

Alameda County Community Wildfire Protection Plan Summary Working Session #4 – Recommendations

1. **Introduction.** Attendees introduced themselves, where they live or work and their perspective, interest or experience with wildfire

- Yeda Altes, Oakland Wildfire Prevention Advisory Commission
- Gil Bendix, Diablo Fire Safe Council
- Fire Chief Kenneth Blonski, East Bay Regional Park District
- Fred Booker, Alameda Master Gardeners
- Shelagh Brodersen, Friends of Garber Park
- Barbara Goldenberg, Shepherd Canyon, Friends of Sausal Creek
- Diane Hill, Oakland Wildfire Prevention Advisory Committee
- Leatha Harris, East Bay Municipal Utilities District
- Jerry Kent, Claremont Canyon Conservancy
- Cheryl Miller, Diablo Fire Safe Council
- Robert Sieben, Hiller Highlands, North Hills Community Association – fire preventions
- Assistant Fire Chief John Swanson, East Bay Regional Park District
- Jay Swardenski, Fremont Fire
- Assistant Fire Marshal Bonnie Terra, Alameda County Fire District
- Judy Thomas, Merritt College Horticultural Program, Sequoyah Heights
- Jay Swardenski, Fremont Fire

2. **Planning Process Recap - What is a CWPP & Why Should Alameda County Have One**

Cheryl Miller, Executive Coordinator, Diablo Fire Safe Council provided an overview of a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The PowerPoint will be made available on the web site www.diablofiresafe.org/ala_co_CWPP.html

A CWPP is a written document, mutually agreed upon by local, state and federal representatives and stakeholders that identifies how a community will reduce its risks from wildland fire. CWPPs are authorized and defined in Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). This Act was passed by Congress on November 21, 2003 and signed into law on December 3, 2003. The HFRA established unprecedented financial incentives for communities to take the lead role in community wildfire protection planning. In order to be federally recognized the CWPP must be signed by three entities: applicable local government (i.e., counties or cities); local fire department(s) and the state entity responsible for forest management – CAL FIRE. Three minimum requirements that also must be met: collaboration; prioritized fuel reduction and treatment of structural ignitability.

As an example, the group reviewed the contents of the Contra Costa CWPP, approved in 2009. They also looked at how the CWPP has been used: to identify and prioritize areas, develop recommendations, find funding and this past year begin to implement education and community projects. (The Contra Costa County plan is at www.diablofiresafe.org/publications.html - CWPP).

Since the group last met we held 3 workshops in Fremont, Oakland and Dublin in July. They were not well attended. A summary is at www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/Workshops_summary.pdf. A presentation was also made to the League of Women Voters (Bay area-wide committee interested in environmental issues).

The eight step planning process, anticipated timeframe, key outcomes, results and deliverables were also reviewed (see www.diablofiresafe.org/pdf/Planning_Overview.pdf for the Overview). We will continue to gather input on risk assessments as we work on Step 6 Recommendations and Priorities.

3. Preliminary Recommendations

The group reviewed preliminary recommendations. The recommendations were organized to focus on each of the existing risk and hazard assessments that had been identified at the last meeting.

1. Recommendations related to risk of fire occurrence included:
 - Borrowing from collaborative partners - volunteer groups such as Garber Park Stewards, Shepherd Canyon, Beaconsfield and Claremont Canyon Conservancy – share ideas on:
 - Information
 - Education
 - Collaborative Planning - local level more detailed assessments and project development
2. Recommendations to address risk of ignitions included:
 - Fire Prevention Education – Smokey Bear, CERT, volunteers in prevention, fire department staff
 - Enforcement – supporting fire investigations and working with law enforcement, defensible space inspections/ enforcement
 - Engineering – equipment safety, fuel reduction activities,
3. Recommendations to address fire weather included:
 - Awareness of hazard conditions – red flag program flags, education, shared responsibility
 - Restrictions on specific uses, certain activities, specific operations or equipment (abatement work) during periods of high fire danger weather
 - Shared responsibility – patrols, community watch type activities,
4. Recommendations to address community at risk hazards included:
 - Reducing surrounding fuels and ignitability of existing homes and structures – from the house out
 - Focus on dense vegetation directly adjacent to homes and homes themselves
 - Weed abatement defensible space inspections and enforcement
 - Home ignition zone improvements (beyond weed abatement or fire code requirements)
 - Reduce structure ignitability
5. Recommendations to further support defensible space programs included:
 - Volunteer activities in community open spaces
 - Chipping programs
 - Green waste pickup
 - Hazardous tree programs
 - “Seed” funding for community projects
6. Recommendations to support improving structure survivability included:
 - Local building standards for remodeling reflective of WUI Chapter 7A adopted by state
 - Educate regarding WUI building standards and existing code requirements – Class A roofs, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, street address numbers.
 - Showcase retrofit techniques and building materials for roofs, gutters, windows, siding, vents, decks, outbuildings,
 - Incentive programs to finance upgrade of existing homes included:
 - Community based: Malibu West FSC - wholesale purchase and installation of materials such as fire safe vents
 - State legislative including incentives for home energy efficiency – upgrade to double pane windows also increase structure survivability for wildfire
7. Recommendations to support new development & construction included:
 - Integrate fire safety into local policies
 - WUI building standard (State Chapter 7A or more stringent) – Roofs, Gutters, Windows, Siding, Vents, Decks, other
 - Local building requirements for fire sprinklers
 - Review of infrastructure design – roads (access for evacuation and emergency equipment), water, underground utilities

- Mechanisms for fuel reduction in community open space (privately or jointly owned)
8. Recommendations to support fuel management on public lands included:
 - Integrating fire & resource management – a lot of collaborative planning work has been done in the region that should be incorporated
 - Share project implementation resources (contractors, equipment, specifications etc.)
 - Share best management practices (BMP) and lessons learned
 - Project & funding support
 9. Recommendations protecting homes, businesses & essential infrastructure at risk included:
 - Expand structure ignition reduction and defensible space activities to businesses and essential infrastructure
 - Identify fuel reduction projects to protect transportation networks and utilities - watershed fuel reduction, roadside clearances, power-line clearance
 10. Recommendations to support Local Preparedness and Firefighting Capability included:
 - Develop local evacuation plans and educate residents on preparedness
 - Participate in and enhance existing CERT/ Neighborhood Watch programs
 - Support continued Support fire department response improvements: mutual aid, wildland fire training, equipment

Discussion of Additional Recommendations

The group discussed the following additional recommendations and concerns:

- Infill new construction: Oakland and other cities are not entirely built out. Development is occurring on previously un-buildable lots in the high hazard areas. Egress is an issue.
 - Ignition sources: More attention needs to be given to overhead powerlines that do not follow roads. These are potential ignition sources. It is difficult to get fire suppression equipment into these areas if there is a fire. It may be beyond a county-wide CWPP's ability to influence that powerlines follow roads, but it should be noted.
 - Outreach: How to reach other organizations to increase community outreach and awareness. Neighborhood Crime Prevention Councils (NCPC) may be a potential partner (Y. Altes has a connection in Oakland; B. Goldenberg is active in Montclair Safety Committee). Need to find common goals.
 - Education structure remodel for ignition resistance: Need information on what can be done on structures without major remodel (to reduce potential damage even if people are not there to fight a fire). Hiller Highlands a good example: R. Sieben toured with community members and showed how the structures could be made more ignition resistant by focusing on:
 - Non ignition zones
 - Vents
 - Bar-b-cues
 - Gaps in sidings
- Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety has a good retrofit checklist with relative costs. See www.disastersafety.org/content/data/file/WF_checklist.pdf Information from the Cedar Fire also provided relative costs for retrofit.
- Funding needs and timeframe: Recommendations need to identify the funding needs and timeframe. What is currently available versus what is needed to address the various issues. Many of the hazards will take long-term commitment to address over many years.
 - Information dissemination partners:
 - Contacting media to help inform homeowners what they can do.
 - Information to Mayor's office and local politicians on what they can do
 - Crime prevention with home-owner associations and Neighborhood Watch block captain network. Many security improvements also improve fire safety – crime

- prevention by environmental design. Oakland Neighborhood Services Division has program.
- Organizations such as California Native Plant Society, Rotary Clubs, Garden Clubs
 - Packages for new homeowners
 - Business improvement districts – point of purchase displays
 - Support from local companies – Starbucks, Peets, Safeway and other stores
 - Facebook – send out information to ask people to friend
- Support: Stuff is not enough – Oakland provided 21,000 door hanger packages with Farmers Insurance last year. Packages of information need support structure for groups of homeowners – block by block to empower people to serve as captains and back-ups.
 - Electronic versions of materials make it easy to distribute – best if comes from “personally known sources” through existing networks. Local filters of good stuff to neighbors from a known neighbor; back up from official sources (fire department, university researchers etc.). Need contact number for follow up questions.
 - Inspection and enforcement mechanisms: Not all cities and parts of Alameda County have mandated inspections and mechanisms to enforce like Oakland and Berkeley. Varies by jurisdiction. In many areas there is not enough fire personnel to inspect. Many have complaint driven inspections that are limited to what can be viewed from the streets. Often the inspections are for weed abatement only through neighborhood preservation or blight ordinances or code enforcement.
 - Evacuation Planning: Alameda County Fire Department is working on evacuation plans for local areas.
 - Partnering with Insurance Companies: Insurance companies can be a big motivator – not insuring or increasing costs can motivate homeowners to take action. Insurance companies also have incentive, better to prevent fire than to have to replace. Residents more likely to pay attention to messages if they also come from insurance companies.
 - Target locations: Target the worst areas, such as broom infestations on Oakland public lands and develop a “adopt a parcel” policy to permit work by volunteers (supervised).
 - Follow-ups to help with “enforcement”: Not all agencies have enforcement mechanisms and need incentives that could include:
 - Programs for disposal
 - Contractor lists of who can do what
 - Removal of lien penalties if work is complete within a certain timeframe
 - Neighborhood volunteers who have permission to work on private land
 - Shared assets
 - Expand urban focus:
 - Grazing as fire control: Focus also on ranch land and public agencies who use cattle grazing for fire control. Some fire agencies have been working with local ranchers to adjust their range management plans to graze closer to roads and fence lines (due to ignition potential) early in the season for fire protection.
 - Wind farms as ignition sources: Operators have to submit wildfire management plans to local fire jurisdictions to address potential ignition risks.
 - Disposal: We are fortunate that our cut/ chipped biomass decomposes faster (year-round) than in some parts of the country since we have no snow.
 - Train-the-trainer programs: Look at CERT programs (CORE in Oakland), and Contractor training for examples of programs where they provide certificates for credibility.
 - Outreach and marketing: use a broad, multi-prong approach to reach people with web, TV, radio, newspaper, e-mail. Use all sorts of venues (such as senior centers), neighbors and trusted friends, as well as messages and support from authorities (fire departments) and experts (researchers such as UC Berkeley).

4. Continued Community Outreach on Risk Assessment and Preliminary Recommendations

The planning process will continue to present to groups and participate in upcoming events to gather additional input on risk assessments and the preliminary recommendations. Planned presentations include to the North Hills Community Association and participation in the 20th Anniversary events related to the Oakland/Berkeley Hills Firestorm.

G. Bendix relayed that he had met with a researcher that was studying the amount of participation in developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Most of the plans had a community outreach component; yet, the researcher's finding was that most community members did not know what the plan were and had not participated. Gil asked all stakeholders to think about the groups they are actively involved in. Many of these groups have missions and concerns that overlap with the CWPP. He encouraged individuals to serve as a go-between to give more people a voice in the plan. Contact C. Miller to set up a presentation or get information about the CWPP you can forward electronically to others in your groups. The information can be customized to meet your group's interests. Gil did this with the League of Women Voter who had a presentation and are very interested in further participation and will include information in the 7 Alameda County league group's newsletters.

A survey will be developed and posted using "survey monkey" to provide another way to get input. C. Miller will prepare information and email it to all stakeholders to send to groups they are active in.

5. Next Meeting

26 January 2012 (Information will be emailed early January)

Topics: Preliminary Draft Action Plan – implementation actions, partners and priorities

For More Information Contact

Cheryl Miller

Diablo Fire Safe Council

DFSCMiller@comcast.net

877-725-6803