



Disaster and Fire Safety Commission

INFORMATION CALENDAR

April 20, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
 Submitted by: Jose Luis Bedolla, Chairperson, Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
 Subject: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission Work Plan 2021

INTRODUCTION

As directed by the City Council, the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission (DFSC) hereby submits its workplan for 2021.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

On February 24, 2021, the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission passed a motion to submit the attached annual commission work plan. Motion: G. Couzin; Second: S. Dean; Vote: 8 Ayes: Couzin, Dean, Rader, Simmons, Degenkolb, Grimes, Bradstreet, Bedolla; 0 Noes; 1 Absent: Stein, 0 Abstain.

BACKGROUND

On July 19, 2016, the City Council approved a consent item that directs Berkeley Commissions, with the exception of the Board of Library Trustees, the Zoning Adjustments Board, and the Design Review Committee, to submit a workplan to the City Council at the beginning of each fiscal year.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Not applicable.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Not applicable.

CONTACT PERSON

Keith May, Assistant Fire Chief, Berkeley Fire Department, 510-981-5508

Attachments:

1: 2021 Disaster and Fire Safety Commission Work Plan

Berkeley Disaster and Fire Safety Commission WORK PLAN – 2021

Mission Statement

The Disaster and Fire Safety Commission serves as the public oversight group for Berkeley's Measure GG and Measure FF funds, charged with reviewing the budget on a regular basis to ensure that the funds are spent in accordance with the intent of the voter approved measures, recommending the appropriate annual increase to the tax rate, and recommending new programs and positions requiring Measure GG and Measure FF funding.

The Commission also focuses on ways to increase community safety and resilience, working on education, community disaster preparedness, and other strategies as appropriate, and making recommendations to the City Council for adoption and implementation.

Lastly, the Commission reviews and makes recommendations on items referred by the City Council or other Commissions.

Summary of 2021 Work Plan Activities

	Topic	Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
1	Fire safety & community resilience in the face of a wildland-urban interface fire	Staff time, venue	Research, staff reports and information gathering	Recommendations on alerting, parking restrictions, evacuation planning, veg. mgmt., structure hardening and other topics to improve wildfire safety	Fire prevention and pre-planning to save lives, reduce economic loss and mitigate spread through fuel management.
2	Improve community resilience throughout Berkeley with a whole community approach	Community members' time (volunteer), Commissioner time, and staff time.	Organize and participate in a working group for community based disaster response	Recommendations to City Council to improve community resilience throughout Berkeley. May include Measure GF/FF fund expenditures.	Improvement in community preparedness and communications, especially in previously underserved communities & neighborhoods
3	Ensure that Measure GG and Measure FF Funds are spent appropriately	Commissioner time, staff time	Measure GG and FF spending report is reviewed by the Commission every quarter	Recommendations to City Council to ensure funds are spent in accordance with the measures.	Fire stations remain open & preparedness and emergency response is improved by using Measure

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					GG and FF funds as intended.
4	Help other city entities incorporate a disaster and fire safety perspective into decisions	Commissioner time, staff time.	Respond to referrals seeking input on matters relating to disaster and fire safety.	Recommendations or other documentation to City Council and other Commissions that send referrals.	Incorporates disaster preparedness into City decisions, leading to a safer and more resilient city.

Work Plan Details

1. FIRE SAFETY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF A WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE FIRE

Resources

Specific resources include staff time to properly notice meetings and council submissions prepared by the Disaster Fire Safety Commission. A venue and staff time may be needed for community meetings.

Program Activities

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY ALERTING AND EVACUATION

- This Commission has recommended that the city install sirens as a component of the suite of available alerting tools. We will continue to follow up on the progress of this recommendation through the budgeting process.
- Review and provide feedback and recommendations on the city’s draft evacuation plan.
- Review and provide feedback and recommendations on the city’s emergency alerting protocol.
- Commissioners will attend community events and integrate community feedback and concerns into alerting and evacuation recommendations. Observe and/or participate in any evacuation drills that the City or community groups run in 2021.
- Integrate the needs and contributions of seniors and people with mobility challenges or other access and functional needs in all of our emergency alerting and evacuation recommendations.

SAFE PASSAGES – HOUSING DENSITY, ACCESS & EGRESS ON NARROW STREETS

- Create a Working Group or Subcommittee to focus on questions related to access & egress on narrow streets, including housing density, ADU construction, parking restrictions, home occupation rules, and any other related topics.
- Review and provide recommendations on access and egress needs in a WUI fire, specifically the Safe Passages program that is part of the City’s Wildfire Safety Plan
- Review and provide feedback on parking plans, including changes in rules for on-street and off-street marking
- Review and provide feedback on ordinances relevant to increasing population density in the hills, including but not limited to rules regarding ADU construction

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- A member of the Commission will review agendas for other Commissions such as the Planning and Public Works Commission meetings and City Council meetings where parking changes, housing density changes or other changes that will impact fire and evacuation safety are discussed.

REDUCE VEGETATION AND FIRE HARDEN¹ PROPERTIES

Scientists, State and local fire department officials, Wildfire responders, and forest management experts agree that the new California “norm” includes continued droughts and disastrous urban interface wildfires. Through studies and experience, there is agreement that individual property owners are an essential component in the successful achievement of fire prevention goals that will increase life safety, reduce economic impact and preserve the environment. The Commission will take an active role to achieve these broad fire prevention goals through recommendations to the City Council in the following areas:

- Policy declarations and advocacy in support of fire prevention activities at all levels of government;
- Public outreach regarding fire prevention planning, activities and responsibilities;
- Collection, analysis and distribution of financial information, including grants, fees, loans and insurance, related to fire prevention at both citywide and neighborhood levels.

Goals include:

- Support the City’s community outreach measures to improve vegetation management and slow the spread of a WUI fire in the hills.
- Ensure that vegetation management is compliant with sustainable best practices, including local composting.
- Seek any available data on use of the chipper program, and explore if changes to the program would increase adoption.
- Review and provide recommendations on new approaches to vegetation management, including employment of Youthworks (city youth jobs program) staff over the summer to reduce fire fuel in the hills.
- Provide input on development of a fire safety plan, including a post-fire plan for cleanup of materials, including toxic materials, following an WUI fire.

Additional Items

Commissioners working independently in other capacities (such as in neighborhood groups in the hills, or as volunteers) may develop ideas to improve WUI safety in those environments and bring these to the Commission for consideration throughout the year.

Outputs

- Recommendations to City Council regarding parking restrictions on the hills, siren expenditures, ADU rules, vegetation management and any other topics relevant to improving wildfire safety in the City.

¹ To fire harden a property is to take steps that make the home and property more fire-resistant.

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- Feedback to city staff on the Draft Evacuation Plan and alerting tools and protocols.
- Recommendations to support testing and drills to ensure that both staff and residents are prepared to carry out emergency alerting and evacuations

Outcomes

Prevent loss of life by improving the City's planning and available tools to create a safe and efficient evacuation of all endangered residents in the case of a major WUI fire. Improve and practice emergency alerting so that all residents are alerted adequately and in a timely manner of any life-threatening hazards such as an approaching fire. Reduce as much as is feasible, economic losses to property owners.

2. IMPROVE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGHOUT BERKELEY WITH A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Resources

Resources include community members' time (volunteer), Commissioners' and staff time to participate in working group and/or subcommittee work, and staff time to present yearly Berkeley Ready presentations to Commission.

Program Activities

Support accessible preparedness outreach, training and communication, with a special focus on underserved and/or vulnerable members of our community, including residents of South and West Berkeley, seniors, persons with disabilities, families with children, Spanish-speakers, and renters. Consider ideas toward the goal of equitably and adequately serving all people who live, work, study or play in Berkeley.

COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing disaster that impacts every person and institution in the City. It has exposed gaps and inequities in city services and all aspects of our social system including healthcare, education, food systems, housing and more.

Commission member(s) will stay apprised of City activities as well as community-based activities in response to this pandemic and, if appropriate, provide recommendations to Council. The Commission will make thoughtful, science-based recommendations to reduce suffering and protect and preserve life, health, property, and City funds.

- Understand and hear from the communities that are most impacted by COVID-19, to compile case studies of the community lifelines (store closure, transit, etc.) impacts for Council, if appropriate. Report on community members who are working to support each other through this crisis and make recommendations on possible coordination and support.
- Recognize that forms of support that require internet access, bodily ability, driving a car, having existing healthcare, or other forms of privilege can reinforce existing inequities. Commission will integrate a lens of equity into any COVID-19 related recommendations.

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- Recognize that strengthening the City’s resilience in the face of COVID-19 and similar future disasters will take many forms that may not look like the professional, top-down based approach that has been followed in the past.

Community Based Disaster Response

Commission member(s) will continue to explore ways to support community-based post-disaster response, creating an inclusive, broad-based response that better meets the post-disaster needs of all people in Berkeley:

- explore options to help give the community a better structure or pathway to participate in disaster response.
- explore ways to improve and support social cohesion throughout the city that will naturally increase post-disaster assistance, information-sharing, and shared resources among neighbors.
- explore options to streamline and reducing the cost of permits for Seismic Shutoff Valves and other disaster preparedness upgrades

To stay apprised of CERT, Berkeley Ready, and other activities in the City, the Commission will host presentations at Commission meetings by the following groups:

- Berkeley Ready staff presentation(s)
- Berkeley Disaster Preparedness Neighborhood Network (BDPNN)
- Berkeley Mutual Aid (BMA)
- Berkeley Path Wanderers
- Others as appropriate

Additional Items

Commissioners working independently in other capacities (such as with schools and businesses) may develop ideas to improve community resilience in those environments and bring these to the Commission for consideration throughout the year.

Output(s)

- Develop recommendation(s) to City Council to enhance Berkeley Ready, CERT and other city programs to support community resilience. Develop recommendations to fund or otherwise support activities of Berkeley Disaster Prep Neighborhood Network, Path Wanderers, Berkeley Mutual Aid, or other community groups.

Outcomes

Measurable improvement to Berkeley’s community preparedness. Measurement may be in number of people reached, or number of active volunteers, or new previously underserved populations reached.

4. ENSURE THAT MEASURE GG AND MEASURE FF FUNDS ARE SPENT APPROPRIATELY

Resources

Commissioners’ time and staff time to generate financial reports and present them to the Commission every quarter.

Program Activities

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- Commission will review and provide input on Measure GG and Measure FF expenditure plans as early as possible in the budgeting process, and engage collaboratively with City staff to ensure that these funds are spent in accordance with voter intentions.
- Commission will make recommendations on appropriate allocations for programs and positions requiring Measure GG and Measure FF funding.
- Staff to generate a Measure GG and Measure FF spending report every quarter, or more often if needed
- Commission to provide recommendation on optional tax percentage increase each year
- Member(s) of the Commission will engage with the Re-Imagining Safety process by participating in or observing task force meetings or other related events, so that the Commission can stay apprised of any budgeting changes that result from Re-Imagining Safety, and the potential for available funds to be applied to dispatch upgrades or any other Measure GG or Measure FF-funded programs.

Output(s)

The Commission will create recommendations to Council if needed to ensure that Measure GG and FF funds are used to enhance the safety of the Berkeley community and remain within the definition, scope, and intentions of the original law.

Outcomes

With funds correctly allocated, the goals of Measures GG and FF are maintained: keeping all fire stations in the city open 24-7, improving community resilience through programs such as Berkeley Ready, adequately training firefighters and paramedics, maintaining and replacing necessary equipment and facilities, planning and preparing for wildfires, and upgrading and modernizing the City's 9-1-1 dispatch system.

5: HELP OTHER CITY ENTITIES INCORPORATE A DISASTER AND FIRE SAFETY PERSPECTIVE INTO DECISIONS

Resources

Commissioners' time for research and recommendation creation

Program Activities

Respond to requests for input on matters relating to disaster and fire safety. Requests may come from City Council, City Staff, other Commissions, or the public.

- Examples of recent referrals:
 - City Council referral for feedback on requiring gas shut-off valves
 - Planning Commission request for feedback on ADU Emergency Ordinance
- Provide input into Council decisions when decisions will affect disaster resilience or fire safety in Berkeley

Recommendations may also be generated in absence of a referral, when the Commission determines that input into Council decisions is necessary to serve Berkeley's resilience in disaster and fire safety.

Output(s)

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Recommendations to City Council or communications with other city entities, often in response to referrals.

Outcomes

City Council will incorporate fire safety and disaster preparedness considerations into decisions, leading to a safer and more resilient city.