



Susan Wengraf
Councilmember District 6

CONSENT CALENDAR
October 15, 2019

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Councilmember Wengraf
Subject: Declaring Wildfire Prevention and Safety a Top Priority in the City of Berkeley

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution declaring Wildfire Prevention and Safety a Top Priority in the City of Berkeley

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None

BACKGROUND

The East Bay hills are home to extremely high fire hazards due to proximity to park land where the fuel load is high; narrow, curvy roads, hampering access by first responders and obstructing efficient evacuation routes; and steep topography and changing weather conditions. On April 23, 2019 Governor Newsom held a press conference in Berkeley, at the edge of Tilden Park, restating his declaration of a state of emergency regarding wildfires in California. Historically, California is at high risk of wildfire and the Governor was dedicating new resources to wildfire prevention. The Governor, in choosing the location for his press conference, was no doubt aware of Berkeley's history.

In 1923, a wildfire swept through north Berkeley, ultimately destroying approximately 600 homes, including churches, schools, libraries, and student living quarters. At that time, the population of Berkeley was 52,000. Today, the population density has more than doubled. In 1980, a fire in Berkeley's Wildcat Canyon destroyed 5 homes and then, on October 17, 1991, a fierce and destructive wildfire consumed southeast Berkeley and Oakland, claiming 25 lives and reducing approximately 3,000 structures to ashes. Had the wind direction not shifted, it is likely that many more people would have died and more of Berkeley would have been destroyed.

Since 1991, due to climate change, wildfires have become larger, hotter, more destructive, and more difficult to control. Vulnerable communities throughout the state have been ravaged. Potentially greater risk exists today not only in the Berkeley Hills but to neighborhoods between the hills and the Bay, as evidenced by the total destruction of Coffey Park in the 2017 Tubbs Fire. Berkeley is ranked at the same risk

level of many of the cities that have already been decimated by fire. Berkeley's risk is ranked as the highest designation in the state.

Berkeley is also at extreme risk for a devastating earthquake on the Hayward Fault, which cuts right through Berkeley's high fire severity zone; when fire ensues it will cause even further destruction to life, property and further challenge the City's resiliency.

It is time for Berkeley to acknowledge our risk and make wildfire prevention and safety a top priority. Our full commitment, by resolution, will allow us to move forward with projects and programs to achieve our shared goals of wildfire prevention and safety; ensure wildfire prevention and safety are reflected in allocation of resources and city policies; and make certain wildfire prevention and safety are addressed as the highest priority in the next updates to the City's General Plan, Climate Action Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, Resiliency Strategy, 2050 Vision and any other plans where it may be appropriate.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

This item supports the City's environmental sustainability goals. Fire prevention is critical for environmental sustainability. In 2018, California wildfires emitted as much carbon dioxide as an entire year's worth of California's electricity according to a November 30, 2018 press release from the U.S Department of the Interior.

CONTACT PERSON

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Council District 6

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Attachments:

- 1: Resolution

RESOLUTION NO. ##,###-N.S.

Declaring Wildfire Prevention and Safety a Top Priority in the City of Berkeley

WHEREAS, wildfires have grown larger and increased in intensity over the last several decades due to climate change and increased density in the wildland/urban interface (WUI), and

WHEREAS, areas of the City of Berkeley are designated by CAL FIRE as having the highest rating of "very high severity" risk to wildfire, and

WHEREAS, on March 22, 2019, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency in of California with regard to wildfire risk, and

WHEREAS, since 1922, more than a dozen major wildfires have impacted the Berkeley hills, resulting in extensive damage, economic harm and loss of life. The 1991 Oakland/Berkeley firestorm, considered the third most deadly fire in California, burned over 1,500 acres, caused the deaths of 25 people and injured over 150 people, and

WHEREAS, wildfires in this decade are larger, faster and more destructive than in 1991, potentially causing greater risk to not only the Berkeley Hills but to neighborhoods between the hills and the Bay, as evidenced by the total destruction of Coffey Park in the 2017 Tubbs Fire, and

WHEREAS, Berkeley is also at extreme risk for a devastating earthquake on the Hayward Fault, which cuts right through Berkeley's high fire severity zone; when fire ensues it will cause even further destruction to life, property and further challenge the City's resiliency, and

WHEREAS, when a wildfire destroys a neighborhood, the short and long-term economic impact multiplies exponentially. The 1991 Berkeley/Oakland Tunnel Fire resulted in the loss of 2,900 structures and 25 lives. The 1923 North Berkeley fire destroyed about 600 homes and burned all the way to the corner of Hearst and Shattuck, before the winds shifted.

WHEREAS, major disasters such as the 2017 Tubbs Fire and the 2018 Camp Fire severely strain the limited housing stock in a community when survivors are forced to replace housing destroyed in the wildfire. Berkeley already has an affordable housing crisis, and nearby communities would be hard pressed to accommodate thousands of residents displaced by a wildfire or other major disaster, and

WHEREAS, a wildfire in the Berkeley hills threatens the entire City of Berkeley, both hill areas and flat areas and impacts air quality, loss of housing, injury as well as the tragic loss of life.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council pass this resolution making wildfire prevention and safety a stated top priority for the City of Berkeley.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that wildfire prevention and safety be addressed as the highest priority in the next updates to the City's General Plan, Climate Action Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, Resiliency Strategy, 2050 Vision and any other plans where it may be appropriate; and be reflected in city policies and allocation of resources.