



Disaster and Fire Safety Commission

INFORMATION CALENDAR

July 9, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
Submitted by: Gradiva Couzin, Chairperson, Disaster and Fire Safety Commission
Subject: 2019 Disaster and Fire Safety Commission Work Plan

INTRODUCTION

As directed by the City Council, the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission (DFSC) hereby submits its workplan for Fiscal Year 2020.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

On May 22, 2019, the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission passed a motion to submit the attached annual commission work plan. Motion: S. Dean Second: Flasher Vote: 8 Ayes: Degenkolb, Flasher, Simmons, Couzin, Grimes, Dean, Stein, Bailey; 0 Noes; 0 Absent; 0 Abstain

The proposed workplan focuses on five topics of concern: 1) Increasing fire safety and resilience in the wildland urban interface 2) Undergrounding of utilities 3) Improving community resilience and community preparedness; 4) Monitoring Measure GG Fund expenditures; and 5) Assisting other city entities with incorporating a disaster and fire safety perspective

BACKGROUND

On July 19, 2016, the City Council approved a consent item that directs Berkeley Commissions, with the exception of the Board of Library Trustees, the Zoning Adjustments Board, and the Design Review Committee, to submit a workplan to the City Council at the beginning of each fiscal year.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Not applicable.

POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Not applicable.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE ACTION

Not applicable.

CONTACT PERSON

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Attachments:

1: 2019 Disaster and Fire Safety Commission Work Plan

Berkeley Disaster and Fire Safety Commission WORK PLAN – 2019

Mission Statement

The Disaster and Fire Safety Commission serves as the public oversight group for Berkeley's Measure GG, charged with reviewing the budget on a regular basis to ensure that the funds are spent in accordance with the intent of the voter approved measure, recommending the appropriate annual increase to the tax rate, and recommending new programs and positions requiring Measure GG funding.

The Commission also focuses on ways to increase community safety and resilience, working on education, community disaster preparedness, and other strategies as appropriate, and making recommendations to the City Council for adoption and implementation.

Lastly, The Commission reviews and makes recommendations on items referred by the City Council or other Commissions.

Summary of 2019 Work Plan Activities

	Topic	Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
1	Fire safety & community resilience in the face of a wildland-urban interface fire	Staff time, venue	Research, staff reports and information gathering	Recommendations on alerting, parking restrictions, evacuation planning, vegetation management, structure hardening and other topics to improve wildfire safety	Fire prevention and pre-planning to save lives, reduce economic loss and mitigate spread through fuel management.
2	Undergrounding Subcommittee	Staff time, venue	Currently in Phase 3 of a 3 year plan. Meetings with PG&E, community, and others.	Recommendation to either underground along arterials or mitigate hazard in another manner.	City Council to make a well informed decision on undergrounding efforts
3	Improve community resilience throughout Berkeley with a whole community approach	Community members' time (volunteer), Commissioner time, and staff time.	Organize and participate in a working group for community based disaster response	Recommendations to City Council to improve community resilience throughout Berkeley. May include Measure GG fund expenditures.	Measurable improvement in community preparedness, especially previously underserved communities & neighborhoods

4	Ensure that Measure GG Funds are spent appropriately	Commissioner time, staff time	Measure GG spending report is reviewed by the Commission every 6 months	Recommendations to City Council to ensure funds are spent in accordance with the measure.	Fire stations remain open & disaster preparedness is improved by using Measure GG funds as intended.
5	Help other city entities incorporate a disaster and fire safety perspective into decisions	Commissioner time, staff time.	Respond to referrals seeking input on matters relating to disaster and fire safety.	Recommendations or other documentation to City Council and other Commissions that send referrals.	Incorporates disaster preparedness into City decisions, leading to a safer and more resilient city.

Work Plan Details

1. FIRE SAFETY AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF A WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE FIRE

Resources

Specific resources include staff time to properly notice meetings and council submissions prepared by the Disaster Fire Safety Commission. A venue and staff time may be needed for community meetings.

Program Activities

COMMUNITY EMERGENCY ALERTING AND EVACUATION

- This Commission has recommended that the city install sirens as a component of the suite of available alerting tools. We will continue to follow up on the progress of this recommendation through the budgeting process.
- Review and provide feedback and recommendations on the city’s draft evacuation plan.
- Review and provide feedback and recommendations on the city’s emergency alerting protocol. This will include the city’s compliance with state guidelines on WEA alerting in wildfires, anticipated in July 2019.
- Commissioners will attend community events and integrate community feedback and concerns into alerting and evacuation recommendations. Observe and/or participate in any evacuation drills that the City or community groups run in 2019.
- Integrate the needs and contributions of seniors and people with mobility challenges or other access and functional needs in all of our emergency alerting and evacuation recommendations.

SAFE PASSAGES – ACCESS & EGRESS ON NARROW STREETS

- The Commission will review and provide recommendations on access and egress needs in a WUI fire, specifically the “Safe Passages” program that is part of the City’s Wildfire Safety Plan

- The Commission will work to monitor and recommend parking restrictions in the hills; for example, a simple approach such as painting curbs red on one side of all the streets narrower than 20 feet or at points within narrow streets that do not allow access by first responders and clear the way for successful evacuation.

REDUCE VEGETATION AND FIRE HARDEN¹ PROPERTIES

Scientists, State and local fire department officials, Wildfire responders, and forest management experts agree that the new California “norm” includes continued droughts and disastrous urban interface wildfires. Through studies and experience, there is agreement that individual property owners are essential component in the successful achievement of fire prevention goals that will increase life safety, reduce economic impact and preserve the environment. The Commission will take an active role to achieve these broad fire prevention goals through recommendations to the City Council in the following three areas:

- Policy declarations and advocacy in support of fire prevention activities at all levels of government;
- Public outreach regarding fire prevention planning, activities and responsibilities;
- Collection, analysis and distribution of financial information, including grants, fees, loans and insurance, related to fire prevention at both citywide and neighborhood levels.

Additional Items

Commissioners working independently in other capacities (such as in neighborhood groups in the hills, or as volunteers) may develop ideas to improve WUI safety in those environments and bring these to the Commission for consideration throughout the year.

Outputs

- Recommendations to City Council regarding parking restrictions on the hills, siren expenditures, vegetation management and other topics relevant to improving wildfire safety in the City.
- Feedback to city staff on the Draft Evacuation Plan and alerting tools and protocols.
- Recommendations to support testing and drills to ensure that both staff and residents are prepared to carry out emergency alerting and evacuations
- Support the City’s community outreach measures to improve vegetation management and slow the spread of a WUI fire in the hills.
- Seek any available data on use of the chipper program, and explore if changes to the program would increase adoption.
- Review and provide recommendations on new approaches to vegetation management, including employment of Youthworks (city youth jobs program) staff over the summer to reduce fire fuel in the hills.
- Ensure that vegetation management is compliant with sustainable best practices.

¹ To fire harden a property is to take steps that make the home and property more fire-resistant.

Outcomes

Prevent loss of life by improving the City's planning and available tools to create a safe and efficient evacuation of all endangered residents in the case of a major WUI fire. Improve and practice emergency alerting so that all residents are alerted adequately and in a timely manner of any life-threatening hazards such as an approaching fire. Reduce as much as is feasible, economic losses to property owners.

2. UNDERGROUNDING SUBCOMMITTEE

Resources

Specific resources include staff time to properly notice meetings and council submissions prepared by the Undergrounding Subcommittee. A venue and staff time may be needed for community meetings.

Program Activities

The Undergrounding Subcommittee is in Phase Three of a proposed three year plan to study and make recommendations on the feasibility of undergrounding utility lines along arterial and collector streets throughout the City of Berkeley.

- Berkeley has now assigned an employee to work with the Undergrounding Subcommittee through the process of finalizing the plan and determining the expense of undergrounding utility lines along 2-3 major arterials to be used for evacuation from disasters.
- Berkeley already has undergrounded utilities along north-south arterials such as Telegraph, Sacramento, University, and San Pablo. Our focus in this phase will be on west-east ones such as Dwight, Gilman, and Marin.
- This subcommittee currently has members from the Public Works Commission and two liaison representatives, one each from the Disaster & Fire Safety and Transportation Commissions. The Disaster & Fire Safety Commission has two observers on the sub-committee: Paul Degenkolb and Bob Flasher.

Outputs

- Recommendation to Council that main arterials be undergrounded

Outcomes

- 2-3 more east-west arterials will have undergrounded utility lines for safety in evacuations.
- Lives will be saved in the next WUI by enhancing evacuation routes.

3. IMPROVE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGHOUT BERKELEY WITH A WHOLE COMMUNITY APPROACH

Resources

Resources include community members' time (volunteer), Commissioners' and

staff time to participate in working group and/or subcommittee work, and staff time to present yearly Berkeley Ready presentations to Commission.

Program Activities

Support accessible preparedness outreach and training, with a special focus on underserved and/or vulnerable members of our community, including residents of South and West Berkeley, seniors, persons with disabilities, families with children, Spanish-speakers, and renters. Consider ideas toward the goal of equitably and adequately serving all people who live, work, study or play in Berkeley.

Community Based Disaster Response

Commission member(s) will continue to participate in a working group to explore ways to support community-based post-disaster response, creating an inclusive, broad-based response that better meets the post-disaster needs of all people in Berkeley:

- explore options to help give the community a better structure or pathway to participate in disaster response.
- explore ways to improve and support social cohesion throughout the city that will naturally increase post-disaster assistance, information-sharing, and shared resources among neighbors.

This may include new directions such as developing a network of “communication hubs” that community members can self-deploy and staff in a disaster.

To stay apprised of CERT and Berkeley Ready activities in the City, the Commission will host presentations at Commission meetings by the following groups:

- CERT Advisory Committee presentation(s)
- Berkeley Ready staff presentation(s)
- Berkeley Disaster Preparedness Neighborhood Network (BDPNN)
- Disaster and Disability group

Community Fire Risk Reduction

Work towards ensuring that all people residing in or visiting Berkeley are in dwellings that adequately protect them from fire danger and that residents’ financial means are not associated with an increased fire danger:

- Explore options to ensure that renters who are concerned about the fire safety of their homes have a pathway to get their concerns addressed without putting their housing at risk
- Explore options to ensure that temporary rentals such as Airbnb and unpermitted and permitted second units and ADUs are fire safe
- Explore a Community Risk Reduction approach towards fire prevention, including on-request in-home fire risk inspections and fire escape planning, that does not include a code enforcement component
- Seek community-based approaches to reducing fire risk in homeless encampments
- Explore fire-safe inspections of properties used for group living purposes, including student Co-ops, fraternities, sororities and other identified group living accommodations

Additional Items

Commissioners working independently in other capacities (such as with schools and businesses) may develop ideas to improve community resilience in those environments and bring these to the Commission for consideration throughout the year.

Output(s)

- Develop recommendation(s) to City Council to enhance Berkeley Ready, CERT and other city programs to support community resilience. This may include scaling up current activities, or redirecting efforts towards new activities.

Outcomes

Measurable improvement to Berkeley's community preparedness. Measurement may be in number of people reached, or number of active volunteers, or new previously underserved populations reached.

4. ENSURE THAT MEASURE GG FUNDS ARE SPENT APPROPRIATELY

Resources

Commissioners' time and staff time to generate financial reports and present them to the Commission every 6 months

Program Activities

- Staff to generate a Measure GG spending report every 6 months
- Commission to review staff report every 6 months.
- Commission to provide recommendation on optional tax percentage increase

Output(s)

The Commission will create recommendations to Council if needed to ensure that Measure GG funds are used to enhance the safety of the Berkeley community and remain within the definition, scope, and intentions of the original law.

Outcomes

With funds correctly allocated, the goal of Measure GG is maintained: keeping all fire stations in the city open 24-7 as well as improving community resilience through programs such as Berkeley Ready.

5: HELP OTHER CITY ENTITIES INCORPORATE A DISASTER AND FIRE SAFETY PERSPECTIVE INTO DECISIONS

Resources

Commissioners' time for research and recommendation creation

Program Activities

Respond to requests for input on matters relating to disaster and fire safety. Requests may come from City Council, City Staff, other Commissions, or the public.

- Examples of recent referrals:

- City Council referral for feedback on Ordinance to Improve Fire Safety Standards for Rebuilt Fire Damaged Structures
- City Council referral for feedback on Local Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Staff request for feedback on Draft Evacuation plan
- Provide input into Council decisions when decisions will affect disaster resilience or fire safety in Berkeley

Output(s)

Recommendations to City Council or communications with other city entities, often in response to referrals.

Outcomes

City Council will incorporate disaster preparedness considerations into decisions, leading to a safer and more resilient city.