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AGENDA REPORT

TO: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

FROM: Teresa Deloach Reed
Fire Chief

SUBJECT: OFD Vegetation Management
Activities, FY 2015-16

DATE: February 17, 2016

City Administrator Approval

Date

2/25/16

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends Acceptance Of This Informational Report From The Oakland Fire Department's (OFD) Vegetation Management Unit Regarding The Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) And The Ongoing Efforts To Prevent Wildfires In The City Of Oakland For Fiscal Year 2015-2016.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Staff is presenting this report at the request of the Public Safety Committee to provide information related to the vegetation management and wildfire prevention programs conducted by the Oakland Fire Department and the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District for the period of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-2016 in the high fire hazard area within the Oakland hills. The programs described in this report are recommended, reviewed and approved by the WPAD Advisory Board in collaboration with the Oakland Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau's Vegetation Management Unit.

BACKGROUND/LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

In January 2004, the City Council approved Resolution No. 78305 C.M.S., establishing the formation of the Oakland Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) and setting the boundaries to reduce the risk of wildfires in the Oakland hills. The formation of the WPAD set forth the following goals:

- Develop, establish, and implement a strategic cost-effective sustainable, and environmentally-sensitive fuel management plan;
- Have knowledgeable and involved property owners, developers and the public-at-large using fire safe practices;
- Enhance cooperation and communication with and between the community, the City, and other agencies and neighboring districts; and

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- Establish and refine policies, procedures, and regulations that improve fire safety.

The OFD is the lead agency for wildfire prevention in the Oakland hills and together with the WPAD Advisory Board works with the public and large agency landholders to ensure compliance with the Oakland Municipal Code and the California Fire Code regarding wildfire prevention. The mission of the WPAD is to reduce the risk of fire and increase fire prevention efforts in the Oakland hills through education, planning and additional service to the residents within its boundaries. The WPAD Advisory Board serves to provide oversight on the WPAD fiscal expenditures, and to provide input to the programs and services conducted by the Oakland Fire Department in the prevention of wildfires in Oakland.

These programs and services encompass wildfire prevention education, hazardous fuels management projects, inspections, community partnership projects and, if necessary, enforcement and abatement of non-City owned properties within the WPAD. The district boundaries are generally within the Oakland hills and the surrounding areas and located within and among extreme dense vegetation which puts residents at a high risk of loss or damage in the occurrence of a wildland fire. The district runs from the Berkeley border south to the San Leandro border, and from the Contra Costa County border on the east to Highways 13 and 580 on the west and contains portions of Council districts 1, 4, 6 & 7.

The specific programs approved and funded by the WPAD include: Goat Grazing; Vegetation Management; Chipping and Debris Removal Services; Fire Prevention Education and Training; and Roving Fire Patrols.

Goat Grazing: This program utilizes goat herds to clear the excess brush and remove vegetation from large public open areas within the WPAD boundaries. Such vegetation, if otherwise left to grow, would allow the rapid spread of fire in the Oakland hills areas. Goat grazing is done through a services contract.

Chipping and Debris Removal Services: This program assists private property owners by providing a convenient way to dispose of vegetation, including roadside pick-up of tree branches and vegetation debris.

Vegetation Management Program: Private contractors are used to provide vegetation reduction services in the WPAD areas where the goat herds are unable to graze. Each year, properties requiring vegetation management are identified by Vegetation Management Unit Inspectors when in violation of the California Fire Code. Hazard mitigation is then conducted.

Roving Fire Patrols: This program incorporates the use of additional fire patrols to monitor properties within the WPAD boundaries during high fire hazard days, so as to increase prevention efforts.

Public Outreach: The outreach efforts include, but are not limited to: printing, duplication, and postage of all correspondence mailings, outreach notices (i.e. annual inspection mailers and, vegetation management inspection reports) to residents in the WPAD, as well as the creation of fire danger signs posted within the WPAD.

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Fire Prevention Education and Training: Through this program OFD staff provides fire prevention training and defensible space planning to residents in the WPAD neighborhoods, at schools and community meetings. Defensible space is the immediate area around a home or structure created through the regular maintenance of vegetation to minimize conditions that present an ignition source for fire.

Support Services for Inspection Program: This program provides seasonal support to the residents throughout the inspection process. Support services staff intake inquiries via phone or email and respond to them while also maintaining the inspection program database.

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The OFD and the WPAD Advisory Board have developed annual goals which detail recommendations for strategic policies, programs, and educational activities to support the WPAD goals.

The immediate goal of the WPAD is to reduce the risk of fire in Oakland, with a concentration in the Oakland hills. This is accomplished by establishing and implementing strategic, cost effective, sustainable, and environmentally sensitive fuel reduction practices. Fuel is defined as grass, shrubs, ornamental plants, ivy and other overgrown vegetation that can lead to a fire transferring from the ground to a structure or nearby trees. By removing the build-up of vegetation from the open space areas throughout the high fire area, strategic fuel breaks are created. These fuel break systems can be used to compartmentalize and dampen fire progression patterns across large urban interface areas, thus transforming them into more manageable fire control areas.

The OFD's Fire Prevention Bureau's Vegetation Management Unit is the primary unit tasked with reducing the risk of fire within the designated high fire severity zone in the Oakland hills. Fire safe information is provided to residents (i.e., annual notice, website, etc.) to ensure that property owners are provided with information to reduce the risk to their property from wildfire.

The Unit is currently staffed with three full time employees (FTE) which includes: one Vegetation Management Supervisor; two FTE - Fire Suppression District Inspectors. In addition to the three FTE, the Unit also has one limited duration employee (LDE) - Program Analyst II. During wildfire season (May through November), the Unit is staffed with an additional three temporary part-time (TPT) Fire Suppression District Inspectors.

Program Objectives: The unit's primary responsibility is to annually develop, implement, manage and oversee the following projects in support of the OFD/WPAD goals:

- Conduct inspections on City of Oakland-owned parcels, unimproved private parcels and improved private parcels to determine maintenance and fuel reduction requirements for California Fire Code compliance.
- Increase the private owner rate of compliance with state and local regulations for defensible space on all parcels.

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- Produce and monitor fuel reduction treatment schedules with large property and public entity partners.
- Be aware of, and comply with, environmental regulations and protocols relating to protected species and seasonal watershed.
- Respond year-round to customer issues, educational needs, and complaints.
- Enforce codes and ordinances, and increase pressure on non-compliant property owners.
- Partner with the community to increase awareness and compliance for defensible space responsibilities.
- Conduct enforcement and assist Field Operations Bureau (FOB) personnel with inspections of residential properties.
- Develop and manage fuel reduction contracts to: 1) Provide adequate roadside clearances; 2) Clear City owned vacant lots; 3) Reduce growth of invasive species along City designated open space fire trails.
- Manage a goat grazing contract for abatement of approximately one thousand four hundred (1,400) acres of City owned open space and parkland.
- Manage Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant.
- Manage Chabot Space and Science Center fuel reduction project for Pallid Manzanita preservation.

Additionally the Vegetation Management Unit staff have or are in the process of developing and implementing the following procedures and processes to increase efficiencies that contribute to both preventative and fiscal outcomes:

- Provide training on proper inspection techniques for conducting inspections, documentation of findings and reporting for Field Operations staff.
- As part of Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC), the Vegetation Management Unit will develop and implement training for all Battalion Chiefs on reviewing field inspections and inspection findings.
- Provide ongoing training for FOB personnel on the use of the Department's inspection database, to ensure accurate data entry for inspection reports, and billing.

- Work collaboratively with the Finance Department/Revenue Management Bureau to automate the billing process through the Oracle Finance system. This process will ensure that "outstanding balance due" notices will be automatically generated in Oracle and that 90-day delinquent accounts are referred to the Collections Unit.

FY 2015-2016 OFD/WPAD Program Accomplishments

OFD continues to work closely with all other large public entity property owners, including the California Department of Transportation, P.G. & E., and East Bay Regional Park District to reduce fuel loads, create emergency vehicle access if needed in the event of a fire, and to maintain roadside clearance around the property perimeters. Specific program accomplishments for 2015-2016 are:

Vegetation Management Program: this program has produced the following statistics;

- 99 percent of all improved and unimproved properties were inspected;
- 22 contracts were completed for City of Oakland-owned properties;
- 3 contracts were completed for non-compliant privately-owned properties; and
- Up to 93 percent compliance was achieved by season's end.

Goat Grazing- City Council approved a multi-year goat grazing contract with EcoSystems Concepts to provide more than three thousand five hundred (3,500) goats for hazardous fuel removal in six (6) City of Oakland open space areas and parklands. Completed goat grazing has cleared hazardous fuels on approximately one thousand four hundred (1,400) acres annually in the WPAD and will continue for two (2) more seasons.

Chipping Program- A total of 11 chipping and debris removal contracts were completed.

Roadside Treatment- Roadside treatment conducted along major egress routes located in the WPAD. Removal of broom by hand pulling is resulting in a reduced hazard.

Roving Fire Patrols- On Red Flag day, Roving Fire Patrols were dispersed throughout the Oakland hills as an increased prevention effort for early detection of a possible wildfire.

Public Outreach and Wildfire Prevention Education- The Vegetation Management Unit completed six (6) volunteer work days in the Oakland hills, in which participants gathered in designated high fire areas to remove overgrown vegetation that presented immediate fire danger. Participants included members of church groups, local high schools, local colleges, and citizen neighborhood groups.

The Unit participated in the Annual Fire Safety Day in October 2015 at Lake Merritt with over 400 elementary school children in attendance.

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OFD/WPAD Partnership Accomplishments

The partnerships that have been established over the years have resulted in a more cognizant, fire-safe community and the establishment of defensible spaces that are less prone to burn due to prevention efforts such as advanced planning.

Public entities such as East Bay Regional Park District, Oakland Unified School District, California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), and East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) are working continuously to abate parcels throughout the high fire hazard area. CalTrans is removing dead and dying trees from the freeway roadsides and providing a 20 to 30 foot roadside clearance along Highways 13 and 24. The message of year-round compliance is finally an obtainable goal throughout the WPAD. Information is provided to the property owners throughout the high fire hazard zone on how to abate their properties, and replace vegetation that requires less maintenance.

California Department of Transportation (CalTrans): Clearance is being provided along Highways 13, 24, and parts of 580. The Oakland Fire Department has provided CalTrans with a scope of work that will result in the thinning of trees and a reduction of ground fuels.

Shepherd Canyon Project: OFD provided roadside clearance along Shepherd Canyon Road, Escher Road, Bagshotte Road and part of Westover Road. Ground fuel and dead / dying vegetation were removed from the lower and upper meadows. Vegetation was cleared from the railroad side (bike path) located on the Robles side of Shepherd Canyon Road.

Program Goals:

Continue the process to create strategic fuel break systems that can be used to compartmentalize and dampen fire progression patterns across large expanses of wildland, transforming them into more manageable fire control areas. This can be accomplished by working with community groups and other public entities to promote the neighborhood defensible space programs, hazardous fuels management projects, and vegetation management inspections.

Remove the build-up of non-native vegetation from the canyons throughout the high fire hazard area. This can be achieved by working collaboratively with other large property stakeholders including the East Bay Regional Park District, U.C. Berkeley, P.G. & E, Oakland Unified School District, CalTrans, and EBMUD.

The implementation of effective and ongoing vegetation management programs and services can substantially reduce the likelihood of injuries, loss of life and property. The Fire Department continues to work with internal and external agencies to implement the following objectives:

- Public education to help create fire safe and fire resistant communities;
- Protection of property and lives - reduce the risk of fire, loss of life and property;

- Enhance and maintain partnerships with large property owners/public entities;
- Act in observance and compliance with environmental issues and concerns;
- Take action on violations and implement lien procedures as necessary;
- Conduct citizen volunteer fuel reduction workdays in spring 2016 in parklands;
- Increase public awareness by property owners of policies and procedures, and their understanding of the goal of enforcement, which is to protect lives and structures.

The most important aspect for OFD and the WPAD is the extremely positive relationship that has been established with the community and the large parcel owners within the WPAD.

Emphasis on year-round compliance should also require year-round availability of staff performing inspections, attending community meetings, and conducting activities in schools. Every opportunity to provide Oakland residents with information and education helps achieve the mission of maintaining fire safe communities.

Based upon these facts, staff recommends continued support for the implementation of vegetation management programs/projects within the City of Oakland.

FISCAL IMPACT

This is an informational report only and does not have a fiscal impact.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The Vegetation Management Unit continues to inform the public of the necessity and requirement of Fire Code compliance. The residents within the designated high fire severity zone receive informative annual mailers, and have access to website postings and diagrams. Staff conducts presentations monthly at both the WPAD and Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) meetings to address Fire Code compliance standards and defensible space requirements.

COORDINATION

Staff coordinated with the Office of the City Attorney, Controller's Bureau and Office of the City Auditor in preparation of this report.

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SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

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

Environmental: The Oakland Fire Department Vegetation Management Unit is working on the implementation and enforcement of efficient management strategies to ensure we reduce fuel loads and minimize the probability of a fire event prior to the peak of regional fire season. Fewer fires result in less land destruction, reduced damage to infrastructure, and reduced air pollution produced by smoke.

Social Equity: A fire safe and healthy environment protects life and property, thus benefiting the entire City.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff recommends acceptance of this informational report from the Oakland Fire Department's Vegetation Management Unit regarding the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) and the ongoing efforts to prevent wildfires in the City of Oakland for Fiscal Year 2015-2016.

For questions regarding this report, please contact Vincent Crudele, Vegetation Management Supervisor, at 510-238-7391.

Respectfully submitted,



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