



AGENDA REPORT

TO: FRED BLACKWELL
CITY ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: Teresa Deloach Reed
FIRE CHIEF

SUBJECT: OFD Vegetation Inspection Audit 2011-12 **DATE:** April 7, 2014

City Administrator
Approval

Date 4-14-14

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 1, 4, 6, and 7

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends acceptance of this Informational Report concerning the November 19, 2013 Oakland Fire Department Vegetation Inspection Audit. This informational report provides the Public Safety Committee with the status of the recommendations made by the Auditor's office and agreed to by Fire Administration.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The information contained in this report provides a status update to the seven (7) recommendations made by the Office of the City Auditor. This report will outline the progress of work that has been completed as the Department moves toward implementing policies and procedures to enhance the service provided, improve data management and tracking, establish alternative collection methods and increase efficiency and effectiveness of the abatement process.

OUTCOME

By implementing the recommendations outlined in the Auditors report, the Fire Department will enhance the vegetation management services provided to Oakland residents, and improve its efficiency in conducting inspections.

BACKGROUND

The Office of the City Auditor conducted a performance audit of the City's Vegetation Management Inspection process during calendar year 2011 – 2012. The audit was all inclusive of activities associated with the vegetation management inspection program; such as inspection quality, processes, training, documentation and accounting functions. The audit concluded with seven (7) recommendations which Fire Department staff is working diligently to address. During

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the period selected for the performance audit, there have been many changes, both selected and mandated, within the Vegetation Management Unit. The audit performed only validated the issues Fire Administration has been working to address.

Below you will find what action is needed to close the recommendation and the action Fire Administration has taken to date.

Status of Recommendations

Recommendation	Action required to close recommendation	Action taken to date to close Recommendation
1	<i>Implement policies and procedures that include stronger supervision and quality control measures</i>	<p>Polices have been completed and are currently under final approval. The policies and procedures include elements for stronger supervision and improve quality control by requiring officers to review each inspection form. Under the updated policy, company officers are required to review each form and sign off on the completeness and accuracy of the form. An incomplete or inaccurate form will be returned to the individual who completed the inspection, and coached on the proper method to complete the forms and if necessary, review the training video.</p> <p>A "Field Operations Line Inspection Program" manual is also in the final draft phase and upon final review will be distributed to the Fire House as a reference guide.</p> <p>Procedures have been reviewed to provide clear direction on how to complete inspection form, how to perform data entry tasks, document deficiencies and handle citizens inquires.</p> <p>Company Officers are now required to review and sign off on the accuracy of the completed inspection forms.</p> <p>Battalion Chiefs have been given the ability to identify inspections to be completed. Battalion Chiefs are also able to spot check completed inspections for accuracy.</p>

Recommendation	Action Required to Close Recommendation	Action Taken to Date to Close Recommendation
		Reports will be generated monthly identifying data entry errors and distributed to the appropriate supervisors.
	<i>Modify database to improve data accuracy and integrity</i>	The database has been updated to reflect reporting features for contracts, billing, revenue collection, and inspections details. Improvements to the database for accuracy and integrity include highlighting required fields to assist staff in completing fields, which require data. Required fields have a background color, which assist staff performing data entry functions by bringing these fields to their attention.
	<i>Include inspection performance as part of the written evaluations</i>	Staff has developed performance objectives for the following the rank of Battalion Chief, Fire Captain, Fire Engineer, Firefighter, Fire Paramedic and Fire Suppression District Inspector. Staff is coordinating with the necessary city staff to assure the meet and confer process meets the deadline to have these performance standards included on the fiscal year (FY) 14/15 performance period.
2	<i>Integrate inspectors' expertise, or expertise of similar value, into improving quality of inspections performed and data recorded</i>	<p>Seasonal Inspection staff does not have the expertise to improve the quality of inspection performed at the company level. Temporary Part Time (TPT) personnel will have a learning curve when using the database, understanding inspection procedures, and navigating the Oakland Hills. However, the Vegetation Management Supervisor is available to suppression personnel via email or cell phone to provide direction as needed. As of July 1, 2014, a sworn Assistant Fire Marshal position will become unfrozen and available to fill creating an additional resource for line personnel.</p> <p>Collaboration between fire prevention and fire suppression personnel has resulted in a new training presentation and modified inspection</p>

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		form. These improvements have reinforced the understanding of expectations and requirements for properties to be fire code compliant.
3	<i>How training is improved</i>	Training videos are being created to demonstrate the variety of items which may be encountered in the field and how to cite and obtain compliance with the intent of the code requirements. Additionally, a six (6) week training schedule, consisting of a power point presentation, which supports the training video, goals and objectives of fire prevention, will be delivered to all line personnel. The curriculum will provide examples of hazardous vegetation scenarios; provide documentation expectations for the inspection form as well as data entry expectations and requirements. This training is scheduled to begin April 9, 2014.
	<i>Implement a tracking mechanism to ensure all fire line personnel attend annual training</i>	An attendance log will be kept by the instructor and will have the employee's name, date of attendance, rank and City ID number which will be confirmed during the training roll call. The attendance log will be recorded into the training division database. Personnel who did not attend on their scheduled date will be notified of a mandatory deadline to receive the training.
4	<i>Increasing inspection staff to full-time or by adjusting the month's part-time inspection staff is working</i>	The adopted FY 11/12 budget cuts reduced the staffing in the Vegetation Management Unit from 6.0 full time employees (FTE) Fire Suppression District Inspectors to 3 FTE, concurrently reducing the program from a year round program to a 6 month program. Currently, the Vegetation management unit is staffed with one FTE Vegetation Management Supervisor one FTE Fire Suppression Inspector and three TPT Inspectors. The cost of a fully loaded FTE Vegetation Management Inspector is \$125,613.

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		<p>The cost to add an additional four (4) FTE inspectors would cost the GPF \$502,452. Funding for full-time inspectors require Council approval.</p> <p>Adjust the months TPT inspectors work: Historically, the TPT's start in August and work until they have exhausted their hours (1000). The modified work schedule for the TPTs will begin in July 2014, with a full work week (37.5) through October (2014), thereby exhausting approximately 600 hours. The inspectors will then be laid off and brought back in May and continue their full work week through June exhausting another 300 hours, with 99 hours in reserve. The TPT actual working months would be July through October (2014) and May through June 2015 within the same fiscal year. This revised work schedule proactively addresses hazards at an earlier date allowing for additional fuel reduction efforts.</p> <p>Staff recommends full-time employees in lieu of TPT inspectors due to the training necessary to become a qualified, effective, and knowledgeable inspector able to perform property survey and property boundary tasks, acquire knowledge of terrain, awareness of environmental impacts, and other tasks necessary to reduce hazards. TPT inspectors have not been effective in proficiently performing these tasks and there has been an inability for the City to retain the same TPT employee inspection season to inspection season.</p>
5	<i>Make adjustments to the noncompliant notification process and the abatement</i>	After review, timelines for abatement can be reduced by up to 45 days. The revised Inspection and Abatement Workflow are as follows:

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	<i>contracting process so abatements are address more timely</i>	<p>Annual inspection completed, 30 days permitted for Re-inspection.</p> <p>On day 31, a re-inspection is completed. Non-compliance property is posted and a hearing is scheduled 14 days later.</p> <p>After hearing (approximately 44 days from the Annual Inspection) Fire Prevention will seek bids requiring seven (7) additional days (51 days from Annual Inspection)</p> <p>Issue Notice to Proceed to Contractor will take 1 – 4 days (approximately 52-55 days from the Annual Inspection).</p> <p>Invoice contract cost.</p> <p>Lien unpaid invoices after 30 days if property owner has not paid mitigation fees.</p>
	<i>All abatements have been invoiced</i>	Automation of invoices has been created through OneStep. When contracts are issued and signed off by the inspector and details are entered, the system will generate an invoice for the contract fees (x) plus the contract administration fee of \$531.00.
	<i>OneStep is programmed to produce automated invoices for outstanding amounts due</i>	Unpaid invoices for re-inspections will be sent a 30 day, 60 day, 90 day late statement respectively. Any invoice not paid after 90 days will receive a final request and notice advising the invoice has been referred to the City's Revenue Collections Unit.
	<i>Timely cost recovery collections process has been implemented</i>	Collection of fees is based on a two-pronged approach. Inspection fees are collected via the City's Revenue Collection Unit. Contracted abatement work will go through an attempt to

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		<p>collect for the work by automated invoicing and a lien process.</p> <p>Process for collection of abatement work performed by the city:</p> <p>After the 2nd fire inspection is completed, the Fire Prevention Bureau (FPB) will schedule a hearing for the property owner to go over the hazards. After the hearing, the FPB will file a perspective lien or a Notice of Violation with the County, and charge a \$50 lien fee.</p> <p>FPB will seek three bids for the abatement work, then issue a Notice to Proceed to the awarded Contractor.</p> <p>Invoice is mailed the contracted work plus the contract administration fee. Any unpaid invoice after 30 days will be recorded as a priority lien for the contract charge, contract administration fee and recording fee. At this time, the perspective lien will be removed.</p>
6	<i>Consideration of alternative collection methods</i>	<p>After conversation with Revenue Division personnel, their only collection is through small claims court which Revenue Collection will handle for inspection fees not paid. For contract work, staff will have to file a lien, either perspective or priority. An account currently exists with the County for filing said liens</p>
7	<i>Engage community stakeholders in addressing parking obstructions as a costly threat to both the residents and the City at large.</i>	<p>Conversations are ongoing.</p>

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	<i>Collaboration with the Fire Department, Parking Enforcement and City Council to determine if parking enforcement within the Wildfire District is a priority.</i>	Conversations are ongoing.
7	<i>What steps have been taken to address parking obstructions in the Oakland Hills</i>	Notification will be included with the annual Vegetation Management Inspection explaining the need for unobstructed roadways in the event of an emergency response and notifying residents that illegal parking is an infraction subject to citation.

COORDINATION

Staff coordinated with the Office of the City Attorney, Budget Office, Controllers Office, and Parking Enforcement in preparing this report.

COST SUMMARY/IMPLICATIONS

The Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) currently funds three (3) Temporary Part-Time Administrative Positions (TPT) in the Vegetation Management Unit (VMU). The annual cost of one TPT's is approximately \$45,000, fully burdened.

The City's general fund account is responsible for the fully burdened salaries of one (1) full-time Vegetation Management Supervisor (\$170,549), one (1) full-time Vegetation Management Inspector (\$125,613), and three (3) TPT Vegetation Management Inspectors (\$28,038 per inspector).

To increase to TPT staff (\$28,038) x 3 = **\$84,114** to FPT an additional expenditure from the City's general fund of (\$97,575x3 = **\$292,725**) would be required annually.

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SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: There are no direct economic impacts associated with this report.

Environmental: The management and enforcement strategy of the Oakland Fire Department produces considerably lesser fuel loads before the peak of the regional fire season.

Social Equity: A fire safe and healthy environment benefits the entire City.

For questions concerning this report, please contact Acting Assistant Fire Marshal Kim Catano, at (510) 238-6559.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa Deloach Reed
Fire Chief