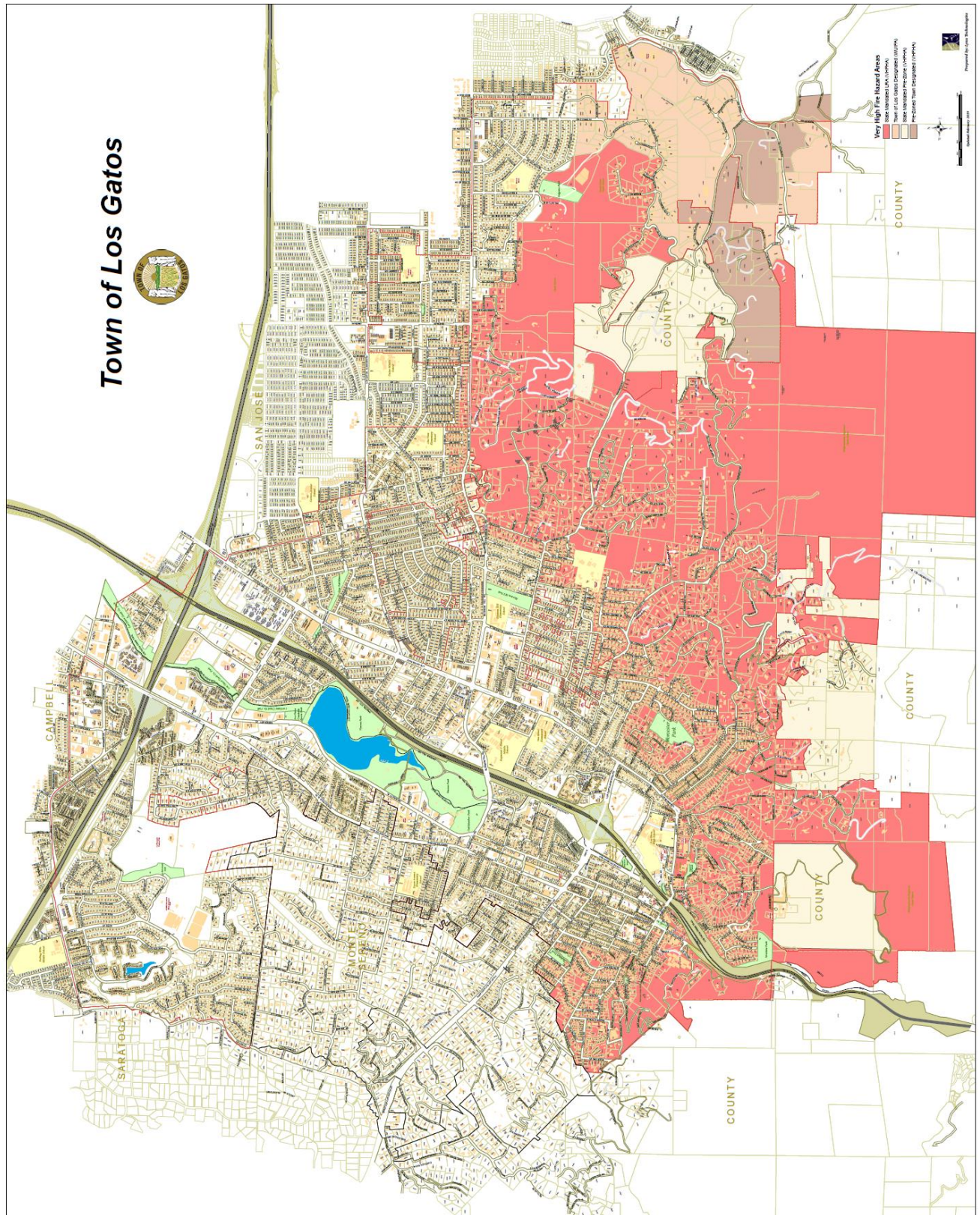
The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) area is best described as an area that transitions from a natural condition (wildland) to a developed area (urban). Homes and other development in the WUI are at risk of catastrophic wildfire due to the presence of vegetation that could fuel a wildfire. The WUI creates an environment in which fire can move readily between structural and vegetative fuels, increasing the potential for wildland fire ignitions and the corresponding potential loss of life and property.

The Los Gatos WUI planning area includes primarily Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone areas on the southern side of Los Gatos. The areas shaded in red in Figure 1 illustrate the extent of WUI lands within the Town. Approximately a quarter of the Town's total residences are located within the WUI. Of an estimated 2018 Town total of 13,299 residences, the WUI contains approximately 3,091. In addition, at an estimated 2.2 residents per household the WUI is home to approximately 6,800 residents among a Town total of 30,250.

The majority of the northern perimeter of the WUI tends to be flatter terrain with higher concentrations of residences. To illustrate this residential concentration, 1,784 of the 3,091 residences in the WUI are located within a quarter mile of the northern boundary.

Town currently utilizes preestablished areas for the maintenance and execution of its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. The CERT maps contained in the Appendix also provide a detailed mapping of the Town WUI area, as well as routes of ingress/egress within CERT boundaries.

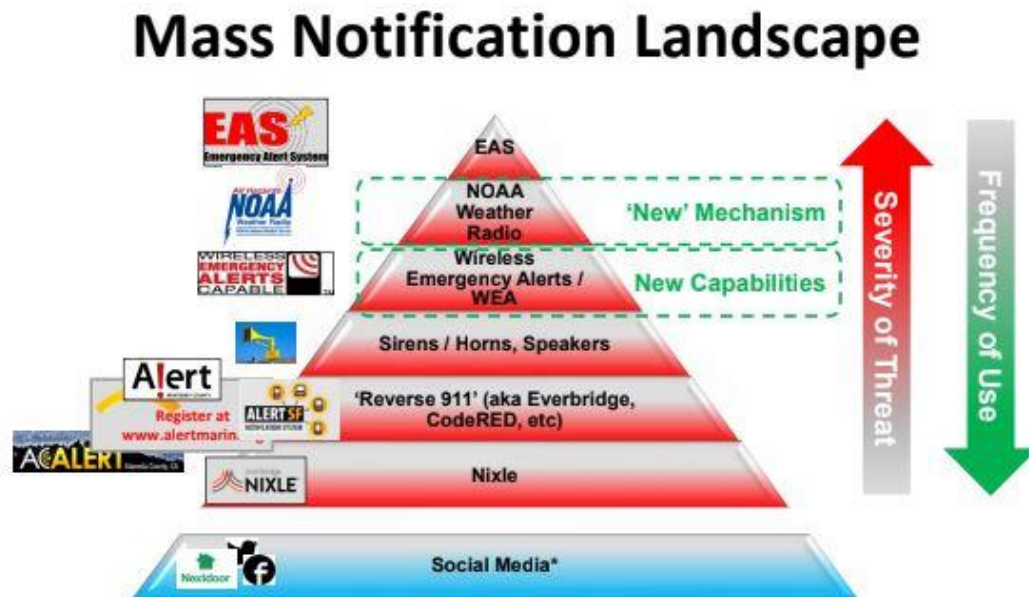
Figure 1



Emergency Communication

In the event of an emergency, it is an inherent responsibility of local government organizations to keep the public informed about natural, human-caused, and technological disasters. Studies show that people rarely act on a single warning message alone. To be effective, warnings should be delivered in various formats across multiple media platforms. The use of multiple platforms helps to increase the reliability of warning delivery, while also providing a sense of corroboration that will encourage recipients to take protective actions. In addition, many emergency subscription platforms are opt-in systems which leave non-adopters out of the information loop. In Los Gatos approximately only 23% of residents (6,942) have opted into the cell notification systems of Alert SCC and Nixle.

As illustrated below many notification systems are dependent on functioning internet and cell service. As evidenced by conditions created by recent fires, neither cell service nor internet service may be relied upon during large scale events, particularly when such an event coincides with a planned Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS).



GOAL:

All residents should receive emergency communications in a timely manner.

ACTION ITEMS	PRIORITY TIMEFRAME
Maximize the use of Nixle/AlertSCC and ensure that existing communication systems are fully utilized.	Priority 1 – within 2 years

Increase resident adoption of Town social media platforms and SCCFD Twitter feed	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Explore additional non-cell/internet reliant emergency communication systems e.g. siren system.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Increase SCCFD Ready, Set, Go Programs in Town	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Explore adding electronic message boards in front of fire stations and possibly police station	Priority 1 – within 2 years

METRICS
• Percentage of residents opting into Alert SCC and Nixle • Percentage of residents signing up for Town/SCCFD social media platforms • Number of Alert SCC/Nixle promotions per year • Percentage of residents with secondary means of receiving communications • Number of residents receiving Ready, Set, Go trainings in Town per year

Emergency Evacuation

The majority of the Town's WUI neighborhoods are served by Hillside Collector Streets which serve properties located in hillside areas, carrying traffic to arterial streets and additional neighborhood collectors. Many of these roadways are designed as one-way routes. During emergency events, both emergency responders and evacuees will be attempting to use the same roadways, thereby hindering access for both groups. Due to the critical importance of providing ingress for emergency vehicles and equipment to the fire area while simultaneously allowing egress to residents attempting to evacuate, the Town will evaluate the existing width, grade, and turning radius on these critical routes in order to improve access.

GOAL:

To the greatest extent feasible, create and maintain conditions necessary for efficient and effective evacuations.

ACTION ITEMS	PRIORITY TIMEFRAME
Identify and explore the development of roadside and other Temporary Refuge Areas (TRAs) throughout the WUI.	Priority 1 – within 2 years

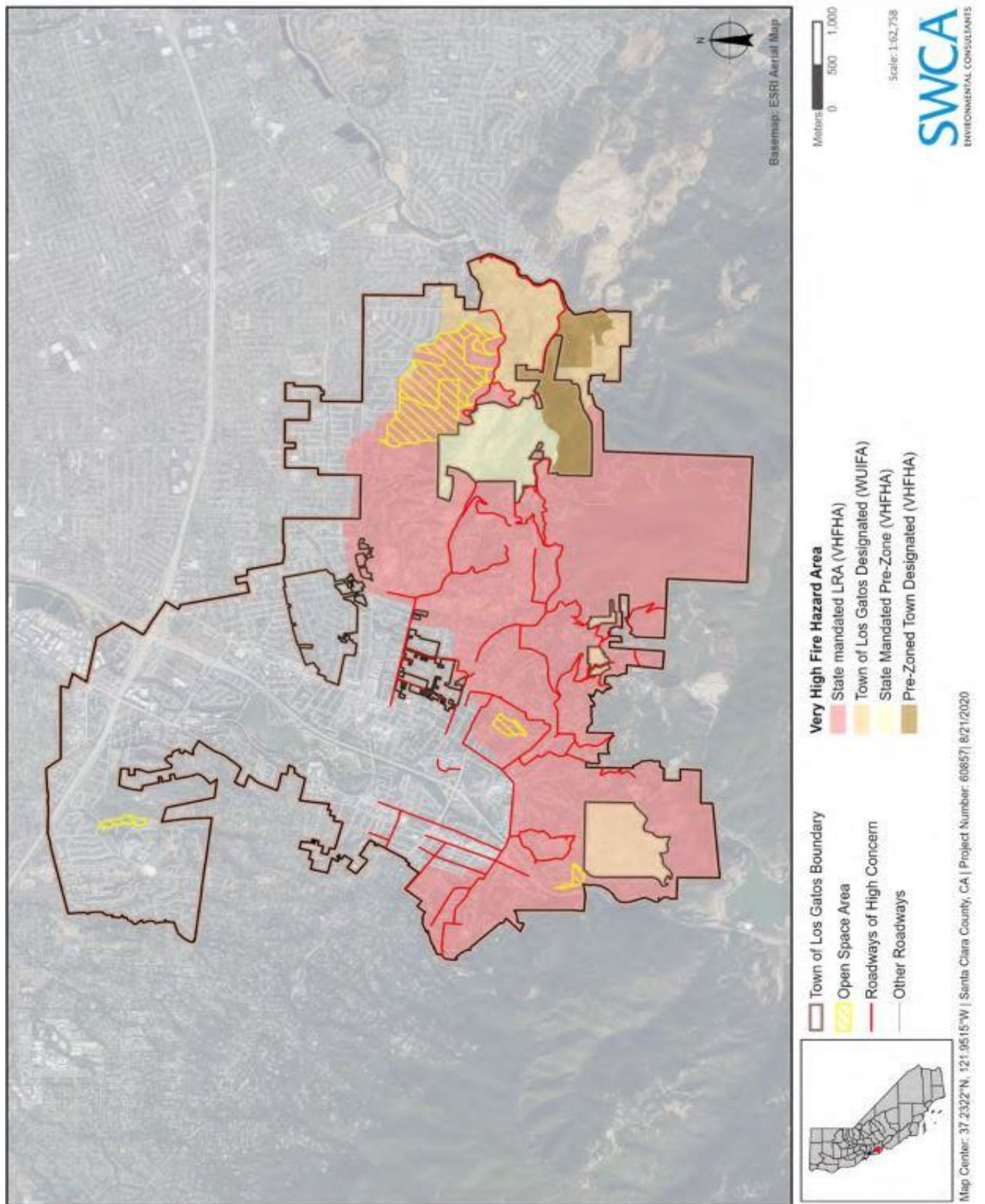
Assess and address evacuation feeder routes leading out of the WUI throughout Los Gatos.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Examine elimination of on-street parking where appropriate	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Implement reflective home address signage throughout the WUI.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Study/identify and develop alternate evacuation routes throughout the WUI.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Identify potential road widening, turnout projects throughout the WUI. Develop a multi-year project to implement needed improvements.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Develop plan to practice annually simulated evacuations in WUI neighborhoods.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Leverage SCCFD Zone Haven GIS platform for the planning/implementation of evacuations.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years

METRICS
• TRAs developed within each of the 7 CERT zones in the WUI • Percentage of WUI roadways with 20 ft of clear width • Percentage of identified WUI roadway improvement projects completed • Number of reflective home signs deployed per year • Number of residents participating in simulated evacuations per year

Roadside Fuel Reduction

Generally, roads are maintained to serve the transportation needs of the public; however, because roadsides are frequently the site of ignition for wildfires and evacuees may need to use the roadways to leave the area even if the vegetation on both sides of the road is on fire. Routes may also be blocked due to consequences associated with an incident including; fallen trees, spot fires, smoke, intense heat, long flame lengths, downed power lines, or vehicle accidents. The following map illustrates 31.09 miles of roadways of highest concern (colored red) for vegetation management.

Figure 2



GOAL:

Vegetation along primary hillside roadways should be maintained to achieve a clearance of 20 feet horizontally and 13 feet six inches vertically above roadways, as well as clearance of non-fire-resistant vegetation within 10 feet of the roads.

ACTION ITEMS	PRIORITY TIMEFRAME
Complete current 11-mile Fuel Reduction project by February 28, 2021.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Develop a plan to ensure that the 31.09 miles of highest roadway concern identified in Exhibit 2 achieve a 6-year management cycle (5 miles per year).	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Identify/map all private roadways in the WUI.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Work with residents to educate and implement vegetation management practices for these private properties.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years

METRICS
• Number of miles of new vegetation management performed per year • Number of continuous miles of vegetation management maintenance per year • Percentage of private roadways mapped • Percentage of private roadway residents contacted per year • Percentage of private roadway residents implementing vegetation management

Open Space and Residential Land Management

California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 4291 mandates 100 feet of defensible space around structures in high fire severity zones, within which vegetation, debris, and other types of combustible fuels are treated, cleared, or reduced to slow the rate and intensity of potentially approaching wildfire or fire escaping from structures.

The creation of reasonable and adequate Defensible Space focuses on measures to modify and break up hazards created by continuity of available fire fuels, both horizontal (across the ground) and vertical (from the ground up into the crowns of brush and trees). Fuels that exhibit a large degree of both vertical and horizontal continuity are the most hazardous; in particular, when they are on slopes. Thus, mitigation of these fuel sources through clearing and treatment, while simultaneously addressing environmental concerns such as protection of native habitats and the potential for erosion, is

particularly important. In addition to the Defensible Space requirements around structures in the WUI, the Town and other public/private agencies are stewards of large open spaces and undeveloped parkland.

GOAL:

Ensure that all public and private property owners are maintaining the mandated defensible spaces.

ACTION ITEMS	PRIORITY TIMEFRAME
Conduct annual defensible space inspections and enforce compliance with state and local fire codes. • Develop strong neighborhood relationships to educate all property owners of their defensible space obligation. • Partner on a pilot Wildland Fire Specialist program to develop relationships with VHFHZ homeowners and drive compliance through education and inspection. • Educate residents about Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) inspection program. • Explore region partnership with SCCFD fuels crews (once developed) and defensible space inspectors.	Priority 1 – within 2 years Priority 1 – within 2 years Priority 1 – within 2 years Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Explore SCCFD performing defensible space citation function.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Develop private driveway fuel reduction initiative	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Develop Eucalyptus eradication plan for Town property within the WUI.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Develop incentive program (cost share) for residential Eucalyptus removal possibly utilizing tree replacement fund.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Develop policy for prohibition of highly flammable plants for new construction within the WUI.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Develop Community chipping program	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years

METRICS
• Number of residential contacts performed by WFS per year • Number of residential defensible space inspections coordinated by WFS per year • Percentage of vegetation on Town owned Open Space maintained • Percentage of WUI residents participating in HIZ trainings per year • Number of SCCFD fuel crews (once developed) deployed in LG per year • Number of SCCFD defensible space inspections conducted in LG per year • Number of private driveways implementing vegetation management per year • Number of Town Eucalyptus trees removed per year • Number of residential eucalyptus trees removed per year • Dollar amount of residential eucalyptus grants per year • Number of tons community chipping removed per year

Emergency Partnerships

The nature of wildfire spread requires a regional approach to wildfire mitigation. A partial list of governmental and private entities with vegetation management responsibilities appears below. Additional regional partners which provide educational and other assistance in creating community resilience to wildfire are also listed.

Santa Clara County Fire District (SCCFD): Santa Clara County Fire Department is an all-risk fire department and provides fire suppression inclusive of structure and vegetation/wildland fire mitigation, technical rescue operations, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials (HazMat) mitigation, fire prevention, community education and risk reduction services (CERRS), disaster preparedness, community emergency preparedness and service responses.

Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E): PG&E provides electricity to the Town of Los Gatos, and controls rights-of-way necessary to maintain overhead transmission and distribution lines, many of which run through the WUI areas. The Town collaborates with PG&E to treat vegetation in the WUI along PG&E's electric transmission line right-of-way to increase power reliability and reduce ignition potential and resulting wildland fire hazard.

Santa Clara County Firesafe Council: The Town of Los Gatos supports and collaborates with the Santa Clara Firesafe Council. The Firesafe Council is a non-profit organization that provides resources to coordinate public and private landowners in Santa Clara County to reduce the threat of wildfire.

Santa Clara County Parks: Periodically, the Parks Department makes use of prescribed burns to manage non-native vegetation, reduce fuel loading, promote

biodiversity and native vegetation. The Department also provides training in conducting managed burns and in wildfire fighting techniques and principles.

West Valley Cities: The West Valley cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga share with Los Gatos a large number of Very High Fire Severity Zones within their borders (see appendices). Because wildfire extends across community borders, an incident in one jurisdiction can be expected to spread to neighboring jurisdictions. Communication between West Valley cities and coordination of wildfire prevention strategies is therefore critical to the prevention of wildfire.

Mid-Peninsula Open Space District (Midpen): Midpen is an independent Special District that manages 26 Open Space Preserves, containing nearly 65,000 acres of public land. In Los Gatos, Midpen manages and maintains significant land holdings along the Town's southern border (see Appendix). Wildland fire prevention, preparedness, and response are all critical components of Midpen's ongoing land stewardship which is largely accomplished through the management of vegetation within its preserves in order to reduce the risk and severity of wildfire, with a focus on ecological health and wildland fire resilience.

County Roads, Valley Water, and CalTrans: These regional governmental partners each have properties and rights-of-way within and/or adjacent to the Town of Los Gatos. These agencies must meet a shared specification for roadside fuel reduction and support safety in general.

San Jose Water Company (SJW): San Jose Water is an investor-owned public utility, and is one of the largest urban water systems in the United States, serving over 1 million people in the greater San Jose metropolitan area. It maintains critical infrastructure in Town essential to fire suppression and manages watershed lands near Los Gatos.

GOAL:

Ensure all regional partners are implementing consistent land management practices to reduce wildfire risk on their properties and right-of ways.

ACTION ITEMS	PRIORITY TIMEFRAME
Work with neighboring cities of Monte Sereno and Saratoga to coordinate mitigation efforts and jointly advocate for the continuation and increased vegetation management among Town partners.	Priority 1 – within 2 years
Ensure timely communications between the Town and these entities regarding activities that may affect another partner's land management.	Priority 1 – within 2 years

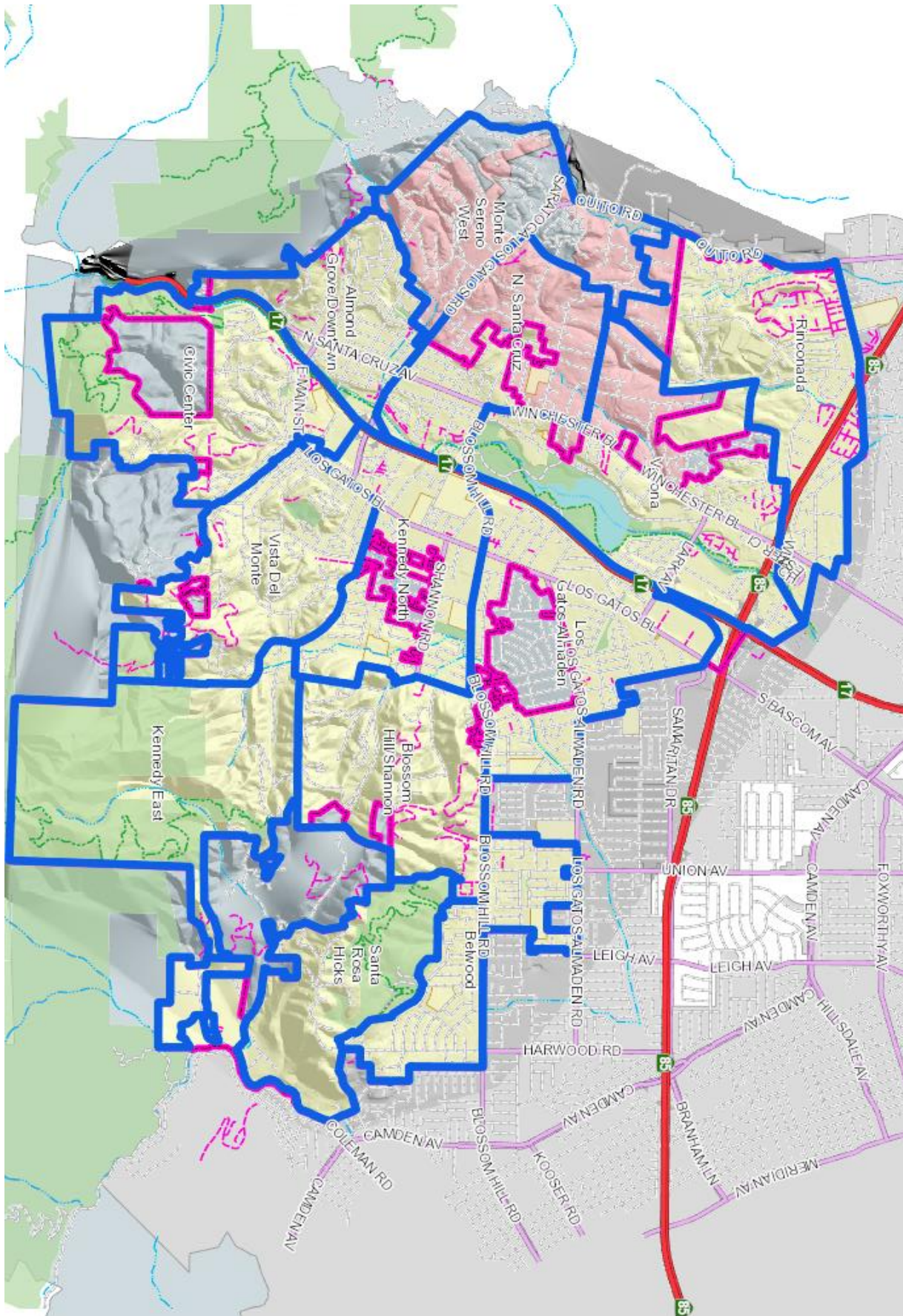
Explore regional projects outlined in CWPP for possible grant funding.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
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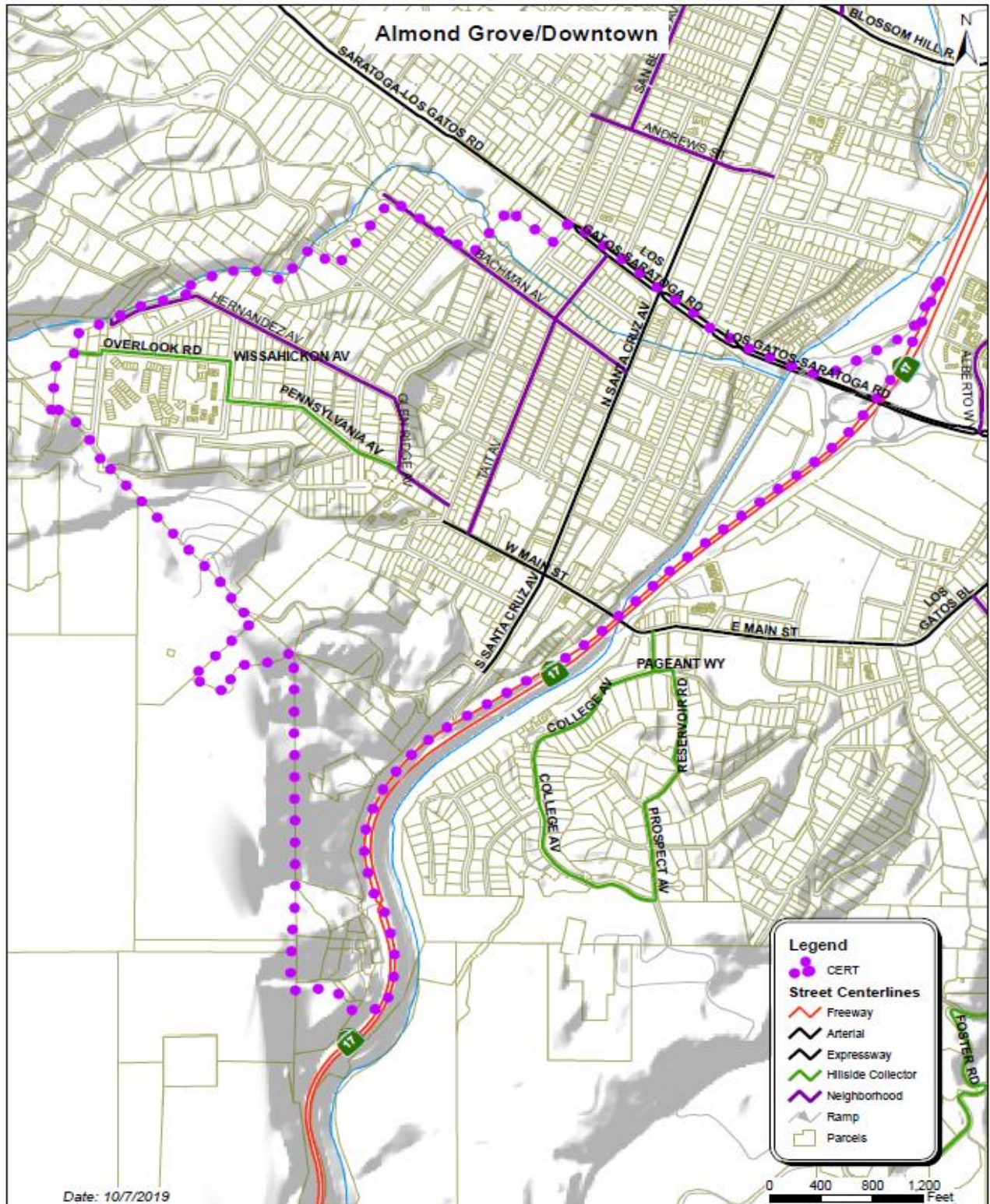
METRICS
• Number of coordination meetings per year • \$ amount of grants issued/received • Number of veg mgt miles performed by partner organizations per year

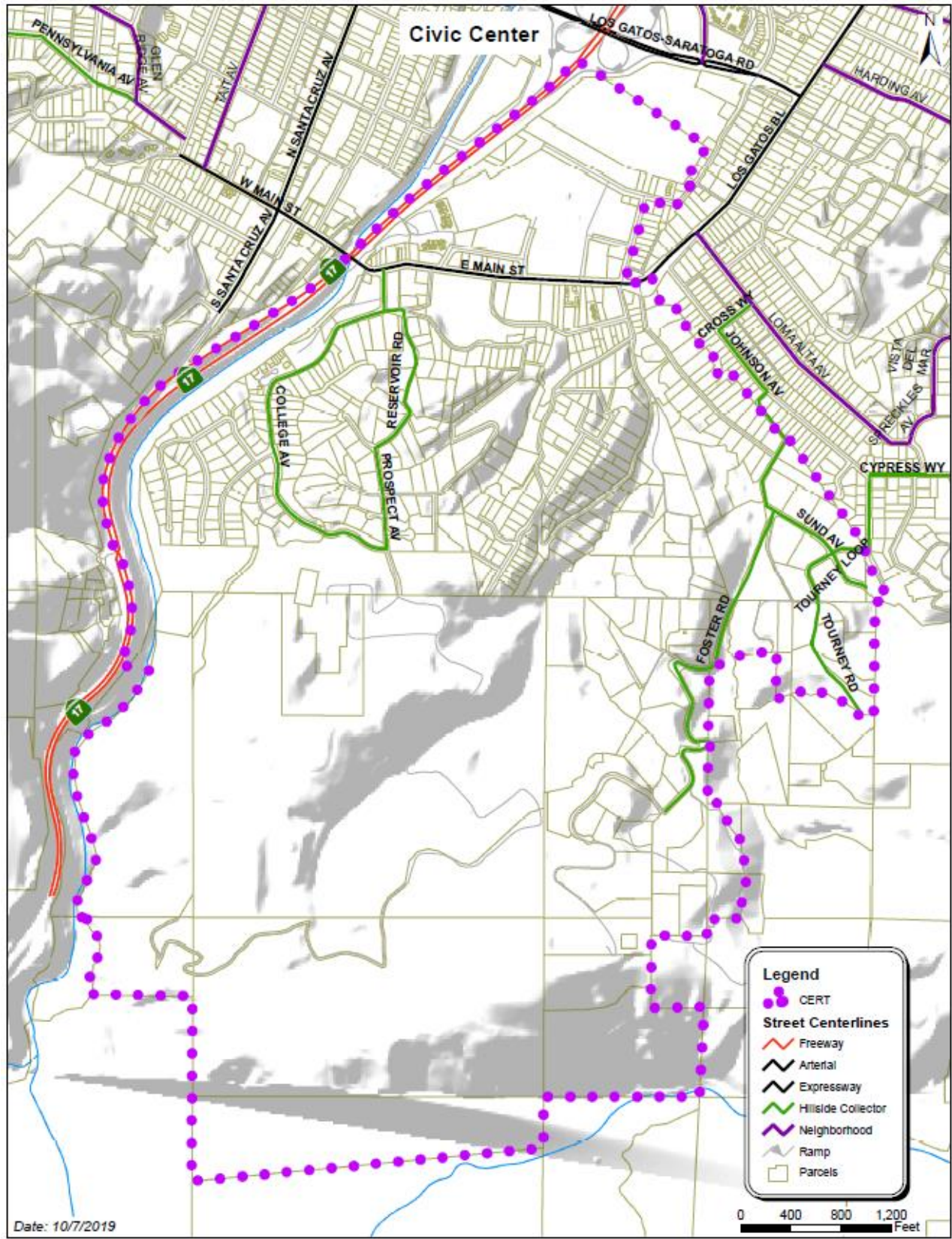
Additional Action Items

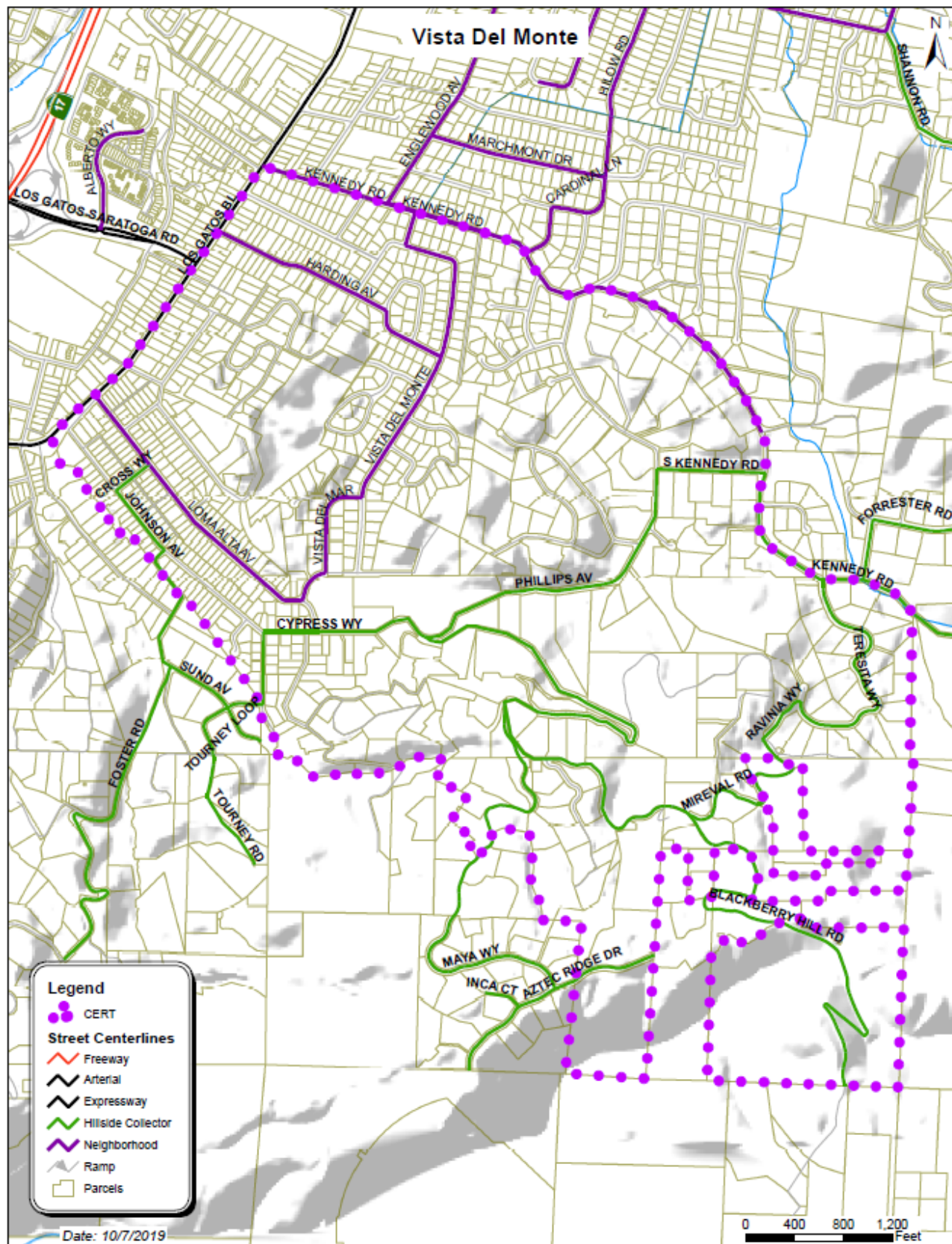
ACTION ITEMS	Priority Timeframe
Homeowners Insurance Availability • Advocate for legislative efforts toward the continuation of homeowner's insurance in the WUI. • Pursue Firewise Community status for WUI hillside neighborhoods to satisfy homeowners Insurance requirements.	Priority 1 – within 2 years Priority 1 – within 2 years
Address areas within the hillside that do not have public fire hydrant systems.	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years
Explore additional funding sources • Parcel Tax • Assessment Districts	Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years Priority 2 – within 3 to 5 years

APPENDICES

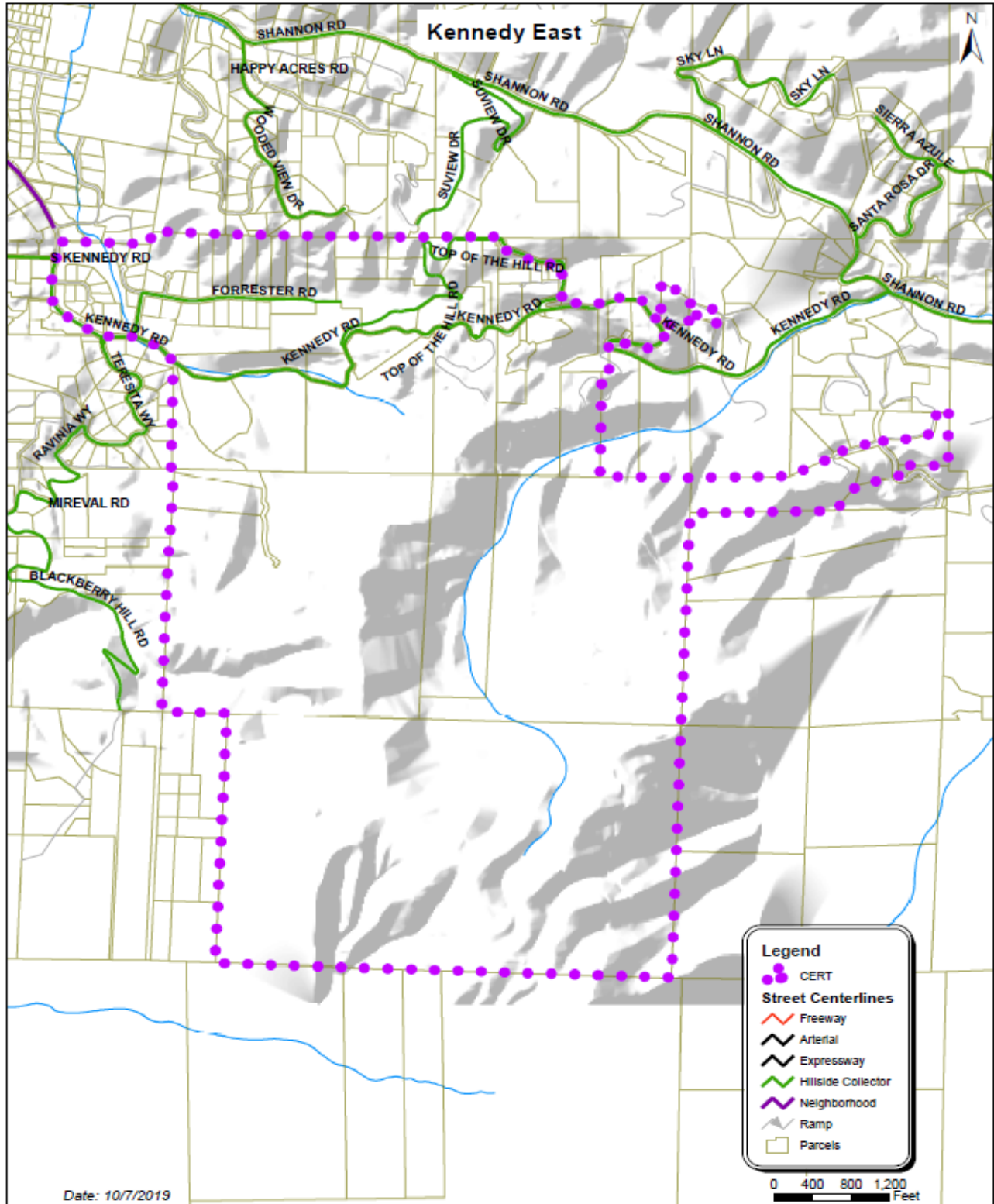


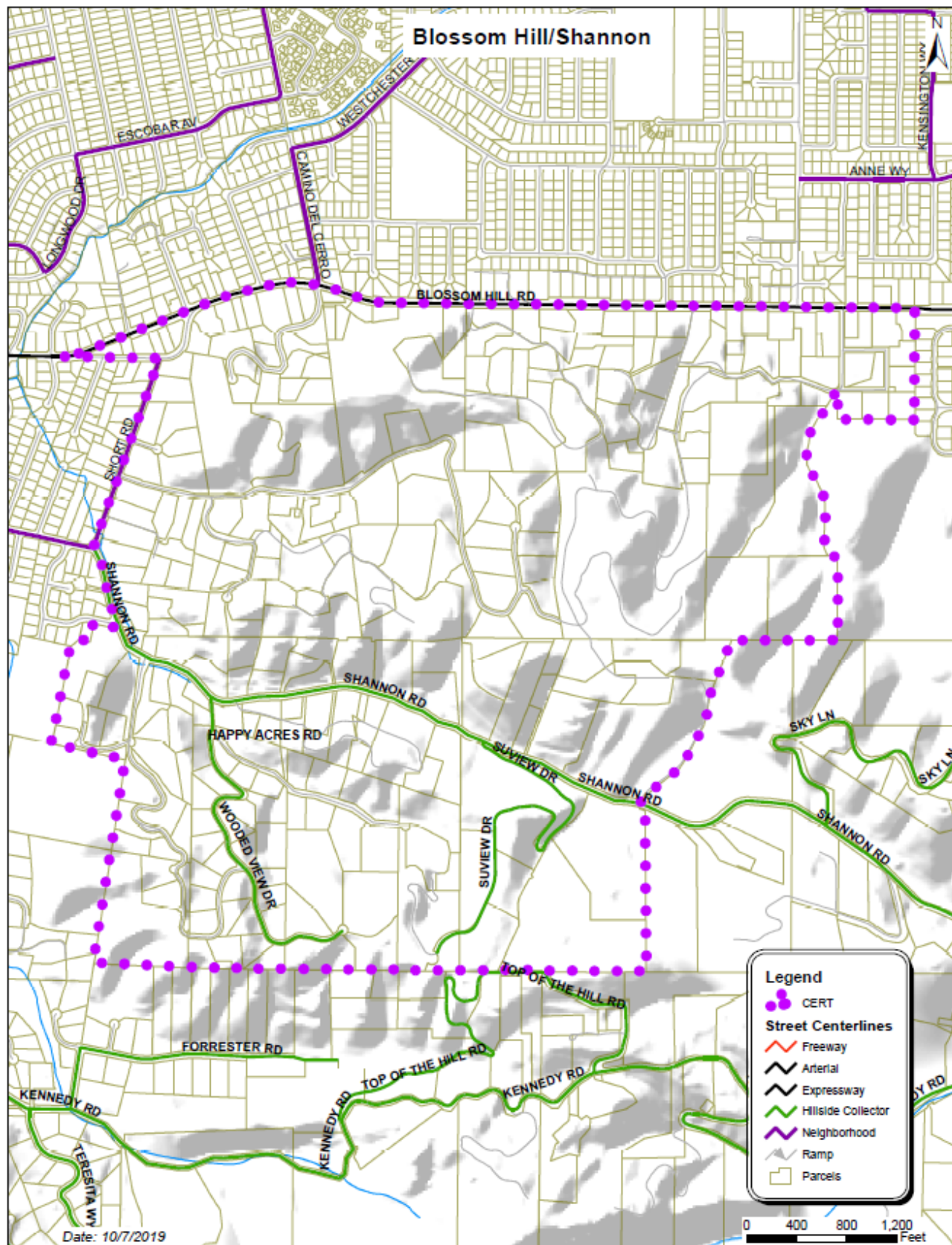


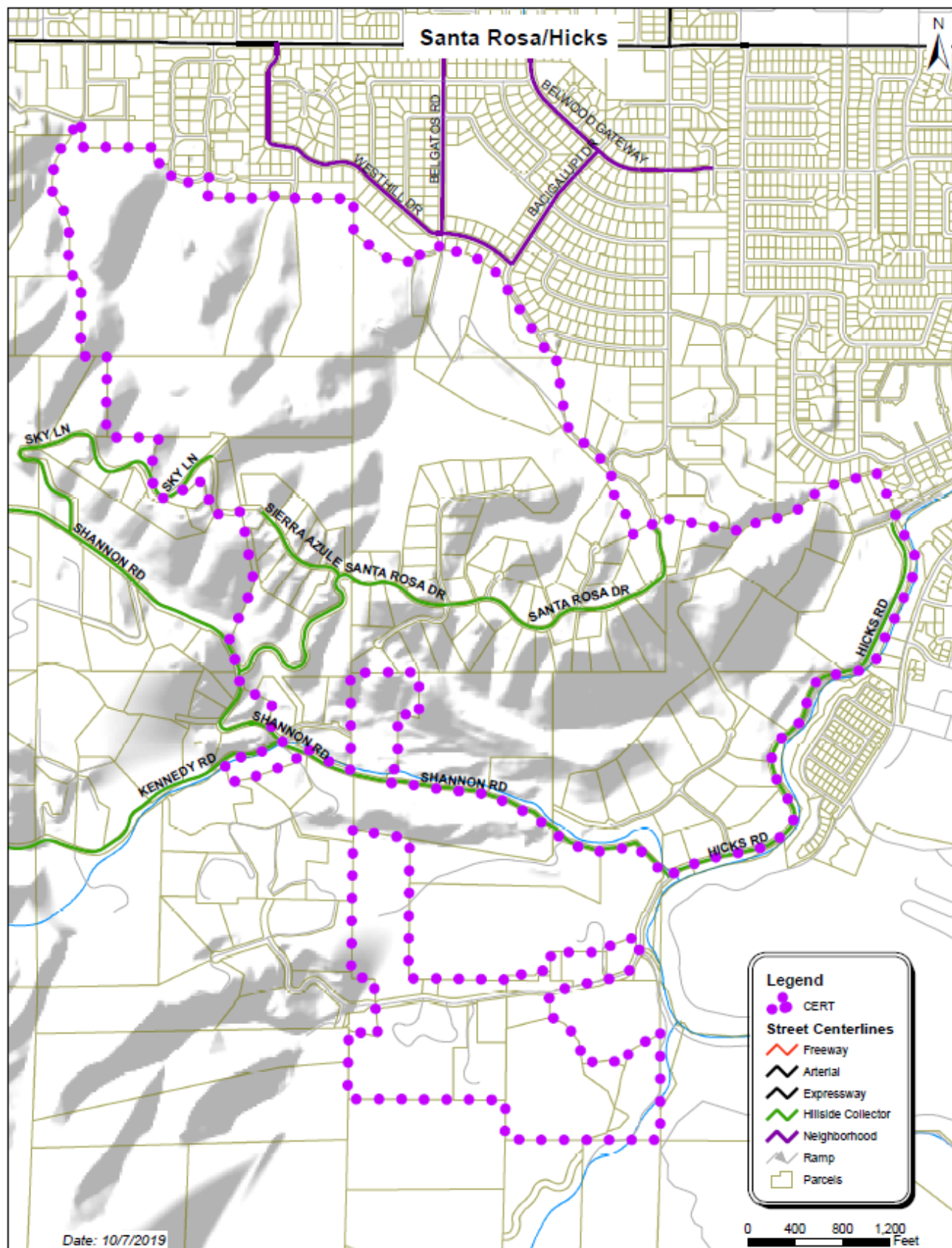




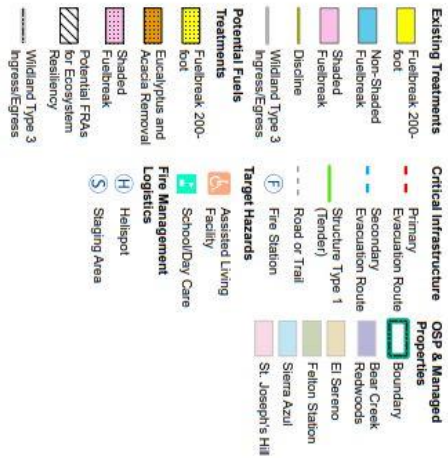




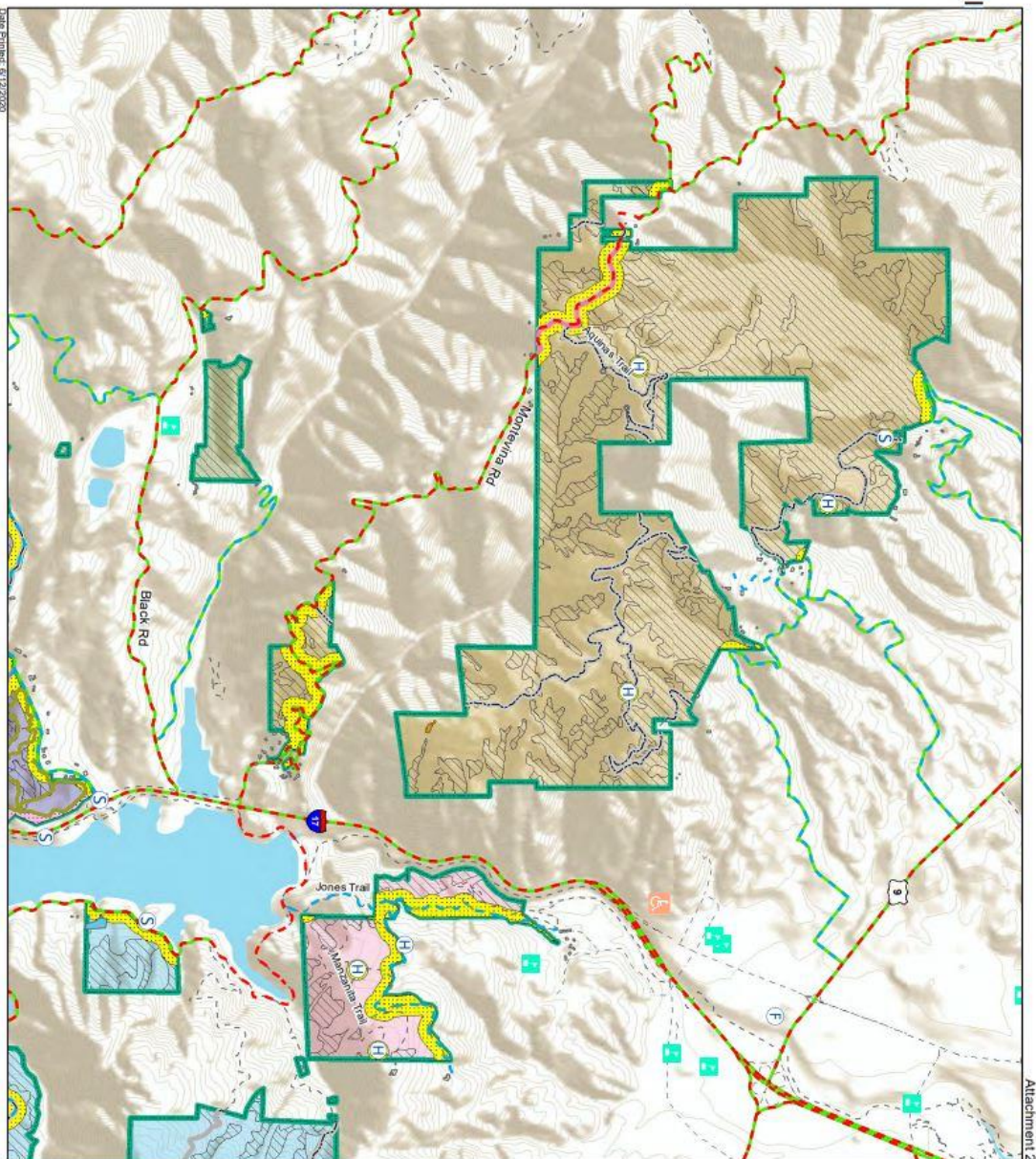
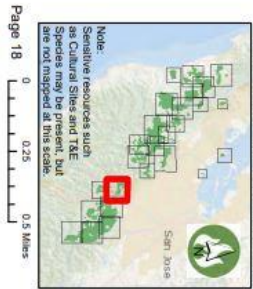




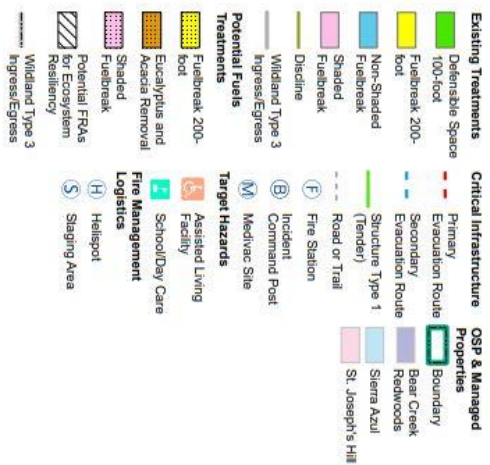
Existing and Potential Treatments EI Sereno/Felton Station/St. Joseph's Hill



* See Table of Contents page for additional symbology.
 ** Fuel break widths are maximums. Fuelbreaks may be constructed at any width up to the maximum width.



Existing and Potential Treatments Sierra Azul (1 of 5)



* See Table of Contents page for additional symbology.
 ** Fuel break widths are maximums. Fuelbreaks may be constructed at any width up to the maximum width.

