

February 10, 2021

Chair Dr Stephen Mizroch and Commission members
San Rafael Fire Commission
City of San Rafael Fire Department
1375 Fifth Ave
San Rafael, CA

RE: Fire Commission Meeting February 10, 2021, public comments for agenda item #1. Open Time for Public Expression

Via email: Lindsay.lara@cityofsanrafael.org

Chair Mizroch and Commission members:

I am attaching my letter addressed to the City Council for their meeting on February 1, 2021, regarding Fire Protection for the San Rafael hillside that includes Fremont Road and Upper Fremont Drive.

My description of the January, 2016, fire at 55 Upper Fremont, agrees with Vice Chair Larry Luckham's comments about a fire in the middle of the night where fire fighters dragged a fire hose 1,000 feet uphill because the Fire Engine could not make it up the hill. Unfortunately, the proposed parking boxes that the Council considered at their meeting will have no effect on Fire access for Fremont Road and Upper Fremont Drive because there is NO public parking on either street; these streets are only around 12' wide (in some places, even less). However, It is possible that cars parked on private property can encroach onto the street.

One issue raised in my letter to the City Council was the immediate fire hazard that the property at 55 Upper Fremont presents with the current absentee owner having clear cut areas of the property leaving downed trees, branches, and brush, providing massive fire fuel on a hillside with limited access and where the owner apparently has not yet taken action to remove this hazard.

This hazard was reported to the Fire Department in September 2020 and my requests for a current status update and plans for removal have been left unanswered. As we know, what we have historically defined as our fire season can no longer be relied upon and the fire at 55 Upper Fremont occurred in January on a cold, rainy night, not on a hot, windy summer day. As we also know, a fire threat in any neighborhood, on any street, is a threat to the whole City.

So, I am asking you, as our Fire Commission, to ***address this Fire Hazard and make it your highest priority and communicate with residents the current status and plans to remove this hazard.*** I understand the City's desire to "work with" residents to obtain voluntary compliance but it is also important to have a plan for those property owners who delay and defer taking action to address a hazardous situation.

In addition, I would like the Commissioners to comment on my two policy proposals for ***Emergency Response Time*** and ***Fire Apparatus Access*** described in my letter to the City Council. I think Vice Chair Luckahm would agree that a Fire Truck turnaround is sorely needed on Upper Fremont. The Y-

intersection immediately above the recent project approved at 38 Upper Fremont is the most logical place for a turnaround. Public Works has required a delivery vehicle turnaround at this intersection but that solution is insufficient. A Fire Truck turnaround would accommodate Fire suppression equipment as well as delivery vehicles. The owner of the private road at this Y-intersection, said in an email: "I absolutely agree that a fire truck turnaround is imperative. We've had several fires up here and it was incredibly difficult for the firemen". ***How can we move this forward to require a Fire Truck turn around at this Y-intersection on Upper Fremont?***

Thank you for your consideration, discussion, and follow-up on issues I have raised.

Sincerely,

Victoria DeWitt
Fremont Road resident

att: 2-page letter to City Council dated January 31, 2021

January 31, 2021

Honorable Mayor Kate Colin and City Council members
City of San Rafael
1400 Fifth Ave
San Rafael, CA 94901

RE: Agenda Item No: 7.a, for February 1, 2021 meeting; regarding Vegetation Management Standards

Honorable Mayor Colin and City Council members:

I support everything the City can do to reduce wildfire risks and improve fire and emergency access and response times. As the City sees more in-fill development occurring in existing neighborhoods, I would like the City to adopt policies that require the same standards for all neighborhoods which *must* be met before any further development is approved. In particular, I recommend the City Council adopt the following policies:

1. Emergency response time. *Require emergency, fire and EMS services to meet NFPA Standard 1710 response time criteria for all new and existing development.*

2. Fire Apparatus Access. *Require CFC turning radius provisions to accommodate the turning around of fire apparatus, as required by CFC Appendix D, for all new and existing development.*

On January 4, 2016, around midnite, on a dark and rainy night, the Fire Department responded to a house fire at 55 Upper Fremont. The Fire truck had difficulty making it up the steep hill, so they parked at Marquard and Fremont and hand carried equipment about 800' uphill. According to the Incident Report (No. 2016-000110), it says that only M51 and B52 "will be able to access via Fremont/Upper Fremont" and at 1:42 am, it says "E54 and B52 are stuck unable to get out at this time." There is no Fire Truck turnaround on Upper Fremont, as required by CFC, Appendix D.

On September 15, 2020, the Planning Commission approved an application for a new home at 38 Upper Fremont. I was disappointed that the City didn't require a Fire Truck turnaround at the Y-intersection of Upper Fremont and a private access road that borders the development site. The City Attorney evidently advised against it (even though a Fire Truck turn-around is being required for a development at Ross/Clayton St in Gerstle Park). Public Works instead required a delivery truck turnaround; FedEx frequently refuses to deliver packages on Upper Fremont because of the inability to turn their trucks around.

The Fire Marshall provided the following comment re 38 Upper Fremont:

"The Fire Department is unable to provide emergency fire or EMS services that meets NFPA Standard 1710 response time criteria because the existing public roadway does not accommodate fire apparatus vehicles and does not meet CFC provisions for Fire Apparatus Access Roads. San Rafael Fire vehicles are unable to maneuver to this property due to unusual topographical

conditions, substandard roadway width, and hairpin type curves that do not meet CFC turning radius provisions. Additionally, there is no existing provision on Upper Fremont Drive to accommodate the turning around of fire apparatus as required by CFC Appendix D."

As City Council members, you are responsible for making safety decisions that protect the residents of San Rafael. These policies need to be adopted at the Council level in order for the application to be required by all City departments and eliminate disparate treatment among various neighborhoods. We now know that a fire started in any neighborhood in the City can quickly become a threat to the entire City, as this report states, "a wildfire in any area of the City could prove catastrophic".

Currently, the property at 55 Fremont has an accumulation of downed trees with dried leaves and brush and we notified the Fire Department in September, 2020. With compromised access on this hill, the removal of this "fire fuel" is critical. We have not received any indication of when this will be accomplished and are not aware of any action taken by the property owner.

Perhaps, there needs to be a rating system where critical areas are given a higher priority for compliance with vegetation removal or better compliance measures should be adopted. The previous fire occurred in January and we will soon be entering the dry summer months so clean-up of this property is top priority! In addition, there is a lot of scotch broom growing along the roadside. Note that Upper Fremont Drive, past #31, is a dirt road and is a City maintained Street, per my understanding. See attached photos of Scotch Broom and dry leaves and brush at this site.

In addition, I would also like to suggest that the Fire Department, while making assessments throughout the City regarding vegetation management, that they also inspect street signage and address numbers and work with property owners and the Public Works department to insure that addresses are clearly marked and street signage is replaced or added where necessary to assist Fire and emergency personnel to quickly locate the destination property. I understand that Firefighters had difficulty locating 55 Upper Fremont the night of the fire.

Thank you for addressing these important safety concerns.

Sincerely,

Victoria DeWitt
Fremont Road resident

att: 2 Photos of dried vegetation at 55 Upper Fremont
Photo of Scotch Broom along Upper Fremont Drive (the dirt road portion)
Photo of Y-intersection where Fire Truck turnaround was suggested

cc: Fire Chief Darin White, Darin.White@cityofsanrafael.org
Quinn Gardner, Emergency Manager, Quinn.Gardner@cityofsanrafael.org







