



AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Joe DeVries
Deputy City Administrator
and Chief Resilience Officer

SUBJECT: CALFIRE MOU

DATE: November 17, 2023

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (Nov 19, 2023 21:02 PST)

Date: Nov 19, 2023

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution Authorizing The City Administrator To Enter Into A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) With The California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) To Provide Ongoing Support In The Removal Of Dead And Dying Trees And Vegetation From Joaquin Miller Park And Other Park Areas In The Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone Of The City Of Oakland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Oakland has the opportunity to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE). This MOU would provide for CALFIRE to send in hand crews to perform targeted fuel reduction in Joaquin Miller Park, a CALFIRE designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ).

REASON FOR URGENCY

Seasonal CALFIRE hand crews are currently available to perform this task, free of charge to the City of Oakland, but when the spring season increases wildfire risks in other parts of the state, they will be reassigned.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The series of historic wildfires throughout California and the Western United States in recent years demonstrates that the impacts of global climate change will continue to have potentially devastating local effects throughout the region, including habitat destruction, loss of life, economic impacts, infrastructural damage, and public health hazards associated with air quality.

Joaquin Miller Park is located in a CAL FIRE designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ). CAL FIRE mapped these FHSZs to inform public officials' decision-making about where to focus mitigation efforts in order to slow the rate of fire spread should a wildfire occur. Joaquin Miller Park's Very High FHSZ designation, the highest CAL FIRE FHSZ classification, indicates

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that immediate mitigation efforts should be taken in this area where there is a substantial risk of an uncontrolled fire due to a combination of factors, such as fuel (e.g. dead or damaged trees), terrain, and weather. Upon entering into this MOU, CAL FIRE would bring in California National Guard members from the San Jose Armory, a fire engine with two-three crew members and a fire captain from Sunol, CAL FIRE Captains and Fire Apparatus Engineers, as well as a skid steer masticator operated by a Heavy Fire Equipment Operator to perform fuels reduction projects in the park.

Continuous horizontal and vertical fuels allow wildfires to spread rapidly, becoming uncontrolled and catastrophic. Fuel reduction in forested areas creates breaks in horizontal and vertical fuel continuity. Thus, targeted fuel reduction performed by CALFIRE hand crews would prevent the spread of such uncontrolled wildfires in this area. Additionally, fuel management around paved roads, buildings, fences, active recreation areas, and other infrastructure in Joaquin Miller Park will create defensible spaces that protect these areas during a wildfire.

In 2019, Oakland City Council adopted Resolution No. [87940 C.M.S.](#), which prioritized wildfire prevention in Oakland, and the City Administrator established a Wildfire Prevention Working Group.

In October, Public Works Staff met with CALFIRE to review potential vegetation management target areas for creating defensible space throughout Joaquin Miller Park. The target areas include Sanborn Dr. between Ranger Station and Lookout Point, Lookout Point, the perimeter of the Native Plant Nursery, the Perimeter of Woodminster Theater, picnic areas near dog parks, and the wooded area between the Sanborn Dr. fence and Joaquin Miller Road. Staff identified removing ladder fuels and small invasive trees, covering tree stumps with black plastic to discourage regrowth, raising branches on mature trees, removing dead and downed trees, and removing and repurposing logs as traffic barriers as potential work for the fuel reduction hand crews in these target areas. This work is summarized in a draft scope of work (**Attachment A**).

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

As demonstrated by CALFIRE's Very High FHSZ classification for the area, there is an immediate need for wildfire mitigation projects in Joaquin Miller Park. Further, CALFIRE hand crews would perform the fuel management for free. Therefore, this MOU with CALFIRE is an especially cost-effective way to reduce uncontrolled wildfire risk and preserve this parkland for its intended use. The MOU also presents an important opportunity for collaboration with a state resource.

Finally, due to Joaquin Miller Park's proximity to residential neighborhoods, hand thinning, as opposed to mechanical thinning or prescribed burning, is the best fuel reduction method for this area. While most fuel reduction would be done with hand tools, such as chainsaws, axes, and rakes, CAL FIRE also plans to provide a skid steer masticator, which would be operated by a Heavy Fire Equipment Operator. This skid steer masticator would allow the wood removed by the hand crews to be chipped onsite rather than having it hauled off to another location.

This resolution meets the citywide goal of holistic community safety in that it is designed to prevent wildfires in the most fire prone area of the city. It also meets the goal of responsive and trustworthy government as the community has asked the City to address these concerns and has shown a willingness to partner with the City on these efforts.

FISCAL IMPACT

Entering into this MOU has no direct financial cost to the City but will provide for immeasurable cost savings by having the work performed for free.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

City Staff meet regularly with the Oakland Fire Safe Council and have partnered with the Friends of Joaquin Miller Park to seek additional resources for this type of clearing. Both organizations, along with other concerned residents, are very supportive of this agreement.

COORDINATION

Oakland Public Works (OPW) and the Oakland Fire Department met with CALFIRE to review potential vegetation management target areas in Joaquin Miller Park. The Planning and Building Department assisted with the CEQA Categorical Exemption documents.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: In adopting this resolution, Oakland will participate in helping to mitigate the number and severity of wildfire events, which will reduce the potential disaster costs and economic impacts of these events.

Environmental: Mitigating the number and severity of wildfire events will protect Oakland's physical environment and infrastructure from damage.

Race & Equity: This proposed resolution will help ensure the safety of Oakland residents living near Joaquin Miller Park, a Very High FHSZ. Additionally, in mitigating wildfires, frontline residents disproportionately affected by climate change will not be impacted by wildfire smoke as frequently or severely.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

The City of Oakland, in partnership with CAL FIRE, received a Notice of Exemption (NOE) (**Attachment B**) on November 6, 2023, from the Bureau of Planning for this emergency vegetation management project in Joaquin Miller Park. The NOE outlines how the project falls under the CEQA Emergency Project (Sec.15269) Exempt Status because the risk of fire in Joaquin Miller Park poses an immediate threat to public health, safety, and welfare.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution To Authorize The City Administrator To Enter Into A Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) With The California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) To Provide Ongoing Support In The Removal Of Dead And Dying Trees And Vegetation From Joaquin Miller Park And Other Park Areas In The Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone Of The City Of Oakland

For questions regarding this report, please contact Joe DeVries, Deputy City Administrator, at (510) 238-3083.

Respectfully submitted,

Joe DeVries

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Attachments (2): Attachment A: Draft Defensible Space CALFIRE Scope of Work
Attachment B: CEQA Notice of Exemption