

ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends the following:

R1. Create a comprehensive, countywide vegetation management plan that includes vegetation along evacuation routes, a campaign to mobilize public participation, and low-income subsidies.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and the County are addressing this recommendation with a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program governed by a countywide joint power authority. We agree that more needs to be done to address this critical public safety issue in the face of what now is commonly referred to as the “new-normal.” Accelerating climate change has led to larger, costlier, and more frequent wildfires in the state than ever before, burning almost year-round. Because of this, all fire agencies, the County, and its cities and towns are working together to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program.

The program scope for an ongoing, locally-controlled, countywide wildfire prevention program would include the following:

- Fire fuel reduction and vegetation management
- Defensible-space home evaluations and education
- Evacuation planning and neighborhood preparedness
- Alert and warning enhancements
- Pursuit of grant funds for countywide efforts, as well as grant funding for to assist seniors, financially disadvantaged and those with access and functional needs with preparedness measures.

This program would require new ongoing funding. We are currently exploring a potential countywide parcel tax measure in March 2020.

R3. Develop and implement a fast, streamlined procedure to enforce vegetation citations.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Fire prevention officers throughout the county are working on a countywide, streamlined approach updating codes and processes. It is the intention of the group to implement some items as part of regular code adoption cycle this fall. Larger scale collaboration and a more streamlined approach will be addressed as part of the countywide wildfire prevention program. At the countywide level, our intention is to educate homeowners for cooperative compliance. Addressing non-compliance would be a matter for each jurisdiction to address.

R4. Adopt and deliver a comprehensive education program focused on action for all residents of Marin on a regular schedule by a team of expert trainers.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

A countywide wildfire prevention program would include a comprehensive education program for all residents. Although agencies have made efforts to educate the public, without additional resources to enhance existing efforts, we believe these efforts will continue to be insufficient and not consistent throughout the County.

R5. Promote the creation of Firewise Communities in every neighborhood by all local jurisdictions.

This recommendation has already been implemented.

As the Grand Jury report points out, Marin currently has over 30 Firewise neighborhoods. With the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program, our current efforts can be substantially enhanced and expanded throughout the County.

R6. Employ individuals with skills in public speaking, teaching, curriculum design, graphics, web design, advertising, community organization, community relations, and diplomacy to educate the public.

This recommendation has already been implemented

We currently have very articulate fire professionals and FIRESafe Marin educating the public. However, we recognize more needs to be done and this work may not need to be done by our firefighters, who often have competing response priorities.

R7. Collect Marin residents’ information and add it to Alert Marin and Nixle databases to make them opt-out systems.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

This recommendation would require changes in State law. We will work with legislators to support bills like SB 46 (Hueso; 2019), which would allow local governments to enter into agreements to access resident cell phone contact information for enrolling county residents in a county-operated public emergency warning system.

We are also pursuing newly available authority to cooperate with utility companies to obtain customer data for these purposes, but state legislation would be needed to obtain cell phone contact information.

R8. Expand the use of sirens with LRADs.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Sirens and LRAD’s have limited reach and ability to be heard inside a building. Local testing has provided mixed results based on topography and other competing outdoor existing noise. This type of system does have valuable application in some areas within the County. For those communities for which these logistical challenges can be overcome, there is considerable appeal for technology such as LRAD’s, which carry a more specific message than sirens. To be effective, sirens require communitywide understanding of their meaning and what is expected of residents when they are sounded.

R9. Research, develop, and publish plans for the mass movement of populations along designated evacuation routes.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify which corridors would benefit the most from contra-flow and traffic-light sequencing. The use of experts in this field should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies and additional funding from a countywide wildfire prevention initiative will be a critical component to our success.

R10. Give the highest priority to mitigating known choke points and to maximizing the capacity of existing evacuation routes.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify “choke points”. The use of traffic analysis experts in this field should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies and additional funding from a countywide wildfire prevention initiative will be a critical component to our success.

R11. Incorporate and prioritize plans for mass evacuations in all pending and future traffic/road projects along major escape routes.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Consideration of mass evacuations is an important element for agencies to add to their assessment of road-related capital projects. However, prioritizing evacuation plans above all other considerations may lead to design decisions that impair other important considerations, such as safe use of roads on a daily basis. A balanced lifestyle of each project is required.

R12. Educate, prepare, and drill for evacuations in all communities.

This recommendation has been implemented.

Although all Marin Fire agencies have done this work to some extent, a countywide wildfire prevention program would substantially expand efforts to educate, prepare and drill for evacuations through Marin.

R13. Fully integrate public transit into the MERA communications system without further delay.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The member agencies of MERA welcome the addition of transit agencies serving Marin. It will be necessary to analyze how to integrate these agencies.

R15. Establish in the form of a Joint Powers Authority an umbrella organization for wildfire planning and preparedness (vegetation management, public education, alerts, and evacuation), funded by a ¼ cent sales tax.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

Grand Jury Report Findings and Recommendations
“Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach”
April 25, 2019

The Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and County are addressing this recommendation with a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program governed by a countywide joint power authority. The program scope for ongoing, locally-controlled, countywide wildfire prevention program would include the following:

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This program would require new, ongoing funding. We are currently exploring a potential countywide parcel tax measure in March 2020.

In addition, we believe the Grand Jury’s recommendation may have been based on their assumption that “each jurisdiction would have to pass exactly the same parcel tax measure for the same amount at the same time.” It is worth noting that, based on the support of agencies that are responsible for fire suppression, it is allowable for the Board of Supervisors to place a single, countywide parcel tax measure on the ballot. A recent example is Measure A on the November 4, 2014 countywide ballot, which implemented a countywide parcel tax for the Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA). Therefore, the results of a countywide measure would require a two-thirds support countywide, but would not require two-third support in each jurisdiction.

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