



# AGENDA REPORT


**TO:** Jestin D. Johnson  
City Administrator

**FROM:** Damon Covington  
Fire Chief, Fire Dept

**SUBJECT:** Goat Grazing Services for Vegetation  
Management

**DATE:** January 29, 2024

City Administrator Approval

  
Jestin Johnson (Feb 14, 2024 19:47 PST)

Date: Feb 14, 2024

## RECOMMENDATION

**Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution: (1) Waiving The Fixed, Sealed Bid, Price-Based Bid process; and (2) Authorizing The City Administrator To Enter Into A Professional Services Agreement With Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. (ECI) For Goat Grazing Services For A Two Year Term Starting April 1, 2024 through March 31, 2026, In An Amount Not To Exceed One Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,600,000.00) With An Option To Extend the Agreement For Two Additional Years In An Amount Not To Exceed One Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,600,000.00) And Without Return to Council, For A Total Contract Amount Not To Exceed Three Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3,200,000.00) For The Entire Four Year Period**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Goat grazing has become an important part of the vegetation management strategy employed by the Oakland Fire Department (OFD). Goats are deployed into the various open space areas within the City and are allowed to graze until enough vegetation is removed to reduce the threat of fire at that location. OFD is seeking Council approval to enter into a professional services agreement with Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. (ECI) for an initial two-year term (April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2026), with the option to extend for two additional years, without exceeding the total contract amount not-to-exceed Three Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3,200,000.00) for the four year period, and without returning to Council for approval.

On November 10, 2023 a Request for Proposals (RFP) was released and opened for a period of 28 calendar days. The RFP announcement was published in the Oakland Tribune, posted on the City of Oakland's website, and distributed through iSupplier. Additionally, direct contact was made to inform vendors of the RFP. After a review of the five proposals received, Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. was identified as the vendor most responsive and qualified to meet all requirements of the RFP.

## **BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY**

Goat grazing has become an important part of the vegetation management strategy employed by OFD. Goats are deployed into the various open space areas within the City and are allowed to graze until enough vegetation is removed to reduce the threat of fire at that location. Herders are required to be on-site to ensure that the goats only eat invasive or undesirable plants and are restricted from grazing protected or endangered flora (identified by pre-grazing site visits and discussion with local community stewardship groups). The resulting grazing activity provides a firebreak that reduces the speed at which a wildland fire can travel horizontally and threaten nearby structures and private property.

The Oakland City Council has approved numerous resolutions since 2006 for the purpose of using goat grazing as a means of fire prevention by reducing hazardous vegetation that can serve as fuel in a fire event.

- In 2006, the City Council approved [Resolution No. 80074 C.M.S.](#), to enter a two (2) year contract with ECI.
- In 2010, the City Council approved [Resolution No. 82798 C.M.S.](#), to enter a four (4) year contract with ECI.
- In 2016, the City Council approved [Resolution No. 85940 C.M.S.](#) to enter a two (2) year and six (6) month contract with ECI.
- In 2018, the City Council approved [Resolution No. 87219 C.M.S.](#) to enter a three and a half (3.5) year contract with ECI with an option to extend for an additional eighteen (18) months.

To date, ECI has provided excellent services to the City of Oakland. ECI significantly reduced the threat of fire by successfully managing fuel reduction on more than one thousand (1,000) acres of open space and park lands located within the wildland urban interface (WUI) areas of Oakland. Because vegetation regrows annually, a new contract is needed to continue grazing practices to prevent possible fire events in the Oakland hills. California Fire Code, Chapter 49 requires that properties be maintained in a fire safe condition year-round, including City owned parcels.

## **ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

Goat grazing services are more efficient than human crews in terms of cost and time. More ground can be cleared quickly because hundreds or thousands of goats can be utilized at the same time, grazing 24 hours a day. Additionally, goat grazing allows for easier and safer access to areas difficult for mechanical or hand crew removal due to slope inclination and terrain.

This item aligns with the citywide priority of providing **holistic community safety**, as goats are a proven tool to prevent the start and spreading of wildfires.

Goat grazing is the most cost-effective way to clear large areas of hazardous fuel loads in the hills area. Based on 2023 figures, the average cost for goats to clear one (1) acre of land to a

height of four (4) inches or less, as required by Sections 4907 through 4910 of the California Fire Code, is approximately \$600 per acre. This cost is less than the estimated cost of fuel reduction by human crews, which averaged over \$8,000 per acre. Therefore, goat grazing services are the most effective and fiscally responsible method of fuel reduction in areas where goat grazing is appropriate.

### ***RFP Process and Review***

An RFP was issued by the OFD on November 10, 2023, with proposals due on December 8, 2023. The Local and Small Local Business Enterprise Program (L/SLBE) was waived by Contracts and Compliance after conducting the availability analysis of local firms for goat grazing services. A total of five (5) firms responded to the RFP. The responding firms are listed in alphabetical order: Capra Environmental Services Corps, Chasin Goat Grazing LLC, Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. (ECI), Goats R Us, and Starcreek Land Stewards.

A panel of three Oakland Fire Department staff evaluated the proposals using criteria which included relevant experience, qualifications, organization, approach, cost effectiveness, and responsiveness to the RFP. Upon review of the five proposals received, Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. (ECI) was identified as the most qualified based on the RFP criteria, completeness of their proposal, and demonstrated history of successful and timely implementation of goat grazing services.

### ***Basis for Contract with ECI***

Adopting the attached resolution will enable the City to enter into a professional services agreement with ECI for goat grazing services which provide firebreaks that reduce the speed at which a wildland fire can travel horizontally and threaten nearby structures and private property. The City sought firms capable of providing the scope of services as briefly summarized below.

- A herd large enough to graze up to approximately 1,200 acres annually and on-site shepherds twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week when grazing services are being provided.
- Have resources and procedures in place for herd care and veterinary treatment.
- Have experience, knowledge, and policies to minimize impacts to protected/endangered species that may be encountered on City-owned parcels.
- Demonstrated ability and experience to engage with local community group stewards of open parkland spaces.

After careful review of the five proposals received, staff recommends awarding the goat grazing contract for fire prevention and mitigation to ECI. ECI personnel is uniquely qualified as the main project lead is a retired fire fighter with 30 years of service in the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire Department. This knowledge of fire prevention and suppression, coupled with over 20 years of managing grazing techniques with portable fencing and water systems, brings an added lens to managing goat grazing for the purpose of fire prevention and mitigation.

The other project lead is an Oakland resident and former Oakland employee with over 30 years of experience supervising City crews and volunteers in Oakland's open space parklands. He

also has a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from UC Berkeley, which is beneficial for identifying and protecting endangered/protected species.

Due to their longstanding work in Oakland, ECI has developed deep relationships with local community groups that steward the open parklands of Oakland. ECI provided an extensive response detailing each of the grazing areas and corresponding local groups that they communicate with.

ECI has approximately 9,000 goats and will deploy a total of about 4,500 goats to Oakland over the course of the grazing season. ECI's proposal also provided a detailed description of their veterinary care, immunizations and disease testing that met all the requirements of the RFP.

Due to the complexity of managing the effective and proper implementation of the vegetation management program that meets fuel reduction needs and ensures the City of Oakland is in compliance with various federal and state environmental, endangered/protected species, health and safety, and veterinary care requirements, staff recommends that it is in the best interests of the City to award the contract to ECI.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The total one-time cost to implement this project for the initial term of the contract (April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2026) is \$1,600,000. Partial funding for year 1 is included in the FY2023-24 budget in General Purpose Fund (1010), Vegetation Management Organization (20371), Vegetation Management Project (1004383). The remaining amount of year 1 and the full amount of year 2 will need to be included in future budgets contingent upon the availability of funding and Council adoption.

Funding for the optional two-year term (April 1, 2026 - March 31, 2028) is contingent upon the availability of funding in future City of Oakland budgets.

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST**

The City's procurement system iSupplier was used for distribution of the RFP. The RFP was also formally advertised in the Oakland Tribune and an announcement email about the release of the RFP was sent to over 20 goat grazing firms. These efforts resulted in five proposals being submitted, which is two more proposals than the previous three proposals received (66% increase) during the last RFP for goat grazing services.

### **COORDINATION**

This report and legislation have been reviewed by the Office of the City Attorney, Budget Bureau, and the Department of Workplace and Employment Standards.

## **PAST PERFORMANCE, EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP**

ECI has consistently provided exemplary service to the City of Oakland since the mid-1990s. Their most recent contract was for the 2023 fire season, which resulted in almost 1,200 acres being grazed and minimized the number of incidents in the Oakland Hills high fire severity zones while saving the City thousands of dollars in fire-related response activity in these areas.

ECI's operation provides twenty-four (24) hour supervision with onsite shepherds and continual veterinary evaluation and care. Its operation maintains the highest level of care for its herd animals. They employ a full-time certified forester to monitor grazing and to ensure overgrazing does not occur and threatened or protected plant species are isolated from the herd to prevent damage or loss. ECI is environmentally conscious and sensitive to issues such as erosion, protection of native species, and preservation of riparian habitat.

ECI's past practice has demonstrated its willingness to modify operations, based on the threat of fire and fuel load. ECI responds immediately when changes in the grazing schedule occur, relocating a herd to address overgrown vegetation that threatens a neighborhood and/or City infrastructure, as required.

## **SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES**

***Economic:*** Investing in cost-effective goat grazing services to mitigate fire risk and spread has an economic benefit in addition to saving lives and homes in the wildland urban interface of the Oakland Hills. The 1991 Oakland Hills fire reportedly cost \$1.5B in damages, which when adjusted for inflation, is \$7.4B according to the National Centers for Environmental Information.

***Environmental:*** Goat grazing is an environmentally friendly strategy that introduces livestock and fire safety management agricultural practices to the City of Oakland, leading to a fire safe and healthy environment that benefits the entire City by reducing the chance of wildfire. Efficient management and enforcement strategies help to ensure the Oakland Fire Department is able to reduce fuel loads before the peak of the regional fire season, thereby protecting life and property. Additionally, reducing potential wildfires will result in less land destruction from fires and reduced air pollution produced by smoke.

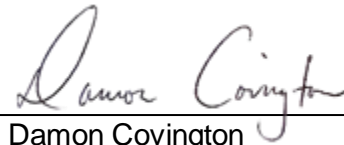
***Social Equity:*** The goat grazing technique allows for the preservation of local open spaces that are available for all Oakland citizens to use. This fire prevention method keeps our parks and open spaces clear and available for activities such as biking, hiking, dog walking, and picnicking.

**ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL**

Staff Recommends That The City Council Adopt A Resolution: (1) Waiving The Fixed, Sealed Bid, Price-Based Bid process; and (2) Authorizing The City Administrator To Enter Into A Professional Services Agreement With Ecosystems Concepts, Inc. (ECI) For Goat Grazing Services For A Two Year Term Starting April 1, 2024 through March 31, 2026, In An Amount Not To Exceed One Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,600,000.00) With An Option To Extend the Agreement For Two Additional Years In An Amount Not To Exceed One Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,600,000.00) And Without Return to Council, For A Total Contract Amount Not To Exceed Three Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$3,200,000.00) For The Entire Four Year Period

For questions regarding this report, please contact Scott Kim, Program Analyst III, at 510-238-7664.

Respectfully submitted,



Damon Covington  
Fire Chief

Prepared by:  
Scott Kim, Program Analyst III  
Fire Prevention Bureau