

# CITY COUNCIL REPORT



Meeting Date: July 2, 2025  
 General Plan Element: *Preservation & Environmentally Planning*  
 General Plan Goal: *Protect the natural environment*

## ACTION

### Environmentally Sensitive Lands Text Amendment – Treatment of fire defensible space 462-PA-2025

#### Request to consider the following:

1. Request to initiate a text amendment to the City of Scottsdale Zoning Ordinance (Ordinance No. 455) for the purpose of amending Sections 3.100, 6.1100, A., B., and C., and any other applicable sections, to update the Environmentally Sensitive Lands (ESL) overlay provisions. Text Amendment request may create additional ordinance sub-sections.

#### Related Policies, References:

- 2035 General Plan, as amended
- Zoning Ordinance
- Design Standards and Policies Standards
- Fire Code

## APPLICANT CONTACT

Jesus Murillo  
 City of Scottsdale  
 480-312-7849

## LOCATION

Citywide

## BACKGROUND

The City of Scottsdale was successful in establishing an ordinance that would conserve the city's desert character and minimize the negative impacts of development. In 1977, the City of Scottsdale adopted the "Hillside Ordinance" to help preserve the city's desert character and reduce the negative impacts of development. This ordinance required the dedication of Natural Area Open Space (NAOS) and aimed to protect the community from hazards unique to mountainous and hillside areas. It was later updated and replaced with a more effective version to better achieve these goals.

The Hillside District Ordinance was later updated and renamed the “Environmentally Sensitive Lands Ordinance” (ESL). Established in 1991, the ESL Overlay has been highly effective in protecting natural and visual features, wildlife habitat, unstable slopes, and areas prone to erosion and flooding, while also preserving meaningful open space. Since its adoption, the ESL Ordinance has undergone three significant updates, with the most recent occurring in 2004.

The original Hillside District Ordinance included a single fire prevention-related provision, requiring the Fire Chief to inspect a site prior to Development Review Board approval to identify any unique conditions that might require special fire precautions. These findings were to be communicated to the Board. This was the only mention of a fire prevention type of regulation within the Hillside District Ordinance. The 1991 version of the ESL Ordinance did not provide additional fire prevention regulations. In 2001, the ESL Ordinance was updated to provide fire defensible space parameters that were echoed in the 2003 and 2004 versions of the ESL Ordinance. This text amendment seeks to modify those parameters.

The purpose of this text amendment is to review the ESL Ordinance and modify relevant sections to allow a fire defensible space that is more adapted to the environmental changes that have brought to the City’s attention, and address key issues identified in the existing ordinance, including:

- Respond to the increased threat of wildfires and extended fire seasons,
- Update fire defensible space requirements in relation to Natural Area Open Space (NAOS),
- Identify compatible maintenance techniques and buffer strategies for NAOS areas,
- Avoid creating non-conforming conditions for previously approved developments,
- Ensure consistency between the ESL Ordinance and the Scottsdale Fire Code,
- Maintain the protection and preservation of the City’s environmentally sensitive lands, and
- Evaluate whether certain regulations are more appropriately addressed within the Scottsdale Fire Code.

## **IMPACT ANALYSIS**

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### **Community Involvement**

This proposal will include standard community involvement consisting of public notice in the newspaper, online notification, postcard mailing to interested parties and community outreach meetings.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

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### **Recommended Approach:**

Staff recommends that the City Council initiate the text amendment.

## **RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT**

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### **Planning and Development**

Current Planning Services

## STAFF CONTACTS

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## APPROVED BY

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6/11/2025

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Jesus Murillo, Report Author

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Date



6/11/2025

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Tim Curtis, AICP, Current Planning Director  
480-312-4210, [tcurtis@scottsdaleaz.gov](mailto:tcurtis@scottsdaleaz.gov)

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Date



For

6/11/2025

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Erin Perreault, Planning & Development Services  
Director  
480-312-7093, [eperreault@scottsdaleaz.gov](mailto:eperreault@scottsdaleaz.gov)

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Date

## ATTACHMENTS

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1. ESL overlay map

Desert Hills

Carefree

Dynamite

Pinnacle Peak

Bell

Shea

