



URGENT ITEM AGENDA MATERIAL

Government Code Section 54954.2(b)
Rules of Procedure Chapter III.C.5

**THIS ITEM IS NOT YET AGENDIZED AND MAY OR MAY NOT BE
ACCEPTED FOR THE AGENDA AS A LATE ITEM, SUBJECT TO THE
CITY COUNCIL'S DISCRETION ACCORDING TO BROWN ACT RULES**

Meeting Date: September 15, 2026

Item Description: Wildfire Resiliency Bills – Request for Governor's Signature

This item is submitted pursuant to the provision checked below:

- ☐ Emergency Situation (54954.2(b)(1) - majority vote required)
Determination by a majority vote of the legislative body that an emergency situation exists, as defined in Section 54956.5.
- ☒ Immediate Action Required (54954.2(b)(2) - two-thirds vote required)
There is a need to take immediate action and the need for action came to the attention of the local agency subsequent to the agenda for this meeting being posted.

Once the item is added to the agenda (Consent or Action) it must be passed by the standard required vote threshold (majority, two-thirds, or 7/9).

Facts supporting the addition of the item to the agenda under Section 54954.2(b) and Chapter III.C.5 of the Rules of Procedure:

Eight Wildfire Resiliency bills passed the California Legislature which ended August 31, 2026, and are awaiting the Governor's signature, which is not assured. The Governor has until September 30th to sign them.

Councilmember items for the September 15th agenda were due August 24th, before the conclusion of the 2026 legislative session and understanding that the Governor may not sign the bills. We believe these letters from City Council will contribute to convincing the Governor to sign them.



Brent Blackaby
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
September 15, 2026

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Brent Blackaby (Author), Mayor Ishii (Co-Sponsor)
Subject: Wildfire Resiliency Bills – Request for Governor’s Signature

RECOMMENDATION

On behalf of the City Council, the Mayor will send letters to the Governor requesting his signature on eight (8) high-impact wildfire resiliency bills that passed the California Legislature and are awaiting his signature.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The following are the bills:

1. SB 894 (Allen) — Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act (Megafire Action-sponsored)
Creates a state-backed financing program to make home hardening affordable at scale, leveraging roughly \$8–12 in private investment for every \$1 of state funding.
2. SB 1079 (Stern) — Fire Innovation Unit Act (Megafire Action-sponsored)
Creates a dedicated unit to test and rapidly deploy emerging wildfire technologies, building on Newsom’s push to expand tools like FireSat.
3. SB 973 (Becker) — Wildfire County Coordinator Program (Megafire Action-sponsored)
Expands a successful CAL FIRE pilot that gives communities dedicated capacity to turn state wildfire funding and priorities into projects on the ground.
4. AB 1699 (Rogers) — Good Fire Act
Makes the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program permanent, helping scale beneficial fire to meet California’s land-treatment goals.
5. AB 1891 (Connolly) — Beneficial Fire Capacity Program
Requires CAL FIRE to dedicate at least 10% of its Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund dollars to beneficial fire projects.
6. AB 1934 (Bennett) — Home Hardening Certification Program
Requires the State Fire Marshal to develop a statewide home-hardening certification program.
7. AB 1960 (Bennett) — Wildfire Prevention Grants Program
Allows CAL FIRE to provide wildfire prevention grants to cohesive fire communities working with fire safe councils on prevention projects.
8. AB 1964 (Bennett) — Home Hardening
Directs the State Fire Marshal to identify home-hardening standards and estimate how many homes in fire hazard severity zones meet them.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

No environmental impact for Council approval of the letters. However, should the Governor sign the bills, the positive impact on wildfire resiliency would be tremendous.

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Brent Blackaby Council District 6 510-981-7160

Attachments:

1: Eight (8) letters to the Governor



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September 15, 2026

Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Letter of Support – AB 1699 (Rogers): Good Fire Act – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I write to urge your immediate signature on AB 1699 (Asm. Chris Rogers), the Good Fire Act — legislation that will determine whether California meets this decade's wildfire crisis with the tools our fire scientists, tribal fire practitioners, and land managers have been asking for. Berkeley sits in the East Bay Hills, one of the most fire-prone urban interfaces in the state; we do not have the luxury of treating prescribed fire policy as an abstraction.

Berkeley's northeast hills are among the highest wildfire-risk areas in California. Most homes here predate modern wildfire building codes, sit on lots with setbacks of just four to five feet, and abut East Bay Regional Park District land — the exact location the Berkeley Fire of 1923 started. That fire destroyed approximately 600 structures before reaching downtown, where firefighters were able to stop it only after the winds subsided.

Berkeley's Fire Department believes our next wildfire will also start in the East Bay Regional Parks. For our residents, prescribed fire isn't an abstract policy tool; it's one of the few proven ways to reduce the fuel loads that put thousands of homes at risk.

AB 1699 makes prescribed and cultural burning easier, faster, and cheaper for the agencies that protect us. It permanently establishes the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program, expands the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund statewide, streamlines burn boss certification, and exempts these burns from lengthy CEQA review. In practice, this means the City of Berkeley, EBRPD, and fire agencies across the state can clear dangerous fuels proactively, rather than waiting to react to catastrophic fire.

Signing AB 1699 is an investment in forward-thinking prevention that will meaningfully reduce wildfire risk for Berkeley, our region, and communities throughout California. On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign this bill into law.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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September 15, 2026

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Letter of Support – AB 1891 (Connolly): Beneficial Fire Capacity Program –
REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE**

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign AB 1891 (Asm. Damon Connolly), the Beneficial Fire Capacity Program. California has spent years building the legal permission to conduct prescribed burns; what we still lack is the trained workforce to do them at the scale our wildfire crisis demands. AB 1891 closes that gap directly, and it deserves your signature.

AB 1891 builds the workforce and community capacity California needs to actually conduct more prescribed and cultural burns — dedicating funding to train practitioners, expand community-based and tribal organizations, and support local good-fire programs, with at least 25% of new funding reserved for California Native American tribes.

On June 17, 2025, Berkeley passed the EMBER ordinance, requiring homes in our highest-risk areas to clear all combustible material within five feet of structures and stairs. Our residents are complying — removing beloved roses, camellias, and privacy vegetation — to make their homes and their neighbors' homes safer. They deserve a government that does its part on public land, too. Berkeley's hillside neighborhoods abut EBRPD parkland, where our Fire Department predicts a wildfire would start, and we lack the workforce capacity to treat that land at the pace and scale needed.

AB 1891 directly addresses this gap. By training more burn practitioners and strengthening the organizations that can deploy them — including Indigenous-led groups with generations of expertise in cultural burning — this bill helps the City of Berkeley, EBRPD, and communities statewide match ambition with actual capacity, advancing California's goal of treating 1 million acres annually

through prescribed burns and reducing the far greater costs of post-disaster recovery.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge your signature on AB 1891.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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**Re: Letter of Support – AB 1934 (Bennett): Home Hardening Certification Program
– REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE**

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign AB 1934 (Asm. Steve Bennett), the Home Hardening Certification Program. Right now, a Berkeley homeowner can spend tens of thousands of dollars hardening their home against wildfire — a Class A roof, ember-resistant vents, defensible space — and have no standardized way to prove it: no credential, no public record, no certificate an insurer is required to honor. AB 1934 closes that gap, and closing it protects both our residents' safety and their pocketbooks.

At least 90% of homes in the Berkeley Hills predate modern fire codes designed to protect homes and residents from wildfire. For these older homes, full reconstruction to meet current standards is often out of reach — but AB 1934 offers a different path.

By directing the State Fire Marshal to establish a statewide home hardening certification program, this bill identifies practical, voluntary measures — ignition-resistant siding, fire-rated roofing, non-combustible decking — that let homeowners meaningfully reduce their wildfire risk without a full rebuild.

This matters most for older, higher-risk homes like ours. A uniform, state-backed certification standard gives Berkeley Hills homeowners a clear, affordable roadmap for hardening their properties, and lays the groundwork for insurers and other state programs to recognize and reward that work — complementing local defensible-space requirements with a path toward real market incentives down the line.

By investing in prevention now, Berkeley and communities across California can avoid far greater costs later — both the devastating losses from wildfire

destruction and the burden of disaster recovery. Signing AB 1934 is a critical step toward making home hardening achievable for the homeowners who need it most.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge your signature on AB 1891.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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**Re: Letter of Support – AB 1960 (Bennett): Wildfire Prevention Grants Program –
REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE**

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign AB 1960 (Asm. Steve Bennett), the Wildfire Prevention Grants Program. Wildfire risk is not just a household problem — a single unhardened home on a block can undermine its neighbors' protection, while a fully hardened community sees its safety multiply. AB 1960 recognizes that reality by directing state grant dollars toward whole communities working together, not just individual homeowners acting alone.

AB 1960 recognizes and rewards what we've already learned in the Berkeley Hills: individual fire mitigation is far less effective than collective action. By prioritizing existing Wildfire Prevention Grant funding for communities that reach a threshold of home-hardening participation — with disadvantaged communities prioritized first — this bill turns community-wide fire safety into something both recognized and fundable.

We've seen firsthand what this kind of collective momentum can do. In my efforts to restore home insurance coverage for the dozens of constituents who have lost it, I've met with insurance companies willing to look at the progress we've made through Berkeley's EMBER/Zone Zero regulations. What impresses them isn't any single homeowner's compliance — it's the depth of community-wide engagement, neighbors working together toward compliance across entire blocks. On a recent tour, insurers were moved enough to hand-deliver coverage offers to compliant homes on the spot.

Berkeley voters made this possible by approving Measure FF in 2020 with 74.2% support, funding our Wildland Urban Interface Division, Firewise community-building, and an Evacuation and Response Time Study. But most California communities won't have that kind of local funding. AB 1960 gives them something just as powerful: state recognition that inspires the same collective action, and a funding pathway that rewards it once achieved — all without

new costs to local government, since it builds on an existing grant program rather than creating a new mandate.

Passed unanimously by both houses, AB 1960 reflects a rare and welcome consensus that community-scale fire resilience deserves the state's support. Signing it would help replicate what's working in Berkeley across the communities that need it most.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign AB 1960.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
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Re: Letter of Support – AB 1964 (Bennett): State Fire Marshal: Home Hardening – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign AB 1964 (Asm. Steve Bennett). California is building an ambitious set of tools to harden homes against wildfire — certification, grants, tax relief, insurance transparency — but none of them can be targeted effectively without knowing where the need actually is. AB 1964 gives the state that missing baseline: a statewide standard and a public accounting of which homes are hardened and which still aren't.

AB 1964 requires the State Fire Marshal to establish a statewide home-hardening baseline and then measure, county by county, how many homes meet it and how many still fall short. For a city like Berkeley, that data isn't academic — it's the missing piece we need to turn our investment into real results.

Berkeley has already done the hard work of local action: our EMBER/Zone Zero ordinance requires vegetation clearance in our highest-risk neighborhoods, voters approved Measure FF to fund a Wildland Urban Interface Division and community preparedness programs, and residents in the Berkeley Hills are actively hardening their homes and organizing block by block. But right now, that progress is invisible at the state level. There's no consistent, comparable data showing how a city like Berkeley — dense, older housing stock, high hazard zone — stacks up, or where our remaining gaps are.

AB 1964 fixes that. By requiring county-level reporting and giving county recorders a mandate to track home-hardening records, it would let Berkeley finally document and quantify the progress our residents have fought hard to make — progress we're already using to persuade insurers to return to our market. That kind of verified, state-backed data doesn't just inform future policy; it's exactly the evidence insurers and state grant programs need to recognize communities like ours and direct resources where they're most needed.

Signing AB 1964 would give Berkeley, and every California community working to reduce its wildfire risk, the transparency and accountability needed to translate local effort into lasting statewide progress.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign AB 1964.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom
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RE: Support for SB 894 (Allen): The Wildfire Mitigation Affordability Act – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign SB 894 (Sen. Ben Allen). Home hardening and defensible space improvements can cut a structure's wildfire risk by nearly half — but for too many Berkeley homeowners, the upfront cost of a Class-A roof or ember-resistant vents puts that protection out of reach. SB 894 solves the right problem: not whether hardening works, but whether families can afford to do it.

Berkeley residents understand the devastating wildfire risk facing our community. In 1923, a fire that began in the Northeast Berkeley Hills destroyed approximately 600 structures before reaching downtown, where firefighters were able to stop it only after the winds subsided. In 1991, the Tunnel Fire destroyed more than 3,300 homes and claimed 25 lives. These disasters remain a powerful reminder of what is at stake.

The Berkeley City Council, working closely with our Fire Department, has taken bold action to protect residents, homes, and our community. On June 17, 2025, we approved the EMBER Ordinance (Effective Measures for Berkeley's Ember Resilience), requiring homeowners in the highest-risk hill areas to maintain a five-foot noncombustible buffer around the base of their homes. The ordinance took effect January 1, 2026, and our Fire Department and residents have been working diligently to meet its requirements.

The City has paired these requirements with meaningful assistance. Our Fire Department conducts hour-long inspections to help homeowners understand the EMBER requirements and develop practical plans for compliance. The City provides financial or project assistance to low-income, elderly, and disabled residents through a CAL FIRE grant; distributes free mesh to protect vents and gutters; and helps offset the cost of replacing combustible fences and gates with noncombustible alternatives.

More than 200 Berkeley homeowners are approaching EMBER compliance. Firewise neighborhoods have organized cleanup events that remove an average of four tons of vegetation at a time. Together with our Fire Safe Council, residents recently organized a fence workshop attended by 200 people on a Sunday afternoon, giving homeowners an opportunity to learn about noncombustible fencing and connect with vendors about replacing the first 5-feet of fences and gates extending from their homes.

Berkeley is a community actively engaged in wildfire mitigation. But we cannot do this alone.

SB 894 would provide a critical piece of the financing infrastructure needed to make home hardening and defensible-space improvements possible at-scale. Upfront costs remain a significant barrier, particularly for moderate-income homeowners who may not qualify for assistance programs or have access to affordable private financing.

We understand that SB 894 passed without implementation funding. Nevertheless, signing the bill now is an important step toward making the program a reality. It would allow the Treasurer's Office to begin developing the loan program and pursuing implementation funding through the next state budget process, with the goal of bringing financial assistance online alongside Zone Zero.

The City of Berkeley has long invested in wildfire resilience, including through our Transfer Tax Rebate for home hardening and ongoing resident assistance programs. SB 894 would complement these local efforts by creating affordable financing that enables more homeowners to take action. And by supporting home hardening at scale, the bill can also help advance the broader goal of stabilizing California's homeowners' insurance market in our most fire-vulnerable communities.

Our residents are doing their part. They are clearing vegetation, hardening their homes, replacing vulnerable fences, and investing their own time and resources to reduce wildfire risk. SB 894 would help ensure that the cost of this essential work does not prevent Californians from protecting their homes and communities.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign SB 894.

Sincerely,

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Mayor, City of Berkeley



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RE: Support for SB 973 (Becker): Wildfire County Coordinator Program – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign SB 973 (Sen. Josh Becker). California has built an impressive set of wildfire resilience tools — certification standards, grant programs, financing — but none of them implement themselves. SB 973 puts dedicated coordinators on the ground in every county to translate state policy into local action, and that connective tissue is what will determine whether this year's wildfire legislation changes anything on the ground.

Berkeley works closely with the Alameda County Office of Emergency Services and regional Fire Safe Councils on wildfire mitigation. Making the coordinator program permanent would lock in that collaboration rather than leaving it dependent on year-to-year funding. A designated coordinator, acting in alignment with the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan, could streamline cross-boundary projects on corridors like Grizzly Peak Boulevard and help synchronize evacuation planning with neighboring jurisdictions like Oakland and East Bay Regional Parks — work no single city can do alone.

SB 973 also complements Berkeley's EMBER ordinance, our five-foot defensible space requirement. By helping secure state and federal funding and streamlining cross-county resources, a permanent coordinator would meaningfully ease the financial burden of EMBER implementation for our residents.

The underlying pilot has already proven itself: since 2021, County Coordinators have secured over \$104 million in mitigation and preparedness funding and helped establish more than 100 new Fire Safe Councils statewide. Signing SB 973 would lock in that return on investment and reaffirm California's leadership in

translating state wildfire strategy into local action.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign SB 973.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley



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RE: Support for SB 1079 (Stern): Fire Innovation Unit Act – REQUEST FOR SIGNATURE

Dear Governor Newsom,

As Mayor of Berkeley, and on behalf of the entire Berkeley City Council, I urge you to sign SB 1079 (Sen. Henry Stern). Megafires are not just a public safety crisis — they are driving up utility and insurance costs for every Californian. SB 1079 takes seriously the idea that we cannot prevent these disasters, or the costs that follow them, without investing in smarter, more innovative approaches to wildfire mitigation and response.

Berkeley's Hills are made of narrow, winding roads and steep terrain. An evacuation study showed the less than 2-mile journey from the top of the hills to the base taking between three and four hours. Communities like ours cannot wait for wildfire technology to reach us on a slower timeline. We need it now, and SB 1079 is how the state gets it to us. The bill's Rapid Acquisition and Deployment Program would give the Berkeley Fire Department a far stronger footing to detect, prepare for, and contain wildfire emergencies before they escalate.

By centralizing wildfire technology research, procurement, and deployment — and by directing financial support to the agencies that need it most — SB 1079 would close the gap between the tools available to well-resourced state agencies and those available to city fire departments like ours. That is precisely the kind of investment that protects our most vulnerable communities first.

Signing SB 1079 would strengthen wildfire preparedness for the residents and firefighters in Berkeley and our state, and it would reaffirm California's role as the national leader in wildfire innovation.

On behalf of the City of Berkeley and our residents, I respectfully urge you to sign SB 1079.

Sincerely,

Adena Ishii
Mayor, City of Berkeley