



Susan Wengraf
Vice Mayor and Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
January 30, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Vice Mayor Susan Wengraf (Author), Councilmember Humbert (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Hahn (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Harrison (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Request by Resolution that PG&E Underground Utilities in Berkeley's VHFHSZ

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution urging PG&E to underground utility wires in Berkeley's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) to mitigate wildfire risk and limit evacuation and ingress obstruction. Send the Resolution to PG&E CEO Patti Poppe, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety, State Senator Nancy Skinner, Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, Governor Gavin Newsom and Senator Mike McGuire, author of SB 884. Request the City Manager issue a press release about this Resolution as a critical Public Safety matter.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications to send the resolution.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

Utility-caused wildfires have become California's tragic reality. PG&E's CEO, Patti Poppe states that undergrounding reduces ignitions by 99%, making it the most effective way to reduce wildfire risk. As part of their commitment to improve wildfire safety, PG&E has started to underground electric lines as part of their 10,000 miles Electric Infrastructure Safety Initiative.

SB 884 (McGuire), which became law in 2023, expedites the undergrounding of utility lines and allows use of federal infrastructure funds.¹

Undergrounding utility wires to mitigate wildfire risk from powerline and transmitter malfunctions and to limit evacuation and ingress obstruction, advances Berkeley's Strategic Plan Goal to create a resilient, safe, connected, and prepared city.

This Resolution requests PG&E include the City of Berkeley's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) in their *10-year Distribution Infrastructure Undergrounding*

¹ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB884

Plan to be submitted to California's Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety for review and approval.

Panoramic Hill is in CAL FIRE's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The Berkeley Fire Department has designated Panoramic Hill with the highest severity level, Fire Zone 3, in the City of Berkeley. The Panoramic Hill residential neighborhood, which sits within both Berkeley and Oakland, is surrounded on three sides by wildlands. The neighborhood has only one road for both egress and ingress, which is a narrow, substandard roadway that cannot be widened.

CAL FIRE also includes the North East Berkeley Hills in their Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone designation. The Berkeley Fire Department labels this area Fire Zone 2 and has suggested that due to extreme risk, all residents in Fire Zones 2 and 3 evacuate the area when *Extreme Fire Weather* has been predicted. The streets in Fire Zones 2 & 3 are so narrow and winding and the hills so densely inhabited that it would be unlikely for everyone to get out safely in the event of a wildfire. A 2019 AP News Analysis identified the Berkeley Hills Zip Code 94708 as "being roughly within the worst 1% in the state when it comes to population-to-evacuation-route ratios." Just 31 other Zip Codes in the entire state of California share that designation.

BACKGROUND

In July 2021 PG&E committed to undergrounding 10,000 miles of power lines, over multiple years, in the Highest Fire Threat Districts to protect communities from wildfire threats. City Council approved a Resolution on November 9th, 2021 urging PG&E CEO Patti Poppe and her Board to commit a tiny part of their 10,000 miles of undergrounding to Berkeley's evacuation routes and previously formed Undergrounding Districts. The City did not receive a reply.

SB-884 Electricity: expedited utility distribution infrastructure undergrounding program (McGuire) passed on the Assembly Floor with zero "no" votes on August 30, 2022 and was signed by the Governor on September 29, 2022. On Jan 1st 2023, SB-884 became law, expediting PG&E's work to underground 10,000 miles of the highest fire risk electric lines and allowing use of federal infrastructure dollars for it.

Berkeley has a history of catastrophic wildfire, including the 1923 wildfire that swept through north Berkeley destroying approximately 600 homes and structures, the 1980 fire in Wildcat Canyon that destroyed five homes and the 1991 fire that consumed southeast Berkeley and Oakland, claiming 25 lives and reducing approximately 3,000 structures to ashes.

Neighboring communities share our concern that overhead electrical equipment will ignite wildfire in their communities. The City of Oakland's City Council unanimously passed a resolution on July 18, 2023 urging PG&E to underground utilities in their Very High Fire Severity Zone.

Request by Resolution that PG&E Underground Utilities in Berkeley's VHFHSZ CONSENT CALENDAR
January 30, 2024

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

California wildfires emit as much carbon as almost 2 million cars every year.
Undergrounding reduces wildfire risk.

CONTACT PERSON

Vice Mayor Susan Wengraf Council District 6 510-981-7160

Attachments:

- 1: Resolution
- 2: AP News Study
- 3: July 2021 letter to PG&E CEO Patti Poppe
- 4: CAL FIRE VHFHSZ Designation in Berkeley Map

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

URGING PG&E TO UNDERGROUND BERKELEY'S VHFHSZ

WHEREAS, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) states that undergrounding reduces ignitions by 99%, making it one of the most effective ways to reduce wildfire risk; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 884 (McGuire), which became law in 2023, expedites the undergrounding of utility lines and allows use of federal infrastructure funds; and

WHEREAS, PG&E has committed to protect communities from wildfire threat by undergrounding 10,000 miles of power lines in the Highest Fire Threat Districts; and

WHEREAS, the Panoramic Hill neighborhood is in CAL FIRE's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and Berkeley's Fire Department has designated it with the highest severity level in the City of Berkeley, Fire Zone 3; and

WHEREAS, the North East Berkeley Hills also carry CAL Fire's designation of Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone and the 94708 ZIP Code, which encompasses most of the NE Hills, was designated as "being roughly within the worst 1% in the state when it comes to population-to-evacuation-route ratios" in 2019 by an AP News Analysis.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley urges PG&E to include the areas designated by CAL FIRE: Panoramic Hill neighborhood and the North East Berkeley Hills designated as Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, into its 10,000 miles of undergrounding in the Highest Fire Threat Districts.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Berkeley requests the City Manager issue a press release about this Resolution as a critical Public Safety matter.

Exhibits

A: AP News: How we analyzed California's wildfire evacuation routes

AP NEWS

How we analyzed California's wildfire evacuation routes

By EVAN WYLOGE April 27, 2019



In this April 17, 2019, photo, a pedestrian crosses Washington St. one of the few roads leading into and out of the Gold Rush community of Sonora, Calif. Residents of Paradise, Calif., who were forced to flee from the Camp Fire, became caught in a nightmare traffic jam on narrow winding roads as they tried to evacuate the area. Sonora faces the same kind of issues of too few escape lanes for too many people in vehicles. The 2018 catastrophe illuminated the grim reality that road systems throughout the state are not designed to handle a sudden evacuation. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

REDDING, Calif. (AP) — How many roads are enough to get out?

That's the question we wondered after watching tragedy unfold in Paradise, California, last year during the Camp Fire.

Paradise had five two-lane roads and one four-lane road leading out of town. But the fire forced officials to close three of those routes, further clogging the remaining roads.

Did Paradise have an unusually high ratio of residents to [escape routes](#)? Or were other California communities in a similar situation?

A USA Today-California Network analysis of California communities and [evacuation routes](#) shows that some areas in the state are far outside the norm when it comes to the number of lanes of roadway available for the size of the population.

This is a shorthand method of evaluating the efficacy of egress routes, according to emergency planning experts.

To evaluate exit routes for Californians living in areas at risk of a fire-related evacuation, [we combined and analyzed data](#) from the U.S. Census Bureau, Cal Fire and OpenStreetMap.

We took 2010 census block-level populations, combined with Cal Fire's "Fire Hazard Severity Zone" maps, and aggregated those to ZIP codes, then applied more current population estimates. Next, we spatially joined those areas with the fire risk map. That provided a current population risk breakdown for each ZIP code, based on area and estimated population.

We added OpenStreetMap data to each ZIP code, so we could see which roads cross into or out of the area. Combining the ZIP code population and fire risk data with the standard number of lanes for every major roadway allowed us to come up with a set of ZIP codes that have the greatest number of people living in the highest-risk areas and hypothetically trying to use the fewest number of lanes to leave in any direction or to areas at less risk for fire.

What does this tell us?

In short, the analysis gives an estimate of how many people there are for every lane of major road leaving an area.

When we looked at all ZIP codes in California that have people living in a very high fire risk zone, we found, on average, 134 residents living in the riskiest areas for each lane of [traffic going either direction](#).

Only one out of 20 ZIP codes has more than 313 people living in the [riskiest areas](#) for each lane of traffic. Paradise had more than 1,000, putting it in the worst 1%. But some areas, such as Oak Park in Ventura County, South [Lake Tahoe](#) in El Dorado County or the Palos Verdes Peninsula in Los Angeles County, have two, three or even five times the number of people living in the highest-risk zones, per lane of major roadway out, compared to Paradise.

Here are the ZIP codes the analysis identified as being roughly within the worst 1% in the state when it comes to population-to-evacuation-route ratios:

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA:

90042: Highland Park and Eagle Rock in Los Angeles County

90272: Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles County
90274: Rolling Hills in Los Angeles County
90275: Rancho Palos Verdes in Los Angeles County
91935: Jamul and surrounding areas in San Diego County
92065: Ramona and surrounding areas in San Diego County
92131: Scripps Ranch in San Diego County
91320: From Newbury Park to Dos Vientos Ranch in western Thousand Oaks in Ventura County
91377: Oak Park, an unincorporated community in Ventura County
93021: Moorpark in Ventura County
92548: Homeland and areas northwest of Homeland in Riverside County
92584: Menifee in Riverside County
92314: Big Bear, Minnelusa and Sugarloaf (92386) in San Bernardino County
CENTRAL CALIFORNIA:
93924: Carmel Valley and Jamesburg in Monterey County
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA:
95954: Magalia in Butte County
95969: Paradise in Butte County
96150: South Lake Tahoe and surrounding areas in El Dorado County
95634: Georgetown and surrounding areas in El Dorado County
94508: Angwin in Napa County
94708: Cragmont, Kensington and La Loma Park in northeastern Berkeley in Alameda County
95422: Clearlake in Lake County
95451: Kelseyville in Lake County
95631: Foresthill and surrounding areas in Placer County

95666: Pioneer, Barton and Buckhorn in Amador County



City Clerk Department

November 9, 2021

Patricia Poppe, CEO, Pacific Gas & Electric
c/o Brian M. Wong
Vice President, Corporate Secretary
77 Beale Street, 24th Floor
Mail Code B24W
San Francisco, CA 94105

**RE: PG&E's Safety Initiative: 10,000 Miles of Undergrounding Power Lines
Support from the Berkeley City Council**

At its meeting of November 9, 2021, the Berkeley City Council adopted Resolution No. 70,102-N.S. in support of placing utility power lines underground in the Berkeley Hills and evacuation routes.

Dear CEO Patti Poppe,

On behalf of the Berkeley City Council, I want to commend PG&E on its Safety Initiative to Underground 10,000 miles of power lines to protect communities from wildfire threat. I also want to recommend that PG&E commit a tiny part of those 10,000 miles of undergrounding to Berkeley's evacuation routes and the two established but yet to be completed Underground Utility Districts in Berkeley's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

A 2019 AP News Analysis identified Berkeley Hills Zip Code 94708 as being within the worst 1% in the state when it comes to population-to-evacuation-route ratios. The Town of Paradise is also in the worst 1% category. Berkeley and Paradise share that terrible distinction with just 31 other Zip Codes in California, out of 1,741 Zip Codes in the state.

Berkeley has a history with wildfire. In 1923, a wildfire swept through north Berkeley, ultimately destroying approximately 600 homes and structures. In 1980, a fire in Berkeley's Wildcat Canyon destroyed 5 homes and then, on October 17, 1991, a fierce and destructive wildfire consumed southeast Berkeley and Oakland, claiming 25 lives and reducing approximately 3,000 structures to ashes.

Berkeley is also at extreme risk for a devastating earthquake on the Hayward Fault, which cuts right through Berkeley's very high fire hazard severity zone; when fire

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e-Mail: clerk@CityofBerkeley.info Website: <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/gaefk>

ensues, it will cause even further destruction to life, property and further challenge the City's resiliency. Undergrounding Berkeley's 15.1 miles of evacuation routes throughout the city, and UUD 48 and UUD 35A will reduce the threat of wildfire and improve safety for all residents in Berkeley and neighboring jurisdictions as well.

The City of Berkeley is intent on having a cooperative and efficient permitting process for undergrounding projects, given our mutual desire and interest in these undergrounding projects.

I urge you to include Berkeley's evacuation routes and two established UUDs in PG&E's 10,000-mile promise to underground utilities.

I thank you for your leadership on PG&E's Safety Initiative.

Sincerely,

Berkeley City Council

Sincerely,



Mark Numainville
City Clerk

Enclosure: Resolution No. 70,102-N.S.

cc: CPUC
PG&E Board Members:
Rajaf Bahri
Cheryl Campbell
Kerry Cooper
Jessica Denecour
Admiral Mark Ferguson
Robert Flexon
W. Craig Fugate
Arno Harris
Michael Niggli
Dean Seavers
William Smith

Benjamin Wilson
Jesse Arreguin, Mayor
Terry Taplin, Councilmember, District 2
Sophie Hahn, Councilmember, District 5
Susan Wengraf, Councilmember, District 6
Dae Williams-Ridley, City Manager

RESOLUTION NO. 70,102-N.S.

PG&E'S SAFETY INITIATIVE: 10,000 MILES OF UNDERGROUNDING

WHEREAS, On July 21, 2021 Pacific Gas and Electric Company's CEO, Patti Poppe, announced a new multi-year Electric Infrastructure Safety Initiative to protect communities from wildfire threat by undergrounding 10,000 miles of power lines in the Highest Fire Threat Districts; and

WHEREAS, A 2019 AP News Analysis identified Berkeley Hills Zip Code 94708 as being within the worst 1% in the state when it comes to population-to-evacuation route ratios; and

WHEREAS, The Town of Paradise is also in the worst 1% category. Berkeley and Paradise share that terrible distinction with just 31 other Zip Codes in California, out of 1,741 Zip Codes in the state; and

WHEREAS, Berkeley has a history with wildfire, including the 1923 wildfire that swept through north Berkeley destroying approximately 600 homes and structures, the 1980 fire in Berkeley's Wildcat Canyon that destroyed five homes and the 1991 fire that consumed southeast Berkeley and Oakland, claiming 25 lives and reducing approximately 3,000 structures to ashes; and

WHEREAS, Berkeley is also at extreme risk for a devastating earthquake on the Hayward Fault, which cuts right through Berkeley's very high fire hazard severity zone; when fire ensues, it will cause even further destruction to life, property and further challenge the City's resiliency; and

WHEREAS, The City Council recommends PG&E commit a tiny part of their 10,000 miles of undergrounding to Berkeley's evacuation routes and previously formed Undergrounding Districts 48 and 35A in order to mitigate wildfire risk caused by equipment or earthquakes and improve safety for all residents in Berkeley; and

WHEREAS, It is the intent of the City of Berkeley to have a cooperative and efficient permitting process for undergrounding projects, given our mutual desire and interest in these undergrounding projects

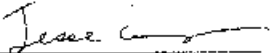
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Berkeley that it send a letter to the PG&E CEO and Board of Directors, with a copy to the CPUC, recommending that Berkeley's evacuation routes and the two established but yet to be completed Underground Utility Districts in Berkeley's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone be considered in the 10,000-mile promise to underground utilities.

The foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Berkeley City Council on November 9, 2021 by the following vote:

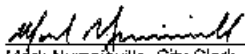
Ayes: Bartlett, Droste, Hahn, Harrison, Kesarwani, Robinson, Taplin, Wengraf, and Arreguin.

Noes: None.

Absent: None.



Jesse Arreguin, Mayor

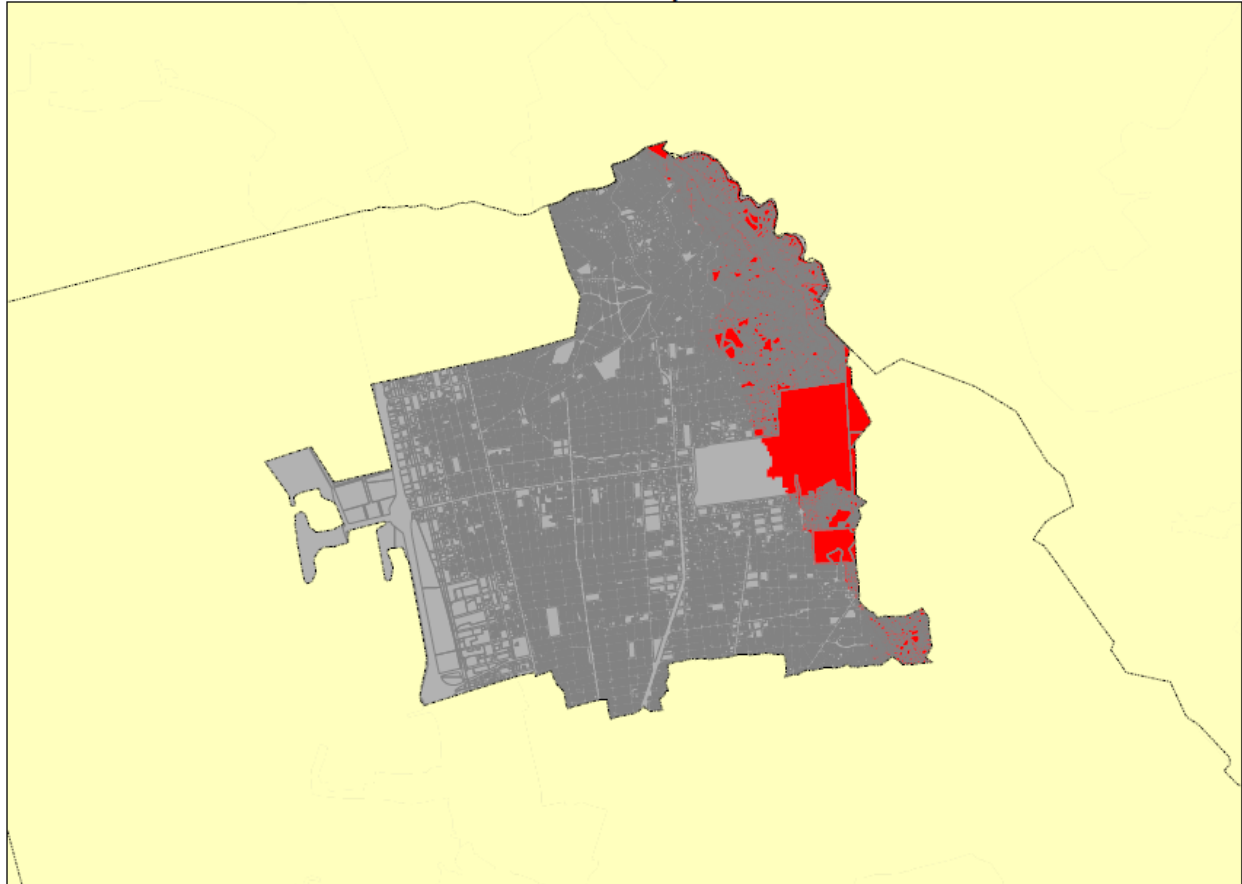
Attest: 

Mark Numarville, City Clerk



Berkeley

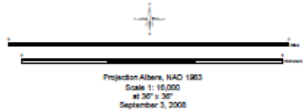
Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in LRA As Recommended by CAL FIRE



Fire Hazard Severity Zones	
Light Pink	Very Low Fire Hazard
Pink	Low Fire Hazard
Light Red	High Fire Hazard
Red	Very High Fire Hazard
Grey	Urban
Black outline	City Boundary
Black outline	Neighborhood
Black outline	County Boundary

Map ID: FVHZ_01_Berkeley
 This map was developed using data products such as parcel and city boundaries provided by local government agencies. In some cases, this includes original geographic information. The maps are for display purposes only. Questions and requests related to parcel or city boundary data should be directed to the appropriate local government entity.
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Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor,
 State of California
 Mike Crutcher, Secretary for Resources,
 The Resource Agency
 Robert Gilpin, Director,
 Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

MAP ID: FVHZ_01_Berkeley
 DATA SOURCES

<https://34c031f8-c9fd-4018-8c5a-4159cdf6b0d-cdn-endpoint.azureedge.net/-/media/osfm-website/what-we-do/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/fire-hazard-severity-zones/fire-hazard-severity-zones-map/upload-1/berkeley.pdf>