

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting of January 9, 2019

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Jason Weber, Fire Chief
SUBJECT: Defensible Space Inspection Proposal

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive Staff report on defensible space inspection concept proposal. Provide direction to staff on next steps.

BACKGROUND:

In the Fall of 2017 and 2018, Northern California suffered devastating wildfires that highlighted the necessity for additional fire prevention and preparedness. Wildland fire protection and vegetation management are key areas in preventing and managing wildfires. While we have taken many steps over the years to prepare for wildfires, there is a need to do more. The current defensible space inspection program consists of engine companies inspecting zones that are assigned by the shift Battalion Chiefs. The Department has utilized a contracted inspector working one day per week during fire season for inspections, follow-ups, and documentation. During these inspections, hazards are identified, and residents are directed to take specific actions that will increase the likelihood that their homes and neighborhoods would be defensible and thus survive a wildfire.

There are challenges with the program which include maintaining consistency in inspections and a large number of follow up issues to be tracked. Public information and re-inspections are difficult for shift personnel to track and complete. The lien process as an enforcement mechanism is time-consuming.

An enhancement to the current inspection program, as discussed below, would better prepare the community in case of wildfire.

DISCUSSION:

Objectives of the inspection program:

The proposal is to increase the capacity for educational and preparedness type inspections. Inspections are formally documented based on Marin County Fire Code and State Defensible Space PRC 4291.

There are several components to this program. Community outreach and advance notification are important elements. The community would be initially contacted through a pre-season notification mailer. Additional canvassing would occur through posters and via social media outlets to residents. Included in the communication will be the Pre-

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season Wildfire Preparedness Checklist. Potential community /neighborhood meetings will be held to explain community preparedness actions which include: Evacuation Routes, Defensible Space Inspection Program and requirements, Hardening Structures, and ALERT MARIN – emergency notification system.

Follow-up inspections will be documented, tracked and prioritized based on the greatest amount of violations for any single resident, the availability of inspectors, and requests from residents for follow-up inspection or information/clarification. The Program will utilize a dedicated email and phone voicemail system for tracking and communication.

OPTIONS:

There are several options that have been considered which include:

Hire/convert full time – Captain to 40-hour work week to manage the inspection program. The challenges are covering, overtime is costly, and the availability of a Captain is questionable. This option would also include hiring at least 4 seasonal 40 hours per week inspectors.

Hire a Lead Supervisor Inspector (possibly a retired annuitant) 4 days/week for three months. The cost would be approximately \$20,000.

Hire at least four seasonal 40-hour per week inspectors approximately \$48,000

Vehicles and misc. equipment costs \$10,000

Subcontract with MCFD for 4-6 seasonal inspectors dedicated for Ross Valley Fire program. Hire Supervisory Inspector to provide oversight. Marin County has struggled to maintain six Seasonal Inspectors and could not provide the personnel to meet the need of the program.

Attached is a chart outlining the proposed priority areas for years one to three. The priority areas were determined based the need for defensible space, the current level of public engagement, the areas where evacuation routes are challenging due to vegetation overgrowth, and the patterns of how vehicle parking impedes the access on narrow roads that will provide challenges to emergency response in combination with public egress.

The 2016 Marin County Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP) fire modeling identifies these areas as consistent with rankings for Areas of Concern, and areas ranked as being able to support Very High Flame Length, Rate of Spread combined with high population density. Reference page 54 <http://www.firesafemarin.org/cwpp>.

Therefore, the recommendation is to focus Option # 2. The fiscal impact to implement this program would be between \$78,000-\$100,000 annually.

2019 D-Space Cost Estimate

Parcels	Percentage of parcels in town	Cost based on %
Fairfax- 1,838	46%	\$36,000-\$46,000
San Anselmo- 1,873	48%	\$37,000-\$48000
Ross- 225	6%	\$5,000-\$6,000
Sleepy Hollow- N/A	0%	\$0
Total parcels 3936	Total Cost Estimate	\$78,000-100,000

Communities at Risk and Areas of Concern	Relative Ranking
Marin County Open Space District Lands (areas in and adjacent to neighborhoods)	Very High/High
Marin Municipal Water District (Rock Spring, Pine Mountain south gate, Sky Oaks Meadow, Deer Park Road, Sky Oaks Headquarters, Peters Dam)	High/Moderate
Marinwood/Lucas Valley (Limestone Hill area, CSA 13, Horse Hill area, Berry area, Miller Creek Road Area, Valleystone Project, Lucas Valley Estates)	Very High/High
Novato (Marin Valley, Novato North, Anderson Rowe)	Very High
Novato (San Marin, Hilltop, Loma Verde, Wilson West, Cherry Hill, Pacheco Valley, Little Mountain, Indian Valley, Wildhorse Valley, Wilson East, Ignacio Valley, Atherton, Blackpoint)	High
Ross Valley (Fairfax, Hawthorne Hills, San Francisco Boulevard, Alameda, Morningside, upper San Anselmo Avenue)	Very High
Ross Valley (Ross [east/central/south], San Anselmo [downtown], Cascade Canyon, Sleepy Hollow)	High
San Rafael (San Pedro Ridge, Dominican, Glenwood, Peacock Gap, Gerstle Park and Cal Park neighborhoods)	Very High
San Rafael (Smith Ranch areas, West End from San Rafael Hill to Ridgewood Avenue Bret Harte, Los Ranchitos areas, Terra Linda neighborhoods)	High
Sleepy Hollow (Loma Alta area)	High
Southern Marin (Meda project, Milland, Ricardo open space, So. Morning Sun/Tennessee, Hawkhill, Autumn Lane)	Very High
Southern Marin (Rodeo water tank, U.S. Route 101/Wolfback Ridge, Seminary, Edwards/Marion, Lattie Lane/Highway 1, Blackfield, Laguna/Forest, Cabin Drive, Homestead Valley, Fairview Ring Mountain Area, Aqua Hotel Hill, Highway 1 to Erica/Friars)	High
Tiburon (Middle Ridge, South Knoll Playground, Blackies Pasture, Greenwood Beach)	Very High
Tiburon (Ring Mountain, Old St. Hilary's Open Space Preserve, Tiburon Marsh, Belvedere Lane and right of ways, Tom Price Park, Sugarloaf Drive to Paradise Drive, Middle Ridge open space, Romberg Tiburon Center, Paradise State Park)	High

The data in Table 15 should be viewed at a finer scale within each community listed in order to get a proper context of the areas of concern at a more local scale. It is important to note that the modeling performed in this section does not take into account factors such as sensitive habitats, plant species, practical implementation of fuel reduction projects, or reduction project costs. Fire protection and land management agencies should work collaboratively to determine which areas to focus efforts on, and what projects and prescriptions best serve specific areas.