



Office of the City Manager

October 24, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: *DWR* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager
Submitted by Interim Fire Chief David Sprague
Re: Wildland Urban Interface Fire Preparedness Progress Report

Large portions of Berkeley's jurisdiction lie within State recognized Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (Fire Zone 2 & 3). As a result of topography, infrastructure, weather, and the systematic exclusion of fire from this area for over 100 years, there is no simple solution to the problem of reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The impacts from wildfire may be direct from fire, or indirect from adverse impacts including breathing problems downwind, sustained loss of power from a PG&E PSPS event, or infrastructure damage. There will also be long-term challenges related to property insurance claim collection, struggles to rebuild after a fire, and the psychological toll that large disasters have on a community. The indirect impacts disproportionately affect unsheltered populations, individuals with underlying health conditions, low-income individuals, children, and the elderly (Governor's Office of Planning and Research, 2022).

The state legislature has declared in Section 51175 of the Government Code that prevention and suppression of wildfires is a statewide concern, and we are of the strong opinion that wildfire is a community-wide threat, not an issue threatening only the Berkeley Hills. The community experienced catastrophic fires that spread out of the hills and to the flat areas in 1923 when a fire started near Lake Anza and burned to downtown, and in 1991 when the Tunnel Fire started in the hillsides of northern Oakland and swept through southeastern Berkeley (only stopped due to a change in the weather), regionally in 2017 when the Tubbs Fire spread out of the hills and through Coffey Park in Santa Rosa, and in many other locations throughout the world. The unprecedented community-wide collaboration will be necessary to protect Berkeley from wildfire.

To coordinate and collaborate on this work, an Intra-Departmental Wildfire Task Force (WUI Task Force) composed of staff from the City Manager's Office (CMO), City Attorney's Office (CAO), Parks Recreation and Waterfront (PRW), Public Works (PW),

Fire began meeting regularly in August of 2022. The WUI Task Force has been focused on:

- **WUI Work Plan:** Staff is building a strategic community-focused plan that focuses on implementation of policies and programs that help reduce the risk of wildfire or strengthens the City's response. The work plan is organized by four areas of focus:
 - Minimizing Risks to Existing and New Land Uses
 - Fuel Modification and Land Management
 - Protecting Public Health and Increasing Equity
 - Disaster Response, Recovery, and Maintenance
- **2022 Fire Code Amendments [11/15 Council Meeting]:** As part of the 2022 Fire Code Adoption, the Fire Marshall has added amendments that echo the State mandate to manage vegetation in the Zone 2 & 3:
 - Amendment 1: clarifies that the new vegetation management best practices, per State guidance and legislation requires work within 100 feet of a structure **and to structures on adjacent property**.
 - Amendment 2: authorizes the Department to require management of vegetation on private lands outside of 100 feet from a structure based on the specific existing conditions.
- **Subject Matter Experts (SME) [11/03 Council Meeting]:** Fire Department leadership has identified subject matter experts that can assist with new and existing internal priorities and unfunded state mandates. Staff will be requesting an increase to the Ganey Science contract appropriating existing Department funds for additional temporary support. Efforts include:
 - Grant SMEs that are assisting with research of Federal and State grant application development and grant management.
 - Environmental experts to plan how to balance the environmental impacts of [vegetation] mitigation work.
 - Chipping Program: SMEs that have successfully implemented and managed community-wide chipping programs.
- **Chipping Pilot Program:** Staff is evaluating the existing chipper program and the feasibility of expanding this service to more areas of the city. Staff identified a SME who designed and manages the chipping program for the Marin Wildfire Protection Agency (MEPA). We learned from the MWPA that when chipping is provided by the City and used in conjunction with a Defensible Space Inspection (DSI), voluntary vegetation removal by homeowners significantly increases.

- **Integration of Chipping Appointment [11/03 Council Meeting]:** Council will consider an amendment from BFD Staff that will appropriate additional existing Department funds to the FireAside contract. This will allow the integration of a self-scheduling appointment tool into the DSI software.
- **Public/Private Partnerships:** Fire staff is working with the CAO and PRW to develop a cost-sharing program to help homeowners complete vegetation management and home hardening activities. The two most significant barriers to voluntary homeowner compliance are selecting contractors and financing the work. These are the two primary problems this program is being designed to address.
- **Grant Funding:** The Ganey Science project management team stood up a grant steering committee tracking both public and private grants and eligibility that helps leverage City funds for projects related to wildfire prevention, specifically education, vegetation removal, and home hardening in Fire Zone 2 & 3. The first grant application is under development.
- **Citation Process:** While the Department's goal is to educate and gain voluntary compliance with hazardous vegetation management. When the citation, fine and abatement process is necessary it should be fair, efficient, and effective. Staff is working to streamline the existing inspection citation processing and appeal process to meet these goals.
- **Temporary Employees [11/03 Council Meeting]:** The City and Department face serious recruitment and retention challenges and temporary staff is needed to ensure projects are moving forward. Staff is requesting Council authorize a new contract with Robert Half/Protiviti that provides interim programmatic support, with the most urgent need currently in the WUI Division.
- **On-Call Contractors:** Staff are working with PW and PRW to launch competitive processes or leverage existing contracts to have adequate capacity to perform hazardous tree maintenance and removal, hazardous vegetation treatment, and chipping service for the 2023 fire season.
- **Physical Space:** The Department does not have the physical space to place additional staff. BFD, CAO and PW are negotiating to complete a lease agreement for the new Fire Administration headquarters. Council can expect to see an agenda item with this lease in early 2023. A temporary overflow office space was identified in the interim.
- **Disaster Fire Safe Commission (DFSC) & Community Partners:** Staff is engaged with key community partners to align their passion and energy with a mutually designed comprehensive WUI Work Plan. This effort will be immensely

beneficial as community alignment will be critical in order to make substantial changes to the fire risk facing our community. These conversations have yielded many good ideas that are being discussed in the WUI Task Force.

- **Vegetation Treatment on Public Land:** BFD and PRW collaborated to identify additional areas on Public Land, including Remillard Park to conduct vegetation management with an existing City contractor using Measure FF funds. Work is on-going and will be completed in late October/November.
- **Safe Passages:** BFD is working with PW to obtain quotes for repainting all red curbs and replacing worn parking restriction signs in Fire Zone 2 and 3. Mills School of Business engaged BFD to develop a plan for engaging a creative public process and help prepare for controversial components of the Safe Passages Program.
- **Mobile Water Supply:** Staff is working to procure a mobile 3,000-gallon water truck with the intended purpose of responding to a fire that ignites in or adjacent to the city. Supply chain issues have prevented the procurement; however, staff was able to recently make the purchase. This vehicle will complement the Above Ground Water System (Measure Q), which takes several hours to deploy.
- **Evacuation Warning [11/15 Council Meeting]:** Staff is requesting a contract amendment to increase the Genasys contract by \$200,000 using existing Department funds. This provides funding to support the complex permitting process within the City and State Architect for the installation of warning speaker sites on City and BUSD land.
- **Evacuation Time Study:** State unfunded mandate, Assembly Bill 747 requires the General Plan Safety Element to identify evacuation routes and their capacity for various emergency situations. Staff identified a consultant to perform an evacuation time study to complete the work for our next update to the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan. The Department will not be eligible to receive federal grant funding without a current adopted plan.

cc: Paul Buddenhagen, Deputy City Manager
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