

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT**

For the meeting of November 12, 2025

To: Board of Directors

From: Nicole Marcucci, Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator

Subject: Receive Presentation on 2025 Defensible Space Program and update on
Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator projects

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Board receive the presentation on the 2025 Defensible Space Program and update on Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator projects.

BACKGROUND:

In 2020, the public voted to pass Measure C, a parcel tax to fund the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA). The MWPA is working to achieve its mission of reducing the risk of wildfire to the communities of Marin through five main goals: 1) Vegetation Management, 2) Fire Detection, Alerts, and Evacuation, 3) Grants, 4) Public Outreach and Education, and 5) Defensible Space and Home Hardening. To read more about MWPA's goals, please visit MWPA Goals on the [MWPA website](#).

The MWPA funding inspired the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD), Marin County Fire Department (MCFD), Central Marin Fire Department (CMFD), and Kentfield Fire Protection District (KFPD) to pool resources and expertise to provide the best defensible space and home hardening information possible to all their residents, creating the Defensible Space program. In 2021, the program piloted Fire Aside's Defensible Space Inspection software, which advanced the program exponentially. This software captures a broader scope of defensible space and home hardening data, allowing program administrators greater insight into defensible space in Marin and providing residents with a comprehensive, individualized property report. In 2023, Southern Marin Fire Protection District (SMFPD) joined the Defensible Space program, adding to the robust program.

DISCUSSION:

For the 2025 season, the program operated with 34 seasonal inspectors to help participating agencies achieve their seasonal goals. The primary objective was to identify and educate

residents about Zone 0 issues, as well as to inform them of upcoming Fire Code changes. The secondary goals were to motivate residents to resolve identified fire code violations, complete upwards of 25,000 defensible space inspections, and refer unresolved hazards to Fire Prevention Bureau(s) for code enforcement and potential abatement.

A comprehensive online residential report is made available to each property inspected. The report features enhanced graphics and a revised layout, making it more comprehensible and user-friendly. The data gathered by the software enables the department to track the hazards posed to the community and neighborhood by individual properties, as well as help identify properties that require assistance or abatement.

Inspection Process:

Every year, half of the department's jurisdiction is scheduled to receive defensible space inspections allowing for all residents to receive an inspection every other year.

Approximately a week before inspecting a neighborhood, communities are notified through “press releases” distributed through the local Firewise communities, town newsletters/notifications, and social media postings. During the inspection process sandwich boards with the message, “Wildfire Mitigation Defensible Space Inspectors in Your Neighborhood” are placed in highly visible, safe locations reminding residents that inspections are in progress in that area.

During an inspection, residents are encouraged to accompany the inspectors as they inspect their property. Inspectors do not access properties without the permission of the tenant or owner. If no one is home or access is denied, the inspector inspects from the street, obeying the laws of curtilage. This means they are allowed to record findings from what they observe from the street and on the path to the property’s front door. They do not pass through any locked gate they confront on their path to the front door or no trespassing signs. This year, the program rolled out a Right of Entry (ROE) form that residents were able to sign before their inspections, allowing the inspectors to complete a full evaluation of the property without the resident being home. The inspector would do their best to make contact with an adult residing on the property before completing the inspection. This new inspection type is allowing the program to provide a more comprehensive report for the resident after completing a ROE inspection.

Every inspection results in a comprehensive report for the property owner that can be accessed online by the owner using a unique code given to them or left at their door by the inspectors. Residents can access these reports 24 hours after their property inspection has been completed. In the online portal residents can view defensible space violations they have to complete to be in compliance with the fire code, as well as defensible space issues that are recommended.

- Defensible Space Violation - Violates the California Fire Code
- Defensible Space Issues - Recommendations based on best practices and research

- Zone 0- As defined by CAL FIRE 0 to 5 feet from a structure

These requirements and recommendations are summarized in a checklist at the end of the report. Residents can also apply for MWPA home hardening and defensible space grants directly through their online report. Once a resident begins working on their checklist items, they can submit photographic evidence of the mitigation work they have completed to resolve the issue on the report. Additionally, the report provides residents with ways to reduce the threat created by home construction vulnerabilities, and provides resources such as grant opportunities, chipper days, and Alert Marin sign-ups.

Reporting:

Currently, the data entered and collected in the Fire Aside Defensible Space Inspection software helps the department to determine what the hazards are, where they are located, assists in identifying potential mitigation efforts, and helps the department to identify public needs. In the future, the data points gathered by our software will also have an additional overlay of environmental factors to help the Defensible Space program and other agencies better understand the overall fire risk in Marin. Below you will find data collected during the 2025 Defensible Space inspections for the Ross Valley Fire Department's jurisdiction. The inspection season officially ended October 30, 2025 with the inspection team completing nearly 25,000 county-wide inspections, meeting the season goal.

Inspection Numbers:

Nearly 25,000 inspections were conducted by the Defensible Space program; 4,901 of these were within RVFD's service area. While 2,493 were first inspections, 2,338 were second or follow up inspections. 70 of the initial inspected properties did not receive a reinspection. Out of these numbers 50.77% of residents had engaged with their report within 15 days.

The 10 most common Defensible Space issues/violations recorded in the Ross Valley this year were:

Hazard	Number of Recorded Issues/Violations
Vegetation in Zone 0	2,279
Ladder Fuels	813
Tree Limbs Overhang Structure	672
Tree Requires Limbing	326
Combustible Growth Near Roadway	279
Patio Furniture Cushions	373

Combustible Doormats	359
Leaf or Needle Litter on Ground	429
Grasses and Weeds	283
Rosemary	355

Fairfax:

The neighborhoods of Oak Manor, Cascade Canyon, Deer Park and Manor Hill were inspected this year. The areas that did not receive an inspection this year will be inspected next year.

The total number of inspections for Fairfax this year was 3,262. Of this number 1,652 were initial inspections and 1,563 were re-inspections. 47 of the initial inspected properties did not receive a reinspection. Out of these numbers 51.90% of residents had engaged with their report within 15 days.

The 10 most common Defensible Space issues/violations recorded in Fairfax this year were:

Hazard	Number of Recorded Issues/Violations
Vegetation in Zone 0	1,439
Ladder Fuels	487
Tree Limbs Overhang Structure	439
Tree Requires Limbing	200
Patio Furniture Cushions	250
Combustible Doormats	205
Other Combustibles Near Structure	186
Leaf or Needle Litter on Ground	311
Grasses and Weeds	237
Rosemary	232

Ross:

The neighborhood of Laurel Grove was inspected this year. The areas that did not receive an inspection this year will be inspected next year.

The total number of inspections for Ross this year was 360. Of this number 186 were initial inspections and 168 were re-inspections. 18 of the initial inspected properties did not receive a reinspection. Out of these numbers 45.28% of residents had engaged with their report within 15 days.

The 10 most common Defensible Space issues/violations recorded in Ross this year were:

Hazard	Number of Recorded Issues/Violations
Vegetation in Zone 0	225
Ladder Fuels	114
Tree Limbs Overhang Structure	58
Tree Requires Limbing	44
Combustible Growth Near Roadway	41
Combustible Doormats	29
Patio Furniture Cushions	27
Combustible Mulch	26
Rosemary	31
Broom Plants	27

San Anselmo:

The neighborhoods of Redwood and Oak were inspected this year. The areas that did not receive an inspection this year will be inspected next year.

The total number of inspections for San Anselmo this year was 1,274. Of this number 650 were initial inspections and 607 were re-inspections. 17 of the initial inspected properties did not receive a reinspection. Out of these numbers 49.22% of residents had engaged with their report within 15 days.

The 10 most common Defensible Space issues/violations recorded in San Anselmo this year were:

Hazard	Number of Recorded Issues/Violations
Vegetation in Zone 0	609

Ladder Fuels	210
Tree Limbs Overhang Structure	173
Combustible Growth Near Roadway	88
Tree Requires Limbing	81
Combustible Doormats	125
Patio Furniture Cushions	95
Combustible Mulch	70
Leaf or Needle Litter on Ground	91
Rosemary	90

Sleepy Hollow:

Sleepy Hollow is on a biannual inspection plan. This year, they did not receive inspections; instead, the district focused on an assistance program that primarily assisted residents in Zone 0 vegetation removal. Sleepy Hollow will be inspected in its entirety next year.

Piloted in 2022, the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District's Direct Assistance program provided residents with the opportunity to receive free hazardous vegetation removal and disposal services from a local, licensed contractor. At first the removal was focused on hazardous vegetation, species like bamboo, juniper, Italian cypress as well as dead trees were the main focus. Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection district has served over 100 residents through this program since its inception. This year the main focus of the program was changed to focus on removal of vegetation in Zone 0 and help residents upgrade/improve the vent screenings on residents properties. A secondary focus for the program is assisting residents who have a combustible fence or gate connected to the structure the program will remove it for free and helping to provide a contractor and non-combustible landscaping at a reduced price. This year the program over a dozen homes were assisted in preparing for wildfire.

Wildfire Preparedness Project Updates:

In August of 2025 the Ross Valley Fire Department, using the Towns' MWPA fund, hired its first Wildfire Preparedness Coordinator to help manage and prioritize Wildfire Mitigation efforts within our jurisdiction with a focus on improving:

- Vegetation Management
- Fire Detection
- Alerts, and Evacuation
- Grants
- Public Outreach and Education
- Defensible Space and Home Hardening

Using the following programs listed below, along with the data collected by the Defensible Space Inspectors, the Coordinator is collaborating with each member agency to create a 3 year plan. These programs use different mapping, fuel loads and existing data to project scenarios and break down potentially hazardous areas by house and street.

- Wildfire Resilient Roads Maps
- Genasys (formerly known as Zonehaven)
- Fire Aside (Defensible Space Inspection software)
- GIS
- Local Hazard Mitigation Plans
- Field Observations

It is by using these programs that the Coordinator has been able to begin planning and observing areas to prioritize and plan the future projects below. By using these data platforms our department can make data driven decisions regarding prioritization of funds and projects.

Evacuation/Roadside Clearance:

Doing evacuation clearance of our public roads can help increase safety for evacuation, increase visibility for everyday traffic and potentially decrease response times for all emergency incidents. This project type focuses on clearing 10 feet from the edge of the paved road and 15 feet of overhanging vegetation. Residents are notified via US Mail that work will be conducted in their area. There is also a section in their notice that invites them to reach out to our department to participate in the project. What this invitation does is grants our team permissions to get into the overgrown drainages and past 10 feet of the roadway, creating more resilient roads and lowering the fuel load.

Voluntary Abatement:

Voluntary abatement is an optional program that residents can opt into that helps with lowering fuel loads on private properties, assisting elderly and low-income residents with increasing their fire safety, assisting residents by taking the initial vegetation work costs from them and increasing neighborhood safety. Properties are selected through multiple data sources to strategically complete fuel modification on private properties. Priority is given to residents that either can not afford the initial cost of work or complete the work themselves. These tend to be our elderly residents and low-income residents. This program is offered to residents who have large parcels or large drainages on their property in conjunction with our roadside clearance projects.

Large-Scale Fuel Modification Projects:

In conjunction with neighboring jurisdictions and/or Department of Public Works directors, these projects work towards lowering fuel loads across private and public properties, lowering neighborhood risks, and creating safer public access spaces. These projects are usually larger open space projects that are done in conjunction with other government agencies to not only reduce fire risk but also improve public access and accomplish other goals.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None

ATTACHMENTS:

None