



Susan Wengraf
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
November 12, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Wengraf, Hahn, and Bartlett
Subject: Wildfire Mitigation Mid-Year Budget Referral

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the Mid-Year Budget Process an amount of \$550,000 for wildfire mitigation measures, including the removal of fire fuel on City properties and the extension by six additional months of the Fire Captain position to provide wildfire safety planning, Safe Passages implementation, and oversight of mitigation programs and public education.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

\$550,000

BACKGROUND

Berkeley is considered to be at very high risk of a wildfire. The draft 2019 Hazard Mitigation Plan states, "Berkeley is vulnerable to a wind-driven fire starting along the city's eastern border. The fire risk facing the people and properties in the eastern hills is compounded by the area's mountainous topography, limited water supply, minimal access and egress routes, and location, overlaid upon the Hayward Fault."

On October 12, 2019, the City Council unanimously approved a resolution declaring that wildfire safety and prevention be a top priority.

With adequate resources, the city can take steps to minimize hazards that contribute to the risk of wildfire. Two of the most effective approaches to risk reduction include removing the fuel load and improving the ability of our Fire Department to quickly respond to suppress a fire.

It has been estimated that if a wildfire were to start at the edge of Tilden Park, at our eastern border, under red flag weather conditions, the fire could reach Marin Circle within 30 minutes. Embers, carried by the wind, could ignite houses in the flatlands. The city is at risk of losing many lives and many billions in property. The results would be tragic and catastrophic for all of Berkeley.

In an effort to proactively mitigate the risk of a Wildland Urban-Interface (WUI) fire, during the June 2019 budget process, Council approved an allocation of \$545,000 to the Fire Department for wildfire mitigation measures. Working cooperatively with the Parks dept and the Public Works dept. dead trees and vegetation were removed and thinned from six parks (John Hinkel, Cragmont, Codornices, Remillard, La Loma, and the Rose Garden's south end); two publicly owned areas off of Wildcat Canyon Road and Ajax Place; and improvements were made to six pathways (Pinnacle Path, Keeler Path, LaLoma Path, West St, Redwood Terrace, and Poppy Path). However, there is more work to be done. Additional dead vegetation and trees were identified that need to be removed and more work is needed to make our paths safe for evacuation.

Approval of this budget referral will allow the temporary Fire Captain position to continue in order to provide coordination of wildfire safety planning, fuel mitigation, inspection programs and public education. That position will end February 2020, if resources are not allocated. It is essential that gap funding be approved so that this position can continue until alternative funding sources are identified. CALFIRE grants and a ballot measure are possible options for future resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Fire prevention is critical for environmental sustainability. In 2018, California wildfires emitted as much carbon dioxide as an entire year's worth of California's electricity according to a November 30, 2018 press release from the U.S Department of the Interior. To that point, Cap and Trade dollars fund CALFIRE grants.

CONTACT PERSON

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