



Cheryl Davila
Councilmember
District 2

CONSENT CALENDAR
March 30, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Cheryl Davila

Subject: Providing our Unhoused Community with Fire Extinguishers

RECOMMENDATION

Direct the City Manager to use existing homeless services funding to develop a program to provide fire extinguishers, fire prevention tools and deploy them through the community based homeless services providers to distribute to our unhoused community.

Short term referral to additionally, require some elements of this program be deployed immediately, with a full program deployment within six months.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On March 1, 2021, the Public Safety Policy Committee moved to send the item with a qualified positive recommendation to refer the item to the City Manager and the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission to consider fire extinguishers and other fire prevention tools such as wool blankets. Vote: Ayes – Kesarwani, Bartlett; Noes – None; Abstain – None; Absent – Wengraf.

BACKGROUND

On any given night, more than 1,000 Berkeley residents do not have shelter (i.e. living outdoors in tents, on sidewalks or in vehicles) according to the [Alameda County 2019 Point-In-Time Count](#). A growing number of residents are housing insecure and at risk of becoming homeless. A majority of unhoused Berkeley residents are people of color, seniors and disabled.

The City of Berkeley spent close to \$20 million on providing homeless services. About \$6.5 million came from its general fund, about \$9.5 million came from regional, state, and federal funds and \$3.9 million were one-time funds from the state's Homeless Emergency Aid Program.

Cooking fires and accidents are common among unhoused populations as they often use portable stoves, wood, and charcoal briquettes which lack safety precautions. Combined with strong winds near brushes these small fires have dangerous implications. For example, in 2018, a fire from a stove at a homeless encampment in Bel Air caused a large brush fire that incinerated several homes. It became dangerous very quickly because the homeless population lacked extinguishing equipment and the winds allowed to fire to travel. This same thing occurred multiple times in Malibu. In just May of this year, a homeless encampment in San Jose was on fire and began to spread to Guadalupe River.

Consider the Homeless has acquired and deployed fire extinguishers to those temporarily living in tents and other alternative housing. They have personally delivered those extinguishers and track use, as well as helping to formulate safety plans. Each time an extinguisher is used it must be replaced or refilled.

With the growing climate concerns and fires plaguing California, it is essential that the City does everything it can to protect the safety of our people and preemptively stop the spread of preventable fires. Recently, there have been a few encampment fires. One fire resulted in injuries to one of the encampment residents leading to extensive burns to their body requiring surgeries and extended hospitalization.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

An estimate of \$25,000 for the first year, with the purchase of about 500 fire extinguishers to place across encampments and RV and vehicle communities in the City of Berkeley that are easily accessible to our unhoused residents. The average cost of a Fire Extinguishers is \$50. A bulk purchase, as well as reconditioned equipment could result in additional saving. New fire extinguisher equipment comes with approximately a six year warranty. Best Equipment Co. LLC, provided discounted fire extinguishers at the Shake Out last year, for about \$38, \$41.52 with tax. Fire extinguisher boxes to house the extinguishers would require additional costs of approximately \$50 per unit. However, the housing box may not be appropriate for this purpose.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Allowing communities to have tools to prevent and stop fires furthers protects other communities and the environment.

CONTACT PERSONS

Cheryl Davila
Councilmember District 2
510.981.7120
cdavila@cityofberkeley.info

Sanjita Pamidimukkala
Eshal Sandhu
District 2 Interns

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Resolution

REFERENCES:

1. Best Equipment Co. LLC 510.655.8882
2. Fire Extinguisher at Home Depot
<https://www.homedepot.com/p/Kidde-PRO-210-2A-10B-C-Fire-Extinguisher-21029292/100552654>

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA,
PROVIDING OUR HOUSELESSNESS COMMUNITY WITH FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

WHEREAS, On any given night, more than 1,000 Berkeley residents do not have shelter (i.e. living outdoors in tents, on sidewalks or in vehicles) according to the [Alameda County 2019 Point-In-Time Count](#). A growing number of residents are housing insecure and at risk of becoming homeless. A majority of unhoused Berkeley residents are people of color, seniors and disabled; and

WHEREAS, The City of Berkeley spent close to \$20 million on providing homeless services. About \$6.5 million came from its general fund, about \$9.5 million came from regional, state, and federal funds and \$3.9 million were one-time funds from the state's Homeless Emergency Aid Program.

WHEREAS, Cooking fires and accidents are common among unhoused populations as they often use portable stoves, wood, and charcoal briquettes which lack safety precautions. Combined with strong winds near brushes these small fires have dangerous implications. For example, in 2018, a fire from a stove at a homeless encampment in Bel Air caused a large brush fire that incinerated several homes. It became dangerous very quickly because the homeless population lacked extinguishing equipment and the winds allowed to fire to travel. This same thing occurred multiple times in Malibu. In just May of this year, a homeless encampment in San Jose was on fire and began to spread to Guadalupe River.; and

WHEREAS, Consider the Homeless has acquired and deployed fire extinguishers to those temporarily living in tents and other alternative housing. They have personally delivered those extinguishers and track use, as well as helping to formulate safety plans. Each time an extinguisher is used it must be replaced or refilled; and

WHEREAS, With the growing climate concerns and fires plaguing California, it is essential that the City does everything it can to protect the safety of our people and preemptively stop the spread of preventable fires. Recently, there have been a few encampment fires. One fire resulted in injuries to one of the encampment residents leading to extensive burns to their body requiring surgeries and extended hospitalization.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Berkeley, California supports not only the increased accessibility of fire extinguishers and fire prevention products for the homeless; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Council of the City of Berkeley hereby direct the City Manager to use existing homeless services funding to develop a program to provide fire extinguishers, fire prevention tools and deploy them through the community based homeless services providers to distribute to our unhoused community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Council of the City of Berkeley hereby does a short term referral to additionally, require some elements of this program be deployed immediately, with a full program deployment within six months.

