



Disaster and Fire Safety Commission

ACTION CALENDAR

June 14, 2022

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
 Submitted by: José Luis Bedolla, Chairperson, Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
 Subject: Parking Enforcement of Existing Parking Code in Fire Zones 2 & 3

RECOMMENDATION

The Disaster and Fire Safety Commission (DFSC) recommends that Council direct the Berkeley Police Department to enforce existing Berkeley Municipal Code in all Fire Zones.

POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

On May 16, 2022, the Public Safety Policy Committee forwarded the item to the City Council (M/S/C Wengraf/Kesarwani) with a qualified positive recommendation amending the item to a budget referral for the FY 23 & FY 24 budget process to hire an additional dedicated parking officer for fire zones 2 & 3. Vote: All Ayes.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

Fully enforcing the existing parking code may require increased staff time from the Police Department - Parking Enforcement (or, in the future, the proposed Department of Transportation, "BerkDOT"). Exact costs and staff time are unknown.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

As another fire season rages, we are again seeing record-setting, deadly wildfires in California. The largest current fire is the Caldor Fire, which has burned 219,267 acres¹ and even threatened Berkeley Echo Lake. There is a continued concern about the level of preparedness for egress from Berkeley's Fire Zones 2 and 3.

The Berkeley Fire Department continues to educate the public on the importance of making and practicing an evacuation plan; for many residents of Fire Zones 2 and 3, a safe evacuation will depend on the ability to drive a vehicle away from the threat before being overtaken by a moving fire.

Many streets in these neighborhoods are narrow and winding, which limits both access – the ability for emergency vehicles to go into these areas, and egress – the ability for residents to escape a fire (see, Exhibit 1) These limitations are exacerbated by

¹ <https://www.fireweatheravalanche.org/fire/state/california>

constant and flagrant violations of existing parking restrictions by Berkeley residents, visitors, and delivery vehicles, which cause additional pinch points and compress the available space for vehicles to drive on the roads. Additionally, illegally parked vehicles block sidewalks, creating a hazard for pedestrians and persons using wheelchairs. There seems to be a culture of illegal parking that continues due to a lack of consequence (see, Exhibit 2)

The continual violations of existing parking restrictions create a life-safety hazard in the hills in all emergency situations, and especially in a wildfire scenario, when rapid evacuation of residents will be necessary.

The City is planning to impose further parking restrictions under its “Safe Passages” program as needed to ensure sufficient access and egress during a wildfire on these narrow streets. If existing parking restrictions are not enforced, there is little reason to expect additional restrictions to have any positive impact on the situation.

Exhibit 1: Street widths of >10 and <26 feet

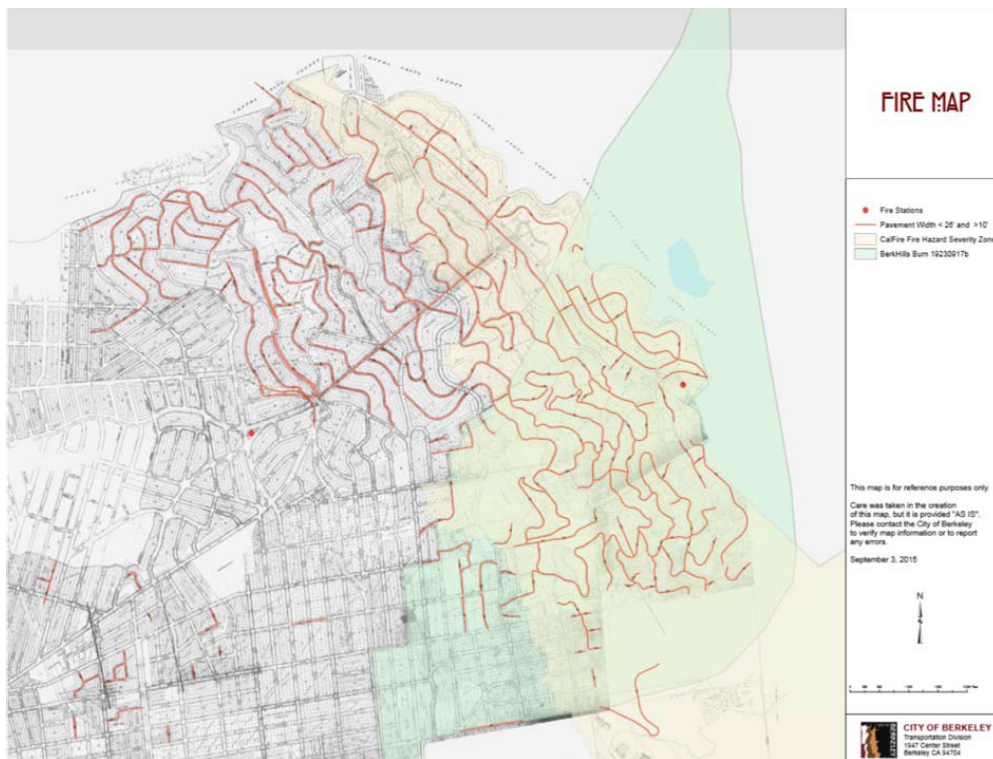


Exhibit 2, (select pictures taken on 7/28/2021 ~12:30 PM)



Los Angeles St

Quail St

Keefer St

Thousand Oaks St

BACKGROUND

The City of Berkeley has been repeatedly notified of access and egress concerns due to a lack of parking restrictions and a lack of parking enforcement in the Hills Fire Zones, including but not limited to two prior recommendations by the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission:

In February 2016, Council approved a January 12, 2016 recommendation from DFSC requesting that it:

“refer to staff the Design of a parking restriction program in the Hills Fire Zone to ensure access for emergency vehicles and to allow for safe evacuations in an emergency and to hold public meetings to get community input in the design of such a program

That recommendation stated:

“Today we are 24 years after the devastating Oakland Hills Fire and 50 years after concern was first expressed for the safety of residents given the conditions that will save lives in the Berkeley Hills”

In December 2019, the DFSC submitted a recommendation to Council, “Recommendation to Immediately Fund and Implement the Safe Passages Program and Additional Actions to Ensure Emergency Equipment Access to All Parts of the City” which included a number of recommended actions to prioritize parking restrictions in Berkeley’s Fire Zones as part of a Safe Passages program.

Parking issues have been discussed in other recommendations over many years, including recommendations to implement new parking restrictions in Fire Zones 2 and 3 to ensure safe access and egress for emergency vehicles.

Safe Passages - Project in Progress:

At this time, the Berkeley Fire Department has allocated staff time and funding towards Safe Passages work in the next few years. In the Safe Passages project, staff will evaluate and document the problem of emergency access and egress in the City's Fire Zones and lead an interdepartmental program in addressing this problem through parking restrictions, increased enforcement, signage, and public education. The Safe Passages project is likely to result in an expansion of "No Parking" areas on dangerously narrow and/or winding streets in the Hills Fire Zones.

As Safe Passages is a multi-year project that is still just getting off the ground, the DFSC is now providing this urgent recommendation to enforce existing parking restrictions in the meantime.

This recommendation does not preclude or replace the need for new parking restrictions and other improvements that are expected to be an outcome of the Safe Passages project.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

There are no identified environmental effects or opportunities associated with the action requested in this report.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

As seen in the years of background and the multiple times that parking restrictions have been recommended by the DFSC and by Council, we believe there is a consensus that narrow streets that impede emergency vehicle access are a threat to life safety in Berkeley.

A consistent lack of enforcement sends the message that parking restrictions in the Hills are not important, but in truth these restrictions are crucial for life-safety in these neighborhoods. Illegally parked vehicles exacerbate already insufficient space on many narrow streets, potentially limiting access for emergency vehicles as well as hindering a wildfire evacuation.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

Alternatives could be considered as part of the City's Safe Passages program and could include changing streets to one way only rather than two way, adding additional red curbing, especially on the smallest width streets in Zones 2 and 3, and adding to the Fire District Parking Restrictions. Each of these has the possibility of cost and additional community involvement and consultation before implementation. We recommend that enforcement of existing laws be increased while simultaneously planning and developing these other improvements.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager refers this recommendation to the budget process.

Staff concurs that the narrow and winding streets in the Berkeley Hills, makes traveling under normal conditions challenging. Illegal parking can exacerbate ingress and egress of vehicles during an emergency event.

Currently, Parking Enforcement Officers (PEOs) are deployed across the City using a “beat” structure with their primary focus being to provide enforcement to metered and residential parking permit (RPP) areas. They respond to other locations within their beat by complaint only. Due to staffing challenges, PEOs are frequently tasked with providing coverage to larger geographical areas. At this time, current resources and staffing models do not allow the robust analysis, project management, and enforcement that is being recommended.

Many of these issues are being discussed within the Fire Department’s Safe Passage Program. The scope of this recommendation will take time, staffing, and the funding of new positions to fully address all aspects of the Safe Passage Program. Until a comprehensive program can be developed, the Police Department will offer voluntary overtime to offer extra patrols to provide enforcement of restricted parking zones throughout the City during Red Flag events.

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