

City of Laguna Beach

AGENDA BILL

No. \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Date: 7/23/19

**SUBJECT: WILDFIRE MITIGATION AND FIRE SAFETY SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT**

**SUMMARY OF THE MATTER**

On December 11, 2018, the City Council approved the formation of a Subcommittee on Wildfire Mitigation and Fire Safety comprised of Mayor Whalen and Councilmember Sue Kempf to work with the City Manager and other staff to undertake the following tasks:

1. Assess the City’s current level of risk and exposure to wildfires;
2. Research and document the programs, rules and regulations currently in place to mitigate wildfire risk and promote fire safety in the City;
3. Identify the current annual cost to the City for its wildfire mitigation measures and fire safety programs;
4. Identify and prioritize additional programs, mitigation measures, staffing and equipment needed to further reduce the risk of loss of life and property damage from wildfires and the cost to implement them;
5. Develop an action plan to implement as many of the items identified in item four above as possible, along with any necessary changes to the City’s ordinances, rules and regulations or state law; and
6. Develop a plan to fund the recommended improvements.

To complete these tasks, the Subcommittee has been meeting twice a month since January 2019. As summarized below, the Subcommittee gathered information from other wildfires and was briefed by experts regarding wildfire risks and responses in the State.

On January 23, 2019, Mayor Whalen and City staff toured the City of Paradise which was destroyed by a wind-driven fire that killed 85 people and destroyed over 18,000 structures. This tour, led by representatives of the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services and a CalFire incident commander, provided valuable insight as to how similar Paradise and Laguna Beach are in certain respects and how vulnerable Laguna Beach is to a similar devastating event.

(Continued)

**RECOMMENDATION:** See recommendations on pages three and four of the agenda bill.

Appropriations Requested: \$ Various Submitted By: Mayor Bob Whalen & Councilmember Sue Kempf

Fund: \_\_\_\_\_

Attachments: Wildfire Mitigation and Fire Safety Rpt Coordinated with: Multiple Staff Members

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
John Pietig, City Manager

In addition to the Paradise trip, certain staff members and the Subcommittee members were briefed on the Woolsey Fire that occurred in Malibu and surrounding areas in November 2018, which burned approximately 97,000 acres and destroyed 1,643 structures. Again, there are parallels to Laguna Beach with Malibu being a coastal community with limited ingress and egress and similar vegetation issues and climate conditions. The Subcommittee has incorporated the lessons from the fires that struck Paradise and Malibu into several possible action items that are outlined in the report.

Finally, the Fire Chief and the City's Emergency Operations Coordinator attended the Governor's Emergency Management Summit in Sacramento on June 3 to learn more about statewide efforts and possible grant funding for wildfire mitigation measures, which helped frame certain analysis and recommendations in the report.

The attached report examines some of the risks, key processes and infrastructure that are associated with a wildfire event here in Laguna Beach. The report includes sections regarding fire risk, vegetation management, emergency alert systems, evacuation, resources, infrastructure and funding. The report also provides a series of possible action items to be considered for implementation in three phases - short (one to two years), medium (three to five years) and long (more than five years) terms that are summarized in Table 1 of the report titled "Possible Action Items". Possible strategies to fund the actions are identified in Section 7 of the report.

The Subcommittee recommends City Council approval of the actions identified in the report and the funding plan for the short and medium terms by adopting the recommendations numbered 1, 2 and 3 set forth on the following page. The Subcommittee also recommends City Council approval of recommendation 4 designed to address possible long-term actions.

The Subcommittee wishes to acknowledge and thank the following team members who contributed significantly to the development of this report:

John Pietig, City Manager; Shohreh Dupuis, Assistant City Manager/Director of Public Works; Gavin Curran, Director of Administrative Services; Wade Brown, Undergrounding Program Manager; Mike Garcia, Fire Chief.; Jeff Calvert, Police Captain; Jordan Villwock, Emergency Operations Coordinator; and Mike Rhode, Wildland Fire Defense Consultant.

**\*\* RECOMMENDATIONS CONSOLIDATED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES \*\***

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended by the Subcommittee of Mayor Whalen and Councilmember Kempf that the City Council:

1. Accept the Wildfire Mitigation and Fire Safety Report and conceptually approve the possible action items summarized in the matrix shown on pages 11-23 of the report;
2. Take the following actions to implement the items identified in the Short-Term category of the report by:
  - a. Directing the City Manager to utilize anticipated grant funds to develop a comprehensive outreach program to provide evacuation information, alert and warning systems, and disaster preparedness materials;
  - b. Appropriating \$200,000 of ongoing funds from the Measure LL Fund;
  - c. Appropriating \$85,000 of ongoing funds from the Parking Fund;
  - d. Appropriating \$137,000 in available General Fund balance and \$320,000 in available Measure LL Fund balance for one-time expenditures over the next two years;
  - e. Authorizing the use of \$1 million per year of the Measure LL funds earmarked for undergrounding for FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21;
  - f. Redirecting the previously approved \$1 million of additional payment to CalPERS in FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21, and appropriating this funding towards the Short-Term action items;
  - g. Restructuring the “Side Fund Loan” to repay the \$1.5 million owed to the Street Lighting Fund in FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21, and appropriating this funding toward the Short-Term action items;
  - h. Appropriating \$693,000 in available Parking Fund balance to cover the remainder of the estimated funding for one-time Short-Term items and directing the City Manager to utilize up to \$693,000 in mid-year savings in FY 2019-20, if available, to repay the Parking Fund;
  - i. Adding a Defensible Space Inspector position to the current year budget to assist both the Fire and Police Departments with fuel modification maintenance compliance, outreach and citizen disaster preparedness;
  - j. Directing the City Manager to submit a letter to the Water Districts requesting that the action items in the report regarding water district improvements be programmed into their capital improvement program; and
  - k. Continuing the Wildfire Mitigation and Fire Safety Subcommittee for another year until August 1, 2020 and directing the City Manager to provide quarterly progress updates to the City Council during the next year.
3. Approve the financial plan required to implement the possible action items identified in the Medium-Term category of the report by:
  - a. Directing the City Manager to return to the City Council with a plan to increase parking revenues needed for the Medium-Term action items, which also will eventually assist with funding Long-Term items;

- b. Beginning in FY 2021-22, appropriating one-half of the total annual estimated Measure LL revenue for undergrounding and fire safety measures;
- c. Beginning in FY 2022-23, appropriating \$1 million per year from the Street Lighting and Utility Fund for undergrounding and fire safety measures; and
- d. Directing the City Manager to continue seeking grants for fuel modification purposes and other grant-eligible items.

4. Approve the following actions to address Long-Term category of the report by:

- a. Directing the City Manager to work with California Public Utilities Commission, State Legislature, Caltrans, County of Orange, OCTA, Southern California Edison, and other federal and state agencies, to pursue funding for undergrounding utilities along Laguna Canyon Road that can leverage City revenues without increasing taxes;
- b. Authorizing the transfer of up to \$100,000 of previously appropriated funding for Laguna Canyon Road Master plan to develop a cost/benefit analysis regarding potential City acquisition of Laguna Canyon Road from Caltrans to facilitate undergrounding and to resolve ongoing debates with Caltrans regarding how to manage the road;
- c. Directing the City Manager to work with participative neighborhoods to develop plans and incentives to underground utilities through assessment districts;
- d. Directing the City Manager to continue to pursue the acquisition of Rule 20A credits from other cities and counties to expedite undergrounding; and
- e. Directing the Subcommittee to continue to work with staff on identifying other revenue sources and funding strategies to provide for the Long-Term action items.