

Disaster & Fire Safety Commission
Regular Meeting
Wednesday January 26, 2022

Present: Jose Luis Bedolla, Shirley Dean, Weldon Bradstreet, Nancy Rader, Toni Stein, Paul Degenkolb

Absent: Kim-Mai Cutler (Excused)

Staff: Khin Chin, Keith May, Abraham Roman, David Sprague, Steve Riggs

Public: Attendees 13: Chris Cullander, Pam Gleason, Henry DeNero, Marcus von Engel, Holly Singh, Benay Dara-Abrams, Kathleen E. Kelly, Alec Dara-Abrams, kellyhammargren iPad, Nancy Gillette, normalydon, Richard Thomason, 15108414896

Preliminary Matters

Call to Order

J. Bedolla called meeting to order at 7:00pm

Approval of the Agenda

Approved by Acclamation

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

Kelly Hammargren: I attended the Council Meeting January, 25, 2022 and I did stay until 12:50 am. I was concerned that Oakland has stricter rules on density than proposed for Berkeley. And, Oakland has better evacuation routes. I was concerned by the map from Bryce Nesbitt on the earthquake zone and that construction in an earthquake zone requires assessment by geologist. In all the Zoning Adjustment Board meetings and Design Review Committee meetings I have never heard mention of this requirement. Councilmember Robinson responded to my statement of District 7 being in the high fire zone, that the frat houses are in the high fire zone. I said today to a friend, "what could possibly go wrong with frat houses in a high fire zone." We need to be doing more with education for students regarding the high fire zones.

Marcus von Engel: My name is Marcus von Engel. As a Berkeley resident I want to thank the commission members for their critical role. When I moved to Berkeley, it was stunningly clear to me that I needed to get involved to mitigate the explosive fire danger we have. This has included supporting the documentation of the dangers in our city,

spending weekends working in the hills to remove eucalyptus fuel as a vice president in our Hillside Fire Safety Group, by coordinating nearly 200 students, and thousands of dollars in donated funds by our residents, as well as personal cash donations.

Growing up on a ranch in Monterey County, as well as living in Southern California, I came to understand the importance of being proactive. We only need to consider recent fires in cities similar to Berkeley to understand the danger:

- 91' Oakland Hills fire, destroyed 2800 homes, causing 25 deaths
- 93' Laguna Beach fire, 500 homes, including the home of one of my best friends
- 2017 Tubbs Fire in Santa Rosa, \$1.2B in damage, 5600 structures destroyed, over 20 people that died
- 2018 Woolsey Fire in Southern California, that destroyed 1,600 structures, and prompted the evacuation of nearly 300,000 people

All these fires have a few things in common:

- 1) Preventable loss of life
- 2) Property damage measured in the billions of dollars
- 3) Fires that spread incredibly fast because there was limited actions to mitigate the spread
- 4) And they all started as a small fire

Another catastrophic fire in Berkeley is not a question of 'if' – but rather of 'when'

We could have a situation that will be worse than Tubbs, Woolsey, Laguna Beach, and Oakland fires combined.

Please, our ask:

- First, Work with the Hillside Fire Safety Group volunteers to support our awareness and fuel reduction efforts
- Second, Implement and enforce existing mandatory fuel reduction initiatives with homeowners
- Third, invest the collected Measure FF funds to drastically reduce the fuel situation in Berkeley.

We have the opportunity through volunteer activities and wise spending of collected Measure FF funds to reduce fuel on public and private lands, and for the City of Berkeley to be seen as a leader in preventing a catastrophic fire from making national newspaper headlines. Thank you

Holly Singh: Hello, my name is Holly Singh, I am a proud 4th generation Berkeleyan and a member of the Hillside fire safety group. When my grandparents bought our home on Le Roy, next to the La Loma Steps, the original owners gave them two photos of the devastation wrought by the 1923 Fire. Looking east from the steps, one can see the outline of our garage. Looking West from the steps, the photo shows a chimney with a clawfoot tub at its base-beyond that, an incinerated wasteland.

I've often thought of the people and animals who lived in the Berkeley at that time. How fast the fire must have come and how difficult it must have been to escape, if indeed they survived. If a firestorm hit us today, as it very easily could, given the unmaintained groves of eucalyptus trees coming down the hills, we would not fare any better. Able bodied people may well get out with their lives, perhaps with the clothes on their backs, but the elderly, not so able bodied and persons with disabilities would likely perish, suffering greatly in the process. I think if the fire hit my neighborhood I would have to heft my elderly mother on my back and urge my uncle, who has autism and no sense of speed, down to the street, hoping to escape with our lives. What of our residents who have no one to help them?

I am urging you to put Measure FF funds into fire mitigation efforts. Clean up the eucalyptus groves and keep Berkeley safe. Thank you.

Alec Dara-Abrams: Hello, I'm Alec Dara-Abrams. My wife and I moved to Berkeley eight years ago - near Cedar and Euclid. As a Berkeley voter back in November of 2020, when we looked over the ballot summary of Measure FF, the City Attorney's impartial analysis, as well as the full text of the Measure, we saw nothing about restrictions to fund vegetation management or hazard reduction only on particular types of property in Berkeley.

The full text of the Ordinance referring to wildfires says:

The proceeds of the tax imposed by this Chapter shall be placed in a special fund to be used only for the purpose of enhancing public safety by funding the following:

...

3. Wildfire prevention and preparedness activities including, but not limited to, vegetation management, hazard mitigation, public education, evacuation planning, and an emergency alert system.

There is no distinction in the Measure between public and private lands. So, when we voted for Measure FF as Berkeley taxpayers who would gladly be providing the money, we had no idea that Measure FF funds would be prohibited from being used to mitigate public wildfire hazards on private land.

I can't see why Berkeley public safety hazards can't be reduced using FF funds wherever the hazards are located.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak..

Henry DeNero: As President of the Hillside Association of Berkeley and the Hillside Fire Safety Group representing over 2,500 residents, I again urge you to use Measure FF to immediately clean up the grounds under the Eucalyptus groves in North Berkeley, including those on private land. There is nothing in Measure FF that prohibits this.

The fuel under these groves, combined with the fact that a fire on the ground can climb the trees into the canopy, makes this condition a threat to the entire City

It was former Fire Chief Brannigan who said that a fire coming over the ridge could burn all the way to the Bay

We were stunned by high winds this past weekend and a fire in Big Sur that the authorities called a "Surreal event"

The Eucalyptus groves represent far and away the most significant fire risk because of their high, flammable canopies, and the fact that a fire on the ground can ignite the canopies. This is well documented by scientists, foresters, and experience

The 1991 Tunnel Fire destroyed 900 homes in the first hour. No reasonable person can assert that the Eucalyptus tree is not a highly flammable and dangerous species

That is why the City should immediately clean up under the groves, including removing loose bark, low branches, saplings and subordinate trees

There are fewer than 1,000 Eucalyptus trees in North Berkeley in 13 groves. Half are on UC Berkeley and Berkeley Labs grounds, AND THEY ARE IN THE PROCESS OR HAVE COMMITTED TO CLEAN THEM UP BEFORE THIS YEAR'S FIRE SEASON

It is time for the City to clean up the other half with equal urgency

The groves in the City could be cleaned up for a few hundred thousand dollars by landscape contractors. Yet the City sits on millions of Measure FF dollars with no effective plan to reduce fire risk

Cleaning up under all these trees, THIS WINTER, BEFORE THIS YEAR’S fire season, will eliminate one of the two ways by which a catastrophic firestorm can kill dozens and destroy a large part of the city. Thank you.

Nancy Rader provided a summary of the City Council vote to limit ADUs in the fire zones, which included a statement on the need to also address other wildfire-related hazards in the fire zones such as vegetation removal and parking restrictions.

Shirley Dean said that it sounds like the State has more authority than previously thought on this topic of housing and ADUs in the hazard zones.

1. Fire Department Staff Report

DFSC Staff Report

January 26th, 2022

1. Measure FF Monthly Report

a. Budget Overview –

i. Program Review

1. Standards of Coverage Analysis – No new updates.

2. Project Management and Subject Matter Expert (SME) – No new updates.

3. Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) – We are working through the contract with Wildland Resource Management. It is near completion. The CWPP will include both private and public land. It will also provide a prioritized list of Projects on both private and public land.

This is a key geospatial analysis of the wildland risk that our community faces. It will result in a comprehensive guide that will drive all our actions surrounding WUI fire prevention in our community.

- 4. **Wildfire Prevention / Mitigation – Vegetation Management Inspections** – No new updates.
- 5. **Retired Annuitants** – We onboarding five new inspectors and hope to have them in the field in February.
- 6. **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and Paramedic Recruitment** – No new updates.
- 7. **Dispatch Re-Design** – We had the kick-off meeting with Federal Engineering, the consultant who will conduct this work. They have begun the process of gathering data to perform their analysis.

8. Recruitments:

- a. Shift Fire Inspector Recruitment – Interviews for Shift Inspectors will begin the week of January 24th. These are filled by existing fire department personnel and are used to assist with fire investigations and other inspection related activities in the built environment.
- b. Sworn Fire Inspector Recruitment – Recruitment is on-going. We will also begin interviewing the first batch of 14 applicants, the week of January 24th.

9. Division of Training Property – No new updates.

ii. Implementation & Metrics

- 1. **Outdoor Warning System** – We are working through the permitting process with the City of Berkeley and the vendor. Working on BUSD MOU.

iii. RFP Updates

b. Program Specific Reports

i. Defensible Space Inspection Updates

Vegetation Management Inspections – Annuitants
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As of:		Vegetation Management Inspections						
1/21/2022								
		AI Inspections						
		Inspected	No Violation Found	Violations Found	Re-Inspection Required	Re-Inspection Completed	Re-Inspection No Violation Found	Re-Inspection w/Violations Found
	Frankel	427	380	47	47	2	2	
	Higgins	383	326	57	57	2	2	
	Lee	116	81	35	35	137	119	18
	McCracken	102	70	32	32	93	65	28
	Pinto	15	7	8	8	91	77	14
	Ward	326	216	110	110	129	63	66
	Williams	795	721	74	74	4	4	
	Totals	2164	1801	363	363	458	332	126

ii. Other

2. Measure GG Monthly Report

a. Emergency Services Coordinator Position

- i. Job Announcement will post to the City’s Website on January 31st.

b. Budget Overview

- i. RFP Updates – In the early stages of developing an RFP for an Evacuation Time Estimate Study for the City of Berkeley.

3. Department Activities

- a. Grants – The Cal OES Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant is still being worked through. The State did push out the deadline for submission of the Notice of Intent (NOI) to February 15th.
- b. In the early morning hours of January 15th, OES Staff received a Tsunami Advisory from the California Tsunami Program that a Tsunami Advisory (tsunami wave heights of 0.3-1.0 meter) was issued for the entire California Coastal Area.

City staff moved quickly to make sure we alerted those in the marina as quickly as possible. We sent out police officers, firefighters, Parks, Recreation and Waterfront staff, parking enforcement officers, and others to notify those living in boats to move to higher ground. We used all tools to notify people and keep them out of the marina. We used AC Alert to send voice calls, text messages and emails specifically to Marina residents and businesses. We also sent a citywide Nixle to inform the community of the situation. In addition, City staff made personal calls to Marina berthers to ensure they had evacuated. In the event that there was any confusion among affected people in the Marina, civilian and sworn staff were present in the Marina to explain the situation, and Marina staff continued to answer the Waterfront Office phone number throughout the event. This layered, very personal outreach reflected the very high level of concern to help those who might be affected and address any questions that might arise.

The Tsunami Advisory affecting the Berkeley Marina was canceled at 7:52pm. There were no reported injuries or damage during the Advisory.

4. Call Volume Report

Fire Department Report by California Incident Type		
November 29, 2021 – January 18, 2022		
Fires – including Encampment Fires (structures, mobile properties, vegetation, rubbish, equipment, cooking, chimney,	55	
Encampment Fires (structures, warming/cooking, debris)	20	
Explosion - no fire (overpressure ruptures, explosions)	2	
Rescue & EMS (medical assist, vehicle accident)	1,353	
Hazardous Condition - no fire (combustible spills/leaks, chemical release, radioactive condition, electrical wiring problem, biological hazard, potential accident w/ building/aircraft/vehicles)	99	
Service Calls (person in distress, water issue, smoke/odor problem, animal issue, public assist, cover assignment/standby)	174	
Good Intent (canceled en-route, wrong location, nothing found, steam mistaken for smoke)	143	
False Alarm Calls (malicious, malfunction, unintentional, biohazard scare)	271	

Severe WX (lightening, wind storms)	2	
Special Incidents (citizen complaints)	2	
TOTAL	1,751	

Unit Utilization	Apparatus Count	4,477
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Consent Items

2. Approval of Draft Minutes of Meeting of December 1, 2021*

Motion to approve the minutes as revised: Dean

Second: Stein

Vote: 5 Ayes: Bedolla, Degenkolb, Dean, Bradstreet, Stein; 0 Noes; 1 Absent: Cutler.; 1

Abstain: Rader

Action Items

Discussion Items

3. Definition of Defensible Space (Dean)
4. Policy on Eucalyptus trees removal and suppression (Dean)
5. Criteria for Use of a Portion of Measure FF funds for Vegetation Clearance on Private Land (Rader)*
 - W. Bradstreet left the meeting at 835pm
 - W. Bradstreet returned to the meeting at 839pm
6. Providing More Budget Details for Measure GG vs General Fund Allocation for Overtime (Bedolla)
7. Timeline for Input for the City’s Budget Cycle (Dean)
8. Process for Annual Election of Chair and Vice Chair (Bedolla)
9. Commission Workplan (Bedolla)
10. Future Agenda Items and Next Steps

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn: Rader

Second: Bradstreet

Vote: 6 Ayes: Bedolla, Degenkolb, Dean, Bradstreet, Stein, Rader; 0 Noes; 1 Absent:
Cutler; 0 Abstain:

Adjourned at 8:56p