



Susan Wengraf
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
September 14, 2021

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Wengraf, Mayor Arreguín, Councilmember Droste,
Councilmember Taplin

Subject: Resolution Expressing Conceptual Support for an East Bay Wildfire Prevention
and Vegetation Management Joint Powers Agency

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution in favor of Conceptual Support for an East Bay Wildfire Prevention
and Vegetation Management Joint Powers Agency.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

BACKGROUND

This item is in support of the concept of using the Joint Powers Authority structure and process to address the wildfire threat posed by vegetation management in the hills of Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Today, local government agencies are responsible for preventing and fighting wildfires in urbanized areas. Counties are responsible for unincorporated areas.

However, wildfires cross jurisdictional boundaries involving multiple cities and counties. Wildfires move at hurricane speeds and force, with winds from 60 to 100 mph, forceful enough to jump huge freeways. It took only one hour for the Berkeley Oakland Tunnel Fire to move from the Berkeley Hills across the Highway 24 freeway to destroy homes in the Upper Rockridge area of Oakland. To the north, it took only four hours for the Tubbs Fire to move from the Napa Valley to Santa Rosa. To the south, the Thomas Fire moved from Ventura to Santa Barbara, jumping a 15-lane freeway. Once started, the intensity of heat and speed makes extinguishing wildfires very challenging, leaving evacuation as the only tool to protect life safety. Evacuation times are often measured in minutes, or less. Since they are impossible to stop once they get going, preventing wildfires becomes a priority.

In Alameda County alone, there are 14 separate cities. If vegetation in our area is to be well managed to reduce the threat of wildfire, the necessary expertise, workforce and financial resources must be assembled over a broad enough area to be effective. Local

agencies with all their present responsibilities unfortunately lack sufficient breadth and resources to adequately address the enormity of the problem. Coordinating vegetation management among all the East Bay local public agencies is an impossible challenge without a structure and mechanism to lead that effort. Just as we have special districts in the Bay Area to manage air quality, water quality, lead abatement and regional planning and transportation, it is time to think about creating a wildfire prevention district to manage vegetation and dramatically reduce the fuel that causes the spread of wildfires in our neighborhoods in the wildland urban interface. Local government agencies in Alameda and Contra Costa counties should begin the process of discussing the creation of a joint powers authority to accomplish this goal.

Discussions around creating an East Bay Wildfire Prevention and Vegetation Management Joint Powers Agency might include:

- (1) Developing a plan to reduce the most flammable wildlands vegetation in the East Bay Hills to the maximum extent feasible and to replace it with wildfire resistant vegetation where appropriate, to protect wildlife habitat and native plants.
- (2) A "Defensible Space" program to aid owners of private property with information resources to manage vegetation on their properties.
- (3) A "Home Hardening" program to advise homeowners, schools and commercial property owners on how their structures can be protected from wildfires.
- 5) The JPA raising funds by applying for state and federal grants, preparing tax measures for voter approval and other means permitted by law.
- 6) Implementing the plan by retaining sufficient staff and equipment and/or by contracting with others to remove the most flammable vegetation in wildland areas and to implement the public information programs for defensible space and home hardening.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

California's 2020 wildfires caused greenhouse gas emissions similar to 24 million passenger vehicles driven for one year, according to the EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator. That's nearly three times the emissions from California's 2018 wildfires. Emissions from wildfire undermine California's work towards greenhouse gas reduction, a situation worsening as climate change accelerates.¹

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1: Resolution

¹ <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/californias-2020-wildfire-emissions-akin-to-24-million-cars>

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

**EXPRESSING CONCEPTUAL SUPPORT FOR THE FORMATION OF AN EAST BAY
WILDFIRE PREVENTION AND VEGETATION MANAGEMENT JOINT POWERS
AGENCY**

WHEREAS, historic wildfires throughout California and the Western United States in recent years demonstrate that the impacts of global climate change will continue to have potentially devastating effects throughout the region; including loss of life, loss of property, economic impacts, infrastructure damage, and public health hazards associated with air quality, among others; and

WHEREAS, reactive approaches to fire management and containment are deployed during times of crisis and overextend local and state resources; and

WHEREAS, the spread of wildfire does not respect political or jurisdictional boundaries; burn areas and air quality impacts from smoke extend throughout the region; and

WHEREAS, a large portion of the East Bay region, including the East Bay Hills from Hercules to Fremont are a designated high-risk fire hazard zone by the State Agency CALFIRE; and

WHEREAS, a more coordinated approach and investment in wildfire prevention and vegetation management may help to mitigate the number and severity of wildfire events; and

WHEREAS, regional coordination may prove both more effective and more efficient in developing and implementing best practices, as well as sharing expertise and other resources; and

WHEREAS, the East Bay contains more than 33 municipalities, numerous unincorporated communities, and fire and special districts, that may all benefit from a coordinated fire management approach; and

WHEREAS, a regional initiative has been launched to form a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) bringing together cities, counties, and jurisdictions from throughout the East Bay to pursue coordinated planning and funding for vegetation management and fire prevention; and

WHEREAS, participating in planning and development of a JPA will be beneficial for the City of Berkeley to access and leverage state and federal resources for vegetation management and pursue coordinated projects to reduce fire risk in the East Bay Hills.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Berkeley agrees to be involved and participate in presentations, meetings, and negotiations to consider, in concept, the formation of a regional Vegetation Management Joint Powers Agency to address and improve fire safety in the East Bay.

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