



CRESCENTA VALLEY TOWN COUNCIL

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We are at an important intersection of California's housing crisis, fire-prone areas, and emergency preparedness. The push for higher-density housing in areas like Altadena and La

Crescenta–Montrose raises serious concerns about wildfire risks, evacuation capacity, and the potential for loss of life and property.

The laws passed by the State to address the housing shortage are focused on increasing the number of dwelling units but often fail to adequately consider the environmental, infrastructural, and safety implications. These policies overlook the fact that these are not just numbers — these are communities made up of people whose safety and well-being are at stake. Well-functioning communities such as unincorporated La Crescenta–Montrose are being placed on a path that could threaten their long-term safety and livability. Foothill communities like Altadena and La Crescenta–Montrose are located in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ), which have already demonstrated their vulnerability through events such as the Eaton Fire. Increasing the number of structures and residents in these areas raises the number of people and homes at risk during wildfires. A key concern is how much occupancy is now allowed on single-family lots. Where one family once lived, new legislation now allows for the addition of multiple units on the same parcel. This dramatically increases the number of people and vehicles per lot.

Occupants

One primary home: 5

☐ One secondary home: 4

☐ Two ADUs: 2 + 2

☐ One Junior ADU: 1

Total: 14 occupants, up from 5

Vehicles

One primary home: 2

☐ One secondary home: 2

☐ Two ADUs: 2 + 2

☐ One Junior ADU: 1

Total: 9 vehicles, up from 2

Most foothill communities have limited road access with only a few primary

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evacuation routes. In La Crescenta–Montrose, the Verdugo Mountains to the south act as a natural barrier, forcing all traffic to funnel onto a small number of exit roads. La Crescenta Avenue — a key arterial — has already been reduced to one lane in each direction to accommodate bike lanes, which will further limit capacity during an emergency.

Past wildfires have demonstrated the consequences of poor evacuation infrastructure. During the 2009 Station Fire in Sunland-Tujunga, residents were stuck in gridlock for hours. In the Palisades Fire, people abandoned vehicles on narrow streets in a desperate attempt to escape. Many residents assume the 210 Freeway would remain open in an emergency, but in practice, the CHP often closes freeways near fire zones to protect motorists and give emergency personnel access.

Increasing density also impacts communities in other significant ways. Closer building proximity affects privacy and reduces natural light, leaving residents feeling boxed in or overlooked. Shadows from larger structures may affect neighboring solar panels and reduce the mental and emotional benefits of daylight exposure.

Air circulation and ventilation suffer when homes are built too closely together, especially if multiple buildings line up tightly. This can reduce air quality, aggravate respiratory issues, and increase reliance on mechanical ventilation, which raises energy usage and costs.

Some residents view larger or more densely packed construction as incompatible with the character of existing neighborhoods. Ongoing development often brings noise, construction disruptions, and light trespass, all of which can increase stress levels for neighbors.

Setback reductions and the increase in hardscaping reduce green space, leading to higher ground temperatures and less biodiversity. Zone 0 fire prevention requirements limit what vegetation can be planted, and with only four feet between buildings, meaningful landscaping becomes nearly impossible. These conditions also hinder stormwater absorption, increase runoff, and reduce groundwater replenishment.

Long-term residents, particularly seniors, may feel emotionally displaced by rapid changes in their neighborhoods. At the same time, schools, utilities, and emergency services face the pressure of supporting more residents without any meaningful increase in infrastructure capacity.

We support thoughtful, sustainable growth — but only if it is done safely. Instead of increasing density in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, we urge state and local leaders to focus on housing growth in lower-risk urban centers, improve fire mitigation infrastructure, and ensure emergency planning keeps pace with population growth.

The Woolsey Fire and Paradise's Camp Fire showed the tragic consequences of fast-moving fires in densely populated wildland-urban interface areas. These events underscored the importance of evaluating how many people can safely evacuate a given community — known as egress capacity — before allowing further development.

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Unincorporated communities like La Crescenta–Montrose are bordered by mountainous terrain with limited exit routes. Increasing density in these areas without addressing evacuation and infrastructure issues poses a clear and serious risk.

We respectfully request that Los Angeles County conduct formal, site-specific evacuation and infrastructure capacity studies before allowing additional density in fire-prone areas. These studies should be conducted in coordination with CalFire, SCAG, and other appropriate agencies. Additionally, we urge County leadership to explore ways to advocate for flexibility in implementing state mandates in high-risk zones, and to push for planning that prioritizes public safety and local realities.

The residents of these foothill communities chose to live in less densely populated areas for a reason. Their voices should be considered in the decisions that shape the future of their neighborhoods.

We appreciate your time and attention to this urgent matter.



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