

New state fault maps show higher earthquake risks in Hollywood

Newly released data tracing the location of the active Hollywood fault will lead to additional curbs on development in the rapidly growing area.

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New state geological maps released Wednesday show several major developments planned in Hollywood are much closer to an active earthquake fault than Los Angeles city officials initially said.

The maps chart the course of the Hollywood fault, which runs from Atwater Village and Los Feliz, through central Hollywood and west along the Sunset Strip.

The state accelerated completion of the maps last fall amid controversy over the Los Angeles City Council approving a skyscraper development on or near the fault.

The maps create a zone of generally 500 feet on both sides of the fault, and state law requires any new development within the zone to receive extensive underground seismic testing to determine whether the fault runs under it. The law prohibits building on top of faults.

The rules, which will take effect when the maps are finalized this summer, will restrict future development in two fast-growing areas: Hollywood north of Hollywood Boulevard and West Hollywood along Sunset Boulevard. Both areas have seen a surge in new development in the last decade, with more projects planned.

The state law has not been in force on the Hollywood fault because the state geologist had not completed the fault zone. A Times investigation last month found that Los Angeles approved at least 14 projects along the Hollywood and Santa Monica faults without ordering the kind of underground digging needed to determine exactly where the fissures run. Among those projects is a sprawling \$200-million complex, known as Blvd6200, now under construction on Hollywood Boulevard.

L.A. officials acknowledged in November they have been using outdated fault maps when reviewing projects. They didn't realize their error until Times reporters pointed it out to them, and they have since begun using newer maps.

Luke Zamperini, a spokesman for the city Department of Building and Safety, said the agency is in the process of including Wednesday's map in its automated permitting system. All new projects within the fault zone will require a full fault study, while previously approved projects that have not begun construction will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, he said.

The state's new map shows that three prominent Hollywood developments — the proposed Millennium Hollywood skyscraper project, the Blvd6200 development and a planned apartment complex on Yucca Street — are within the roughly 500-foot fault zone.

State geologist John Parrish said the state's fault line goes underneath both Millennium and Blvd6200.

"We feel very confident about where we drew that line, within maybe a 50-foot accuracy back and forth. But we're very confident it's there," Parrish told reporters at a downtown Los Angeles news conference. "Surface rupture is very dangerous. In fact, it's calamitous to structures that are built across of the surface trace of an active fault."

The only definitive way to determine if the fault is actually underneath the property is an intensive underground investigation, such as digging a trench, Parrish added.

Los Angeles officials did not order trenching for any of the three projects before the City Council approved those projects. The city later asked the developers of Millennium to dig an underground trench, but that work has not started yet.

Philip Aarons, one of the founders of Millennium Partners, said in a statement that the state's map is not a substitute for underground investigation. Aarons said the geological tests performed so far at the site showed no evidence of an active earthquake fault on the property but he has agreed to complete the trenching work.

The Millennium project would bring 1 million square feet of retail, residential and office space to Hollywood, and 39- and 35-story towers flanking the Capitol Records tower. The new map shows the fault running under the historic tower.

Reports filed by the developers to the city for all three projects indicated the fault was much farther away than the new state map indicates. The developers of Millennium said the fault was about 0.4 miles away; Blvd6200 0.5 miles away; and the residential complex at 6230 Yucca St., 0.3 miles away.

David Jordon, owner of the Yucca Street project, emphasized that the state map is still a draft.

"Safety is of paramount importance to us. There will be further fault investigations on the site. We're working with the city of Los Angeles to determine what those studies will be," Jordon said.

The developers of Blvd6200 did not respond to a request for comment on Wednesday. But in the past, they have said they don't believe the fault runs under the project and that a geologist on site during construction saw no evidence of the fault.

The release of the maps was highly anticipated, in part because of their potential impact on new development in the area.

Leron Gubler, the head of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, said he welcomed the state's release of the map.

"It has eliminated a lot of the uncertainties in the last six months on where the Hollywood fault zone is," Gubler said. "This is a positive development for Hollywood because this is now a zone defined."

City councilman Mitch O'Farrell, who represents Hollywood, agreed, adding: "This information provides a clear map for development in the heart of Hollywood."

California lawmakers banned construction over faults a year after the 1971 Sylmar earthquake, after homes on top of the San Fernando fault were ripped apart when one side of the fault slid past the other. That movement split the foundations of buildings in half, destroying them.

For two decades after the Sylmar quake, the state zoned numerous faults around California. But starting in the 1990s, budget cuts stalled new fault mapping — including the Hollywood fault. There are about 2,000 miles of faults still to zone.

Opponents of more Hollywood development said they were pleased the state produced the Hollywood fault zone.

"We feel completely vindicated by the state map," said Robert P. Silverstein, attorney for community groups who have sued to block the Millennium project.

State officials also released a draft map of the Sierra Madre and Duarte fault zones in the foothill cities of Monrovia, Duarte, Azusa and Glendora in eastern Los Angeles County. Schools that are in or partially within the draft fault zones include Charles H. Lee Elementary School in Azusa and Citrus College in Glendora.

State geology officials will now begin a 90-day public comment period and hold a public hearing. A final map is expected to be published by July 8.

The next fault to be zoned is the Santa Monica fault and the western end of the Hollywood fault, but Parrish said his department only has enough funds to have one person work on the mapping for the first half of the year, and there are no funds after June 30. It's unclear whether mapping the Santa Monica fault can be finished within that timeframe, Parrish said.

Some state lawmakers have urged the governor's office to commit more funding to complete the zoning of earthquake faults. The governor's office will release its proposed budget Friday.