



Susan Wengraf
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
SEPTEMBER 28, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Susan Wengraf (Author), Councilmember Kate Harrison (Co-Sponsor), Councilmember Sophie Hahn (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Adopt a Resolution Renewing and Re-Affirming Wildfire Prevention and Safety as a Top Priority in the City of Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

Request that the Berkeley City Council adopt a resolution re-affirming that wildfire prevention and safety is a top priority in the City of Berkeley.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

BACKGROUND

The Berkeley City Council adopted Resolution No. 69,147-N.S. Declaring Wildfire Prevention And Safety As A Top Priority In The City of Berkeley on October 15, 2019. Since then, extreme weather events have increased in California. Wildfires are starting earlier and ending later each year. Climate change is considered a key driver of this trend. Warmer spring and summer temperatures, reduced snowpack, and earlier spring snowmelt create longer and more intense seasons that increase moisture stress on vegetation and make forests more susceptible to severe wildfire. The length of fire season is estimated to have increased by at least 75 days across the Sierras and seems to correspond with an increase in the extent of forest fires across the state.

Wildfires in 2021 have already exceeded the [2020 season](#), which itself was the largest season in the state's recorded history. As of July 11, more than three times as many acres have burned compared to the previous year through that date, with drought, [extreme heat](#), and reduced snowpack contributing to the severity of the fires. As of August 18, 2021, the state of California was facing unprecedented fire conditions as multiple fires including the [Dixie Fire](#), [McFarland Fire](#), [Caldor Fire](#), and multiple others rage on.

Berkeley's hills are subject to extremely high fire hazards due to proximity to park land where the fuel load is high; narrow, curvy roads, hampering access by first responders and obstructing efficient evacuation routes; steep topography and changing weather conditions. CalFire, has ranked Berkeley at the same risk level of many of the cities that have already been decimated by fire throughout the stateⁱ. Berkeley's risk to wildfire is designated as the highest in the state.ⁱⁱ

In 1923, a wildfire swept through north Berkeley, ultimately destroying approximately 600 homes, including churches, schools, libraries, and student living quarters. The fire traveled down to the intersection of Shattuck and Hearst. At that time, the population of Berkeley was 52,000, Today, the population density is 122,000.

In 1980, a fire in Berkeley's Wildcat Canyon destroyed 5 homes and then, on October 17, 1991, The Tunnel Fire consumed homes in southeast Berkeley and Oakland, claiming 25 lives and reducing approximately 3,000 structures to ashes. Had the wind direction not shifted, it is possible that many more people would have died and more of Berkeley would have been destroyed.

Berkeley's acknowledgment of the serious risk we face to the threats of wildfire is an essential component to a successful program to raise public awareness, and to educate and prepare our community. Our renewed commitment, by resolution, will allow us to move forward with projects and programs to achieve our shared goals of wildfire prevention and safety.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Wildfires negatively impact the ozone and air quality. Wildfires release large amounts of carbon dioxide, black carbon, brown carbon, and ozone precursors into the atmosphere. These emissions affect radiation, clouds, and climate on regional and even global scales. Wildfires also emit substantial amounts of volatile and semi-volatile organic materials and nitrogen oxides that form ozone and organic particulate matter.ⁱⁱⁱ

CONTACT PERSON

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Council District 6

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Attachments:

1: Resolution

2: [Berkeley Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map](#)

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

RESOLUTION REAFFIRMING WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY AS A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE CITY OF BERKELEY AND ENCOURAGING A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND ABATE FIRE RISK

WHEREAS, on October 15, 2019, The City Council adopted Resolution NO. 69,147-N.S. declaring "Wildfire Prevention and Safety a Top Priority" for the City of Berkeley; and

WHEREAS, since 2019, wildfires have continued to grow larger and increase in intensity due to drought, climate change, and unmanaged and overgrown vegetation; and

WHEREAS, the East Bay Hills experienced a wildfire in 1991 which burned over 1,600 acres and 2,900 structures, causing 25 deaths and injuring 150 people; and

WHEREAS, the entire City of Berkeley is potentially at risk of wildfire, not only in the hill neighborhoods but in the lower neighborhoods between the hills and the Bay; and

WHEREAS, unhealthy and hazardous air quality is a consequence of wildfires, seriously impacting the health of all, and of particular concern, the health of our children, seniors and other vulnerable populations throughout the city; and

WHEREAS, Cal Fire has designated a large geographical area of Berkeley to be in a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ) within the Local Responsibility Area (LRA) where the City has the financial responsibility for wildfire protection; and

WHEREAS, when a wildfire destroys neighborhoods, the economic impact is devastating and impacts the City's quality of life, infrastructure, and ability to recover financially, and would adversely impact the City's ability to collect its current level of property and sales taxes and other revenue sources that comprise the City budget; and

WHEREAS, there is a housing shortage in Berkeley and wildfires could exacerbate this situation, in addition to concerns that when wildfires hit, financially disadvantaged people are disproportionately affected.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Berkeley that it reaffirms its commitment to wildfire prevention and safety as a top priority and that discussions and efforts will continue locally and regionally on how best to prevent and abate fire hazards in the City, including but not limited to:

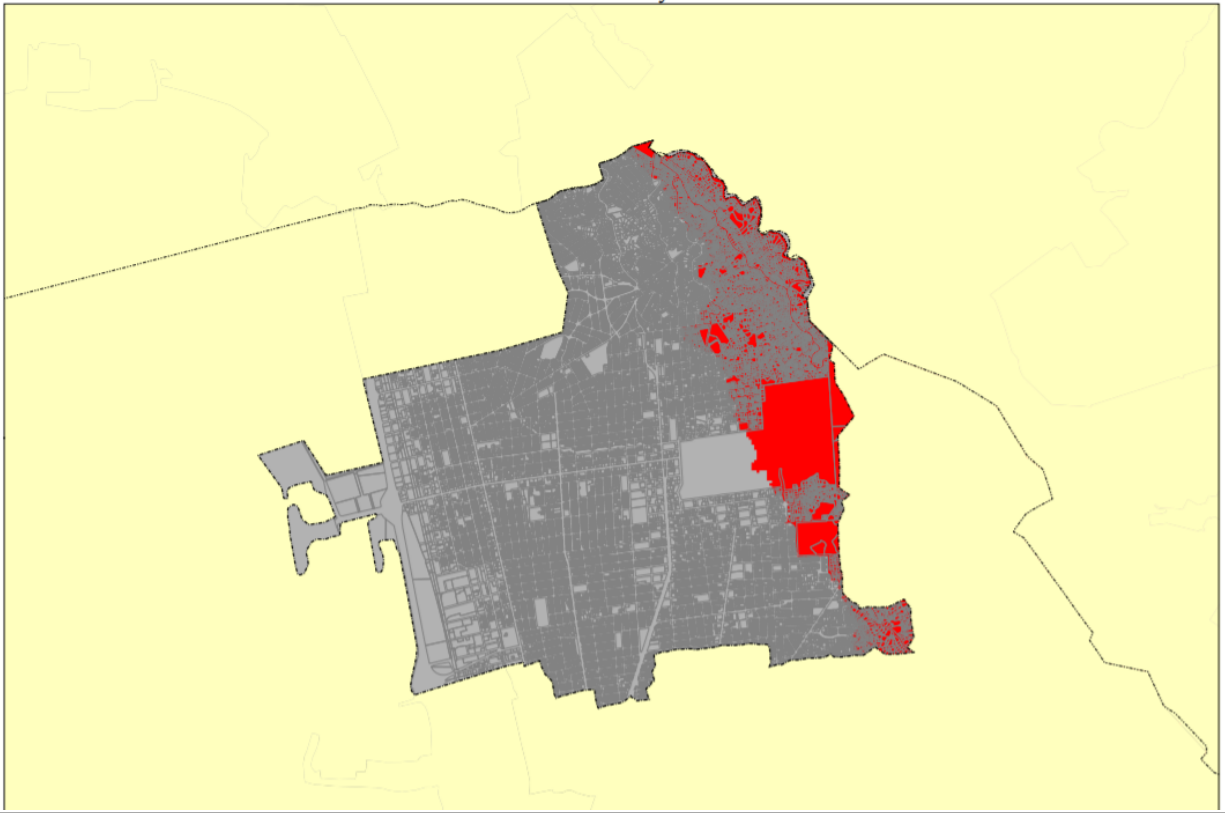
- Working collaboratively with neighboring agencies and jurisdictions on a comprehensive approach to fire prevention
- Seeking grants and other resources for wildfire education, prevention and mitigation
- Planning for and implementing policies for safe evacuation
- Implementing a Vegetation Management Plan to require the removal of flammable vegetation on private properties
- Updating building and fire codes as necessary to make structures more resistant to fire
- Reducing fuel loads in the VHFHSZ in city owned parks and other properties.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution shall become effective immediately upon passage and adoption.



Berkeley

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



ⁱ <https://www.berkeleyside.org/2019/10/17/the-berkeley-hills-are-kindling-city-takes-steps-to-tackle-wildfire-dangers-safety-issues>

ⁱⁱ <https://egis.fire.ca.gov/FHSZ/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://csl.noaa.gov/factsheets/csdWildfiresFIREX.pdf>

