



Berkeley City Council, District 5
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CONSENT CALENDAR

January 30, 2018

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmembers Sophie Hahn, Susan Wengraf, and Kate Harrison
Subject: Immediate Measures to Address Fire Safety and Prevention

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager to study and evaluate, in consultation with relevant Commissions, the following fire safety and prevention measures, on a priority basis. After study and evaluation, implement or, where additional resources may be required, recommend implementation and sources of funding.

1. Complete the Berkeley Fire Department's comprehensive Evacuation Plan and publicize evacuation routes and protocols on a priority basis.
2. Increase outreach efforts to sign up residents for the Alameda County Emergency Alert program.
3. Review and update the City's existing Fire Safety ordinances, including BMC 12.50 Fire Inspection Program
4. Consider implementation of a siren warning system, similar to Oakland's Emergency Siren system¹.
5. Review and, as necessary, strengthen coordination and communication with Oakland, East Bay Regional Parks (EBRP), Alameda County, Contra Costa and other neighboring Fire Department and emergency response service providers.
6. Expand programs and practices to reduce fire hazards and fuel loads and ensure clearance for utility lines on both public and private property including, but not limited to:

Public Property:

- a. Update standards for vegetation and tree management on City of Berkeley property, including consideration of aging trees, bark beetle infestations, sudden oak death, patterns of extended drought followed by heavy rains, and other conditions affecting trees and vegetation

¹ <https://beta.oaklandca.gov/services/fire-emergency-preparedness>

- b. Create and execute a City-wide action and funding plan for rapid implementation of updated vegetation and tree management standards, starting with Berkeley's highest-risk areas, including consideration of potential impacts to wildlife habitat and vegetation and tree replacement, to ensure a robust tree canopy
- c. Design and propose for consideration a tailored red-curb program to address specific identified conditions on streets that are impassable by Emergency Vehicles or present unusual ingress or egress challenges;
- d. Work with EBRP to ensure proper vegetation management in Tilden and other Regional Parks;
- e. Consider and recommend and/or implement protocols for the City of Berkeley to monitor and advocate for proper inspection and maintenance of all PG&E electrical facilities and power lines, including management of potentially hazardous tree conditions.

Private Property:

- f. Taking into account the same considerations as a, b, and c above, establish and disseminate updated requirements for vegetation and tree management on private property, concentrating initial outreach in high-risk zones;
- g. Consider and propose new or enhanced mechanisms and funding sources for inspections and enforcement of vegetation and tree management protocols, and review and possible expansion of the Fire Fuel Chipper and Debris Bin Program²;
- h. Consider and recommend improvements to community and volunteer participation in fire and disaster safety initiatives.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Staff time to create recommendations/plans and, depending on other sources of funds which may already be available through the County, State or other public agencies, additional funding for implementation of new or enhanced policies and programs, as recommended by staff.

BACKGROUND

Berkeley faces a number of well-known fire hazards and vulnerabilities. The Disaster Preparedness and Safety Element of the City's General Plan states:

"Susceptibility to fire is heightened due to Berkeley's dense development pattern, characterized by older structures including high rise buildings, multi-storied residential units, and a variety of warehouse, manufacturing, and commercial properties. Berkeley also faces a significant wildland fire danger along its hillsides where the wildland and residential areas interface"

The General Plan further ensures that the City's disaster preparedness efforts focus on a number of objectives, including improving and developing mitigation programs, and reducing the potential loss of life, injury and economic damage resulting from urban wildfire. In the aftermath of the 1991 Fire, the City established the Hill Hazardous Fire Area District and implemented a number of programs in that area to improve fire prevention in Berkeley. Some steps taken were

² https://www.cityofberkeley.info/fire_fuel_program/

expanded inspection programs, new vegetation management programs, and comprehensive community education efforts for people living in particularly high risk areas.

The North Bay Fire Siege, Thomas, Creek, and other Southern California fires, and 20-acre fire near Tilden Park in 2017 have brought renewed focus on ways to prevent wildfires, minimize damage of wildfires that do occur, and ensure expedient evacuation. It would be prudent for the City to again re-evaluate its current fire prevention and protection programs. A variety of viable policies exist, many of which the Fire Department is already exploring. This item is intended to support the work of the Fire Department, and to expand the fire prevention and protection measures already in place, while considering new measures in light of recent wildfires across California.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This recommendation supports Berkeley's environmental sustainability goals.

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