



SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

Department: Fire Department

Prepared by: Christopher Gray,
Fire Chief

City Manager Approval: _____

TOPIC: WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION ACTION PLAN

SUBJECT: WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION ACTION PLAN INFORMATIONAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept informational report relating to the proposed draft Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan and provide direction to staff, if applicable, to make changes to the draft Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The attached draft Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan (the “draft Plan”) outlines various goals relating to wildfire prevention, which includes, but is not limited to, the following: changes to the City’s municipal code, defined projects, and a series of programs, all of which are designed to help San Rafael proactively and aggressively address the growing risks associated with wildfire. The draft Plan was created per City Council direction at the August 20, 2018 meeting, following [an informational report that was presented to the City Council](#) relating to wildfire prevention efforts. At this time, City staff seeks to present the proposed draft Plan to the City Council at a public meeting to provide City Council and the public an opportunity to review the draft Plan and provide feedback, as well as to seek City Council direction relating to any requested changes to the draft Plan. After the January 22, 2019 City Council meeting, staff will compile feedback from the City Council and the public, as well as follow up on any direction provided by the City Council specifically related to requested changes to the draft Plan, and will bring forth a final Wildfire Prevention and Protection Plan to the City Council for formal approval at a future meeting.

BACKGROUND:

Climate change and growing hazardous fuel loads are creating an increased wildfire risk across California. In the past few years, wildfires have shattered notorious records, including size, property damage, and loss of life. These devastating fires have also provided new insight into how fires behave in the changing environment and expanding wildland urban interface. Recently, in June 2018, 11.6 acres

FOR CITY CLERK ONLY

File No.: _____

Council Meeting: _____

Disposition: _____

on San Rafael Hill burned. The fire was quickly contained by a strong response, including over 80 personnel and air support, and favorable fuel and weather conditions.

In 2007, the City Council adopted a model ordinance, entitled Wildland-Urban Interface—Vegetation Management Standards, for vegetation management to proactively reduce the risk of wildfires ([S.R.M.C. 4.12](#)). This ordinance specifically codifies required vegetation management standards for parcels located in designated Wildland-Urban Interface (“WUI”) areas, with the goal of creating defensible space around structures that will minimize the spread of fires from wildlands to structures, from structures to wildlands, and from structures to structures. Also, the Marin County Fire Chiefs continue to discuss and review ways to better address the growing risk and public concern posed by wildfire risk in our communities. In November 2017, the Marin County Board of Supervisors created a sub-committee to study lessons learned from recent wildfires. In response, on September 11, 2018, the Marin County Fire Department presented [a report to the Board of Supervisors relating to the sub-committee’s findings](#), which includes a list of proposed areas for improvement in managing local wildfire risk. This report includes recommendations to fire, law enforcement, and land management agencies, in addition to emergency services and cities and towns.

Annually, San Rafael proactively addresses wildfire risk in numerous ways. These measures include actions such as:

- Providing free vegetation inspections for residents
- Supporting and coordinating free community chipper days
- Engaging and supporting communities seeking Firewise certification
- Regularly patrolling the open space with two Police Department Rangers
- Providing ongoing public outreach and education at community events, homeowners associations meetings, and City events.

In August 2018, staff presented an [informational report to the City Council relating to the City’s wildfire prevention efforts](#). As part of the presentation, the City Council provided direction to staff to draft a bold and comprehensive plan to further address wildfire risk in San Rafael. In response to direction from the City Council, along with public comment, staff developed the attached draft Plan. Many of the recommendations set forth in the [September 11, 2018 report](#) from the Marin County Board of Supervisors sub-committee are incorporated into the draft Plan.

ANALYSIS:

Lessons learned from recent fires, as well as new research relating to fire safety and a changing climate, have prompted San Rafael to take additional steps to prevent a wildfire tragedy. The draft Plan lists a series of prescriptions, programs, and ordinance changes needed to make San Rafael more fire and disaster-resistant. These action items reflect the need for a comprehensive approach to reducing wildfire risk. Removing dangerous vegetation, using fire-resistant building materials, and avoiding risky activities all are vital for protecting the community.

The draft Plan contains 37 Objectives, followed by a proposed Action to take in order to meet each Objective. The draft Plan proposes numerous changes to the City’s municipal code. Most significantly, staff recommends updating the City’s municipal code to apply existing vegetation standards citywide, instead of only within the WUI, areas where homes are built near lands that are prone to wildland fire. Staff believes that these changes to the City’s municipal code are essential to reducing the wildfire risk in San Rafael. These expanded standards are directly reflected in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 19 and 20, in addition to being components of other ongoing and planned projects. (see pp. 4-6, 16-17 in draft Plan). If staff moves forward with finalizing the draft Plan for City Council approval, once the draft Plan in final form is approved by the City Council, staff will prepare ordinances amending the City’s municipal code to create

citywide vegetation standards and codify those regulations in Chapter 4 of the Municipal Code to accompany the existing vegetation management standards. Chapter 4.12 of the City's municipal code, which establishes the vegetation management standards for the WUI, will be updated to include only standards unique to the WUI.

By presenting this informational report at a public meeting, the City will use this opportunity to facilitate additional community discussion and clarify the most effective ways to reduce wildfire risk in San Rafael. After the presentation, staff will compile feedback from the City Council and the public, as well as follow up on any direction provided by the City Council specifically related to any requested changes to the draft Plan, and will bring forth a final Wildfire Prevention and Protection Plan (the "final Plan") to the City Council for formal approval at a future meeting in early 2019.

Following the approval of the final Plan, City staff will complete the Objectives outlined in the final Plan, including preparing municipal code changes for City Council consideration. New and expanded programs identified in the final plan will require additional staff time and/or funding before they can be fully implemented.

The draft Plan includes the following 37 objectives:

1. Eliminate highly flammable vegetation throughout San Rafael
2. Apply vegetation management standards citywide
3. Adopt Public Resource Code 4290 and 4291
4. Reduce ember ignitions within immediate structure ignition zone standards
5. Apply fire mitigation codes 365 days a year
6. Eliminate fire hazard associated with shake and wooden roofs
7. Increase funding and resources available for wildfire mitigation
8. Immediately seize ignition sources at encampments and remove encampments as quickly as possible
9. Provide for additional Vegetation Management staff
10. Increase Police Ranger staffing
11. Improve public education regarding fire-safe landscaping and planning for a wildfire
12. Increase capability for early fire warnings and detection
13. Improve public emergency alerting capabilities and policies
14. Complete an analysis of fire roads and strategic fuel breaks
15. Expand goat grazing for vegetation maintenance
16. Assure that residents can evacuate through garage doors if power is out
17. Improve development and implementation of Vegetation Management Plans (VMPs)
18. Assure that appropriate staff can send and receive emergency alerts
19. Reduce fuels along roadways
20. Reduce fuels around critical infrastructure
21. Assure that City staff can communicate during an emergency
22. Establish more Firewise communities in San Rafael
23. Review and update WUI map
24. Apply CA Fire Code 7A (fire resistant building material requirements) to additional structures
25. Establish a residential hillside "parking box" program
26. Increase the number of completed VMPs
27. Incorporate VMPs into residential property sales or transfers
28. Prevent potential entrapments by requiring 2 gates in any fence in designated areas
29. Reduce fire risk and keep visitors using short-term rentals safe
30. Review and expand evacuation plans
31. Develop comprehensive San Rafael hazardous vegetation study and mitigation measures

32. Establish additional fuel interruption zones
33. Engage CERT members in fire prevention
34. Reduce hazardous fuels through an abatement process on privately owned unimproved lots
35. Reengage volunteer “Broom Pull Days”
36. Improve the public’s fire risk awareness with sign improvements and installation
37. Effectively coordinate the removal of vegetative debris

For more information, including the proposed Action, as well as an analysis of each of the Objectives, please see the attached draft Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: Feedback from the public, including from the Fire Commission, has been incorporated into the current draft Plan, including the proposed changes to the City’s municipal code. Feedback will continue to be welcomed and considered throughout the ordinance drafting, public hearing, and adoption process.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this informational item.

OPTIONS:

The City Council has the following options to consider on this matter:

1. Accept informational report.
2. Direct staff to return with more information.
3. Do not accept informational report.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Accept informational report relating to the proposed draft Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan (the “draft Plan”) and provide direction to staff, if applicable, to make changes to the draft Plan.

ATTACHMENT:

1. Draft “Wildfire Prevention and Protection Action Plan”