



City of Rolling Hills

INCORPORATED JANUARY 24, 1957

2 Portuguese Bend Road
Rolling Hills, CA 90274

AGENDA
Special Fire Fuel Management
Committee Meeting

**FIRE FUEL MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**
Wednesday, July 21, 2021

CITY OF ROLLING HILLS
6:30 PM

Executive Order

All Committee members will participate in-person wearing masks per Los Angeles County Health Department's Health Officer Order effective Saturday, July 17, 2021. The meeting agenda and live audio will be available on the City's website: <https://www.rolling-hills.org/government/agenda/index.php>

Members of the public may come in to City Hall wearing masks, per the new Health Officer's Order. Zoom teleconference will not be available for this meeting, but members of the public can submit written comments in real-time by emailing the City Clerk's office at cityclerk@cityofrh.net. Your comments will become part of the official meeting record. You must provide your full name, but please do not provide any other personal information that you do not want to be published.

1. PARTICIPANTS

2. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

2.A. [RECEIVE AND FILE THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO QUESTION FROM FIRE FUEL COMMITTEE ON THE CANYON PRIORITY LIST.](#)

RECOMMENDATION: Receive and file.

2.B. [RECEIVE A PRESENTATION FROM COUNCIL MEMBER MIRSCH ON TWO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL FOR FIRE FUEL REDUCTION IN THE CANYONS AND PROVIDE DIRECTION TO STAFF.](#)

RECOMMENDATION: Receive presentation and provide direction to staff.

[Council member Mirsch's FF COMMITTEE PROPOSAL. DRAFT.pdf](#)

3. COMMENTS WILL BE TAKEN BY EMAIL IN REAL TIME - PUBLIC COMMENT WELCOME

This is the appropriate time for members of the public to make comments regarding items not listed on this agenda. Pursuant to the Brown Act, no action will take place on any items not on the agenda.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Next meeting: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 04, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chamber, Rolling Hills City Hall, 2 Portuguese Bend Road, Rolling Hills, CA 90274.

Documents pertaining to an agenda item received after the posting of the agendas are available for review in the City Clerk's office or at the meeting at which the item will be considered.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting due to your disability, please contact the City Clerk at (310) 377-1521 at least 48 hours prior to the meeting to enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility and accommodation for your review of this agenda and attendance at this meeting.



City of Rolling Hills

INCORPORATED JANUARY 24, 1957

Agenda Item No.: 2.A
Mtg. Date: 07/21/2021

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: ASHFORD BALL, SENIOR MANAGEMENT ANALYST

THRU: ELAINE JENG P.E., CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: RECEIVE AND FILE THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSE TO QUESTION FROM FIRE FUEL COMMITTEE ON THE CANYON PRIORITY LIST.

DATE: July 21, 2021

BACKGROUND:

The Los Angeles County Fire Department (Fire Department) prioritized 11 canyons from highest wildfire risk to lower wildfire risk within the City of Rolling Hills. The Fire Department assisted the City in preparing a scope of work for the Cal OES/FEMA vegetation management grant. Based on the Fire Department's scope of work, topography, local weather patterns, fuel load, fire history, and density of homes were factors used for the prioritization. Additional considerations for the prioritization included environmental health, natural habitat for wildlife, and stable hillsides for erosion control.

The Fire Department added that canyons that would be at risk from wind driven fires originating from the southwest are Paint Brush Canyon, Portuguese Canyon, Altamira Canyon, and Forrestal Canyon. Based on fire history, these south facing canyons have the highest risk for a wildfire in the future. Canyons that would be at risk during northeast winds are Georgeff Canyon, Purple Canyon, Willow Canyon, Sepulveda Canyon, Blackwater Canyon, John's Canyon, Agua Magna Canyon.

At the June 30, 2021 Fire Fuel Committee meeting, Mayor Pro Tem Black requested the Fire Department to provide feedback on the factors that set priority canyon number four over priority canyon number five or another lower ranked canyon.

DISCUSSION:

In response to Mayor Pro Tem Black's inquiry, the Fire Department reiterated the following factors used to rank the canyons susceptible to the highest risk of wildfires to the lower risks of wildfires:

- Topography
- Local weather patterns
- Fuel load
- Fire history
- Density of homes

- Environmental health
- Natural habitat for wildlife; and
- Stable hillsides for erosion control.

The Fire Department also noted that if they were responsible for mitigating the wildfire risks in the canyons within the City of Rolling Hills, they would apply resources for fuel reduction at the canyons listed in the order of priority. However, in this context, the Fire Department is serving as an advisor as the subject matter expert. The Fire Department noted that the City can accept the Fire Department's advice or decide to apply resources in a different approach.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None. The Fire Department's services are paid for by residents (property tax bill) via participation in the fire district. The Fire Department noted that they will not charge the City for non-routine work (i.e., generating project scope of work for the City's grant, and or serving as the City's advisor in wildfire risk management in the canyons).

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file.

ATTACHMENTS:



City of Rolling Hills

INCORPORATED JANUARY 24, 1957

Agenda Item No.: 2.B
Mtg. Date: 07/21/2021

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: ASHFORD BALL, SENIOR MANAGEMENT ANALYST

THRU: ELAINE JENG P.E., CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: RECEIVE A PRESENTATION FROM COUNCIL MEMBER MIRSCH ON TWO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL FOR FIRE FUEL REDUCTION IN THE CANYONS AND PROVIDE DIRECTION TO STAFF.

DATE: July 21, 2021

BACKGROUND:

At the June and July 2021 City Council meetings, the Fire Fuel Committee presented to the City Council with the recommendation to have the City fund one fire fuel abatement project in the canyons. The City Council provided feedback to the Fire Fuel Committee and the Committee conducted additional discussions and at the June 30, 2021 Committee meeting. The Committee was ready to represent the recommendation to the City Council at the July 12, 2021 City Council meeting but Fire Fuel Committee member and Council member Leah Mirsch requested to hold off on the presentation. She also requested to hold another Fire Fuel Committee meeting on July 21, 2021 so that the Committee can discuss her second recommendation to go along with the first recommendation.

DISCUSSION:

Fire Fuel Committee member Mirsch's second recommendation is detailed in the attachment to this report. A summary of the second recommendation is as follows:

1. The City Council to direct the City Attorney to investigate a new or enhanced ordinance to deal with fire fuel loading in the canyons.
2. Communicate with residents and educate residents on the importance of fire fuel reduction in the canyons to reduce wildfire risks.
3. Designate an area for abatement action using the Fire Departments' priority list.
4. Notify all residents within the designated area that they need to perform fire fuel abatement by a certain date.
5. Property owners within the designated area can (a) perform the abatement work on their own, (b) perform the abatement work with the assistance of the city and render payment upon completion, or (c) do nothing.
6. If property owners elect to do nothing, or fail to authorize the city to work on their property, or fail to remit payment due for remediation work, or does not perform the work on their own by

specified date, the properties would be declared a nuisance and go through the nuisance abatement process.

Fire Fuel Committee member Mirsch is proposing that the City Council consider the first and second recommendations at the July 26, 2021 City Council meeting and that the City Council conduct a comparison of the two approaches for final decision.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Fire Fuel Committee member Mirsch noted that the second recommendation would be a huge undertaking for the city. The City does not have resources available to perform the project management functions recommended. Engagement of a contracted project manager could be considered. Options for possible funding should be explored, including re-allocating funds from other budget categories, application for grants and other.

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive presentation and provide direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS:

[Council member Mirsch's FF COMMITTEE PROPOSAL. DRAFT.pdf](#)

FIRE FUEL COMMITTEE'S CANYON VEGETATION MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATION # 2

DRAFT

BACKGROUND

The city of Rolling Hills is located in an area designated by CAL FIRE to be at the highest risk level for wildfires. Some factors considered in this designation include a history of brushfires in the city (mostly originating outside city borders), miles of canyons containing tons of highly flammable vegetation, steep, rugged terrain and strong wind conditions. All of these conditions not only put us at a higher risk for a wildfire, but also impact firefighting efforts during an event.

Additional characteristics of our city also increase the risk to life and property in the event of a wildfire, including a limited number of evacuation routes, narrow, winding roads impacting first responders' ability to access many properties, and lack of dependable cell service or other communication capabilities (walkie talkie, etc).

California has experienced significant increases in the number, size and severity of wildfires in recent years. Current record drought levels and higher temperatures cause vegetation to dry and become flammable sooner, quickly adding to existing hazardous fire fuel levels. Designated High Fire Zones have essentially become tinderboxes, with the risk of a catastrophic fire and accompanied threat to life and property increasing at alarming rates.

Over the years the city has recognized the relationship between proper vegetation management and fire safety. In addition to annual inspections conducted by L.A. County Fire Department, reminders are routinely sent by the city to all residents, stressing the importance of properly maintaining the vegetation on their properties to reduce fire hazards. To assist residents in their efforts the city's solid waste hauler provides two free unlimited green waste pick-ups per year, and one free 40-yard haul-away container per property per year.

In 2015, in response to the increased number and severity of wildfires in California, the city enacted an ordinance (Ordinance No. 345 and Chapter 830) finding dead trees, shrubs, and other plants a fire hazard, potentially injurious to safety and general welfare of the public, and therefore declared a public nuisance. The dead vegetation was required to be removed at the property owner's expense, and failure to abate or correct the public nuisance would be handled in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 8.24.

Note: in 2019 the ordinance was updated to include live tumbleweeds, further clarification of types of dead vegetation, and an exclusion of slope areas steeper than 2:1 (50%).

Sometime during this period L.A. County Fire also increased the area covered in their annual inspection from 100 ft from a structure to 200 ft. And although this was a welcome revision, on properties with the acreages found in Rolling Hills, it still leaves huge amounts of area to be maintained (or not) at an owner's discretion.

All of these efforts resulted in improved mitigation around homes and in other easily accessible areas of the property. But the size and topography of many of our lots can create situations where large areas of their properties are not in owners' everyday view, and/or in steep canyons with limited accessibility. In those

situations there has been minimal action to reduce hazardous fuel levels, and in many cases, vegetation in the canyons has grown unabated for decades.

With recent increased publicity and focus on the number of catastrophic fires in California, combined with heightened awareness of the risks posed to our city by the ever-growing amounts of hazardous vegetation in our canyons, the public and the city began to look for ways to address this issue.

The first step seemed to be to find out the various reasons why so many property owners – who normally maintain most areas of their properties in a beautiful manner - fail to deal with hazardous fire fuels in the canyons located on their property. With that information we could work with the community to explore possible solutions.

To begin the process, the City Council agreed to Councilmember Mirsch's suggestion to hold a Focus Group to obtain information from the community. Councilmember Mirsch was authorized to conduct a Focus Group via Zoom, open to all members of the community on April 14, 2021. City Manager Jeng and Planning Director Elguira helped facilitate the meeting, which was attended by over 30 members of the public. During the first half of the 2+ hour meeting, participants were asked to provide feedback on reasons why so little action has been taken by residents to manage fire fuel in canyons located on their own private property. Many reasons were shared, with the most repeated being cost, difficulty, unsure of proper way to remove vegetation, and lack of awareness that canyon vegetation was their responsibility. In the second half of the meeting, participants were asked to suggest solutions to the problems identified in the first half of the meeting. Many solutions were suggested, including having the city perform and pay for the work, have the city require the residents to do the remediation on their own properties at their own expense, and have the city provide a cost sharing or incentive program to assist property owners.

The complete list of problems and proposed solutions developed from the group, along with a brief report out of the meeting were shared at the April 26th City Council meeting. Also at that meeting the council authorized the Fire Fuel Sub-Committee, comprised of Mayor Pro Tem Black and Councilmember Mirsch, to hold public meetings to continue conversation with the community and develop recommendations to reduce fire fuel levels in our canyons. The first meeting was held on May 5th. The sub-committee continued to meet every 2 weeks and a total of 7 public meetings have been held. One meeting was a field trip, where RHCA Maintenance Supervisor Artie Beckler drove Committee members and city manager (via Kubota) over the community's extensive trail system for an up close look at vegetation in the canyons.

During this series of meetings, the committee - accompanied by plentiful feedback from the public - discussed many issues, including review of existing regulations and enforcement policies, the effectiveness of voluntary vs mandatory policies, who should be responsible for mitigating unsafe conditions on private property, existing grant scope and additional grant possibilities, environmental issues relating to vegetation management, and the identification of opportunities for the city to assist in the effort. A staff recommendation for the city to undertake mitigation action in 1 canyon identified in the Fire Dept's Risk assessment report per year was also considered. All of this information, including the recommendation for a city-sponsored annual mitigation project was shared at the next city council meeting.

DISCUSSION

The single point of agreement throughout all of these discussions has been that the public has strongly indicated it wants the city to enact policies to protect the community from wildfire risks associated with overgrown vegetation in our canyons – and they want us to act with a sense of urgency and do something as quickly as possible. The Fire Fuel Sub-Committee supports their request.

The sub-committee believes, for all of the reasons indicated earlier in this document, that current fire fuel conditions in the canyons, as identified by the L.A. County Fire Dept., rise to the level of posing a threat to the safety of life and property to our residents, and should therefore be addressed as a nuisance.

Following is an outline of suggested policy and action plans in support of that belief. Every attempt has been made to consider the input and differing views received during our meetings, resulting in a “hybrid approach”, with options available for property owners. It is not a “quick fix”, but rather an attempt to create a sustainable solution.

1- The hazardous fuels in the canyons are made up of both living and dead vegetation, but as outlined earlier, currently the city has only declared the presence of dead vegetation, dead palm fronds, and dead or living tumbleweeds to constitute a nuisance. The city has fairly broad powers in designating an unsafe condition to be a nuisance. We should discuss with our city attorney if a specific ordinance to deal with this vegetation is required or recommended, and if so the city would proceed with the normal ordinance development process.

2- Communication and education would obviously be a key function. Property owners need to know what to expect, understand the plan and their options with time to make their choices. Details in this area would be developed if the recommendation is accepted.

3- Designation of an area (canyon) for abatement action would be made using the Fire Dept’s Risk Assessment List. At this time the committee members are in agreement that the canyons identified by the FD as High Risk should be used to determine actions, but are not in agreement with how the order of selection of the canyons would be made. This issue has already been referred to the full council for consideration.

4- Notification to all property owners in the designated area that abatement must be completed by **xx/xx/xx** date. A reasonable amount of time would be allowed.

5- Property owners with hazardous levels of vegetation would be given the option of:

- A) Performing the abatement work themselves, to be completed by the **xx/xx/xx** date
- B) Joining a city-lead effort where **the city would**
 - obtain scope of work specifications
 - obtain bids for entire job (by property) and select the vendor(s) to perform the work
 - provide the cost of the work to each property owner
 - determine start date
 - ensure quality of work meets contractual specifications

The **property owner would be required to**

- by a specified date, pay to the city the amount due for the work on their property
- sign forms authorizing the city and its selected vendor(s) to enter onto their property and perform the specified work

C) Do nothing

6 – If a property owner with hazardous levels of vegetation decides to do nothing, fails to authorize the city to work on their property, fails to remit payment due for remediation work, or does not perform their own abatement work by the specified date, then the property would be declared a nuisance, and the city would begin nuisance abatement process (Chapter 824)

Maintenance

This process would be one time only, in each of the canyons specified as High Risk by the Fire Dept. Going forward, all required maintenance will be the total responsibility of the property owner. If unsafe conditions re-occur on the property and a nuisance is declared, the city will begin the nuisance abatement process

Fiscal Impact

This would obviously be a huge undertaking for the city. Currently the city does not have the resources available to perform the project management functions recommended. Engagement of a contracted Project Manager could be considered. It is probably safe to say that funding levels in the current budget would fall significantly short of a project of this size, however Council's approval or amendments to the scope of the recommendation would be required to estimate the level of impact. Options for possible funding opportunities should be explored, including re-allocating funds from other budget categories, application for grants awards, etc.

It should be noted that funds expended under this recommendation would be spent providing administrative assistance to the community, not for any actual work performed on private property.

Recommendation

It is recommended that City Council discuss the actions outlined, and consider whether the proposal will help us improve the safety to life and property in our community by reducing fire fuel in the canyons. Does it create a sustainable solution?

It is also suggested that the council compare this recommendation with that of an earlier pending recommendation for one city-provided mitigation effort per year. The two plans contain very different approaches, including the matter of funding responsibility – the property owner paying to maintain their own property vs the city exercising its legal authority to use public funds on private property for the safety and benefit of the entire community.

The Fire Fuel subcommittee appreciates Council's consideration of our recommendations and looks forward to answering any questions you may have.