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Office of the Honorable Dan Kalb
COUNCILMEMBER ~ DISTRICT 1

Office of the Honorable Libby Schaaf
COUNCILMEMBER ~ DISTRICT 4

June 26, 2014

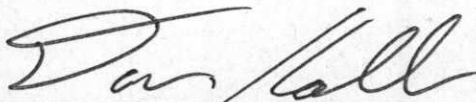
Re: Fire Suppression Funding in the Proposed 2014-2015 Midcycle Budget

Dear City Council Colleagues,

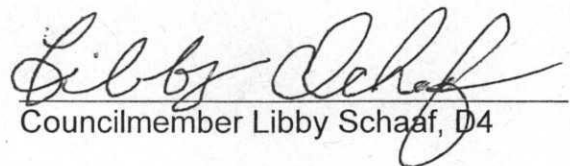
Currently there is one full-time Vegetation Management Supervisor, one full-time Fire Inspector, and three temporary part-time inspectors for 26,000 parcels in Oakland fire-prone regions. Many residents in these areas have urged us to fund this necessary service at a higher level. Arguably, the City should make a greater investment in fire suppression to ensure the safety of our residents against wildfires.

We are already tasked with declaring a fiscal necessity so that we may use millions of dollars in one-time revenues to fund vital ongoing expenses in this midcycle budget. Therefore, we cannot justify the use of additional one-time revenues for this ongoing need. However, we understand that for approximately \$62,000, the City would have the funds to convert one of the three temporary part-time vegetation inspectors into a fully-loaded permanent full-time position. We believe that an additional full-time vegetation inspector will improve fire suppression efforts considerably. Therefore, we respectfully ask that the City Administrator and budget staff continue to look for \$62,000 in ongoing revenues from the current 2014-2015 budget, so that we may fund this critical need.

Sincerely,



Councilmember Dan Kalb, D1



Councilmember Libby Schaaf, D4





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Dear Mayor Quan and City Council Members:

On behalf of the board of the North Hills Community Association, I am writing to once again call to your attention Oakland's urgent need for full-time fire inspectors. We were dismayed to learn yesterday that funding for these positions was not included in the proposed 2015 budget. We *strongly* urge you to include funding for these positions. Only by having properly qualified, trained inspectors who can acquire and retain experience of the vast tracts of our City that remain susceptible to deadly wildfire will we maximize the safety of our citizens and property.

In 2011, fire inspector staffing was reduced from 7 full-time positions to just one full-time plus 2.5 part-time positions. These cuts are far greater than other fire departments have sustained. Part-time inspectors are not a substitute for full-time inspectors. Only with continuity can vital experience be gained. Vegetation management is a year-round, not seasonal, activity. In fact, winter is often the safest time to get work done.

While regular OFD staff may inspect some residential properties as their schedules allow, only a staff of full-time inspectors can ensure the timely completion of consistent, adequate and accurate inspections. The need for staffing has been made painfully clear in the City Auditor's report, and highlighted in a [recent Contra Costa Times news article](#).

Our concern is, it is now only June, and already residents in our area have been complaining about inconsistent and sometimes inaccurate fire inspections. This is alarming and underscores the need for a staff of full-time inspectors. Having such a staff would ensure all properties in the vast swath of public and private lands – stretching from Berkeley to San Leandro – are being adequately and appropriately inspected. In addition, a staff of inspectors would form relationships with property owners large and small, and monitor and encourage compliance and safety year-by-year. We believe inspectors are essential to fire safety in the Oakland hills.

Have other sources of funding been considered? The state and some other municipalities collect inspection fees. Might there be emergency funds available from the State of California?

Preventing a repetition of the 1991 wildfire, which killed 25 people and destroyed thousands of homes, must be one of Oakland's most important duties and goals. Investing in full-time inspectors should be a top priority for the City and an important step to promoting safety. While we urge the restoration of all the positions lost since 2011, we know that this may not be possible. Every full-time inspector we can get back into the hills makes us all much safer. Won't you find a way to do better than the present situation, which is deplorable and puts the entire City at risk of a catastrophe? Can we not have three to five full-time inspectors back on staff? Would it not be better to fund these positions than face lawsuits for negligence if another wildfire should break out?

Sincerely,

David Kessler
Chair, Civic Issues Committee
North Hills Community Association