


**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting of: April 11, 2018

To: Board of Directors

From:  Roger Meagor, Acting Fire Chief
Dan Mahoney, Battalion Chief

Subject: Wildland Fire Prevention 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Board acknowledge and file the report.
2. That the Board provide direction to staff as appropriate.

BACKGROUND:

At the February Board meeting, FIRESafe Marin (Todd Lando and Rich Shortall) gave a presentation which included an overview of FIRESafe Marin, local fire history, FireWise Communities and the recent Sleepy Hollow Prevention efforts.

DISCUSSION:

As a result of the presentation and the discussion that followed, staff would like to update the Board on current fire prevention efforts and potential options for additional outreach.

Engine Company Defensible Space Inspections: Each year the Department performs engine company level defensible space inspections. The original engine company inspection program actually began in the late 1970's in San Anselmo. The program has gone through multiple changes through the years. For this year's efforts the program will use engine company personnel to conduct initial assessment and inspections in targeted areas. Follow-up inspections will be completed utilizing contract personnel. Staff is estimating the personnel will issue a least 150 correction notices.

Resale Inspections: All homes sold in Ross, San Anselmo, and Fairfax receive a Fire Department resale inspection. Fire Department personnel check for compliance with defensible space requirements. Last year there were 285 inspections.

Construction Inspections: All construction projects within the Wildland-urban interface (WUI), which require a Fire Department inspection, must also meet defensible space requirements. Projects that meet the definition of a "substantial remodel" in the WUI are required to complete a vegetation management plan. Last year the department processed 182 construction projects and 12 vegetation management plans.

AGENDA ITEM #

Date

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4/11/18

Fire Hazard Complaints: Each year the Department receives dozens of fire hazard complaints. This year, in the wake of the October fires, we anticipate the number of complaints to increase substantially. Citizens can report a fire hazard via our website or by calling the fire department. All complaints are followed up by Department personnel. Last year the Department received 34 hazard complaints.

FireWise Communities: The Department, in partnership with FIRESafe Marin, encourages and supports Firewise communities. Since last September, Fairfax has added one FireWise Community and three other neighborhoods are working through the approval process.

Grant Funding: For the several years the Department has received multiple small grants from PG&E through FIRESafe Marin as well as funding from FIRESafe Marin to support chipper days. This year, the Department submitted additional grant requests to PG&E for vegetation removal along roadways.

Additional Options: The Department has explored options for expanding the number of defensible space inspections, similar to the effort Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District completed last year. Sleepy Hollow FPD, utilizing Marin County Fire Department seasonal staff, completed approximately 930 house by house inspections over a 10 day period. Approximately 400 notices were written. Follow up inspections were conducted by another round of seasonal fire inspectors over several days. If it appeared the homeowner was making an effort to complete the work, no additional follow up inspection or contact was completed. XMR Consulting coordinated the overall program, and conducted some of the initial and follow up inspections.

A similar “Enhanced Inspection Program” conducted by Ross Valley Fire would require contracting with a program coordinator to develop and manage the program. The coordinator would: conduct high hazard inspections; respond to questions and public information requests; conduct public relations including by social media and direct mail/email; develop education and training materials; organize inspection maps, planning and training; supervise seasonal inspectors; documentation, data collection, GIS, and mapping of inspection results and pre and post-inspection outcomes.

Ross Valley Fire has over 6,000 parcels within the Wildland-urban interface. The Department would contract with a private company or agency (MCFD) for a crew of 9-10 seasonal inspectors and 1 supervisor to conduct a defined number of wildfire hazard inspections in a targeted high-hazard area. Follow-up (2nd) inspections would be conducted 30 days later, ideally with a reduced crew of 3-4 seasonal inspectors. 3rd inspections would be conducted by a contract inspector.

The Department reached out to Marin County Fire to check the availability of utilizing County seasonal staff to conduct the inspections. County could potentially commit to 3 days for initial inspections, which would likely complete 250 initial inspections. An estimated cost for this effort, including the County seasonal inspectors, 1 supervisor, and a program coordinator is \$25,000 to \$30,000. Further analysis would need to be done to come up with a more refined cost estimate.

Conclusion: Staff is recommending continuing with current efforts including the engine company inspections, resale inspections, constructions inspection, hazard complaint follow-up, and FireWise support and expansion. Additionally, staff is recommending adding a contract inspector to assist with the engine company inspection program and hazard complaint follow-up. If the Board choses to move ahead with expanding the defensible space inspection program, utilizing the Sleepy Hollow model, it will be necessary to utilize contract personnel to plan and implement the entire program. There is a strong likelihood that the Department will receive some grant funding from PG&E for roadside clearance. The individual Towns may also want to consider spending additional funds to support roadside clearance and a roadside chipper project.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The fiscal impact for the enhanced defensible space inspection program is \$25,000 to \$30,000. Contract support for the current programs is approximately \$15,000.