Oakland Firesafe Council

7-8:30pm. January 18, 2023

Draft Minutes

Called to order: 7:03pm

Attending: Lin Barron, Ken Benson, Louise Comfort, Olga Crowe, Lynn Derderian

Joe DeVries, Sue Duncan, Debbie Foster, Barbara Goldenberg, Jen Grimm, Michael Hunt, Martin Matarrese, Doug Mosher, Shawn Nevins, Olga Crowe

Jocelyn Mapp, Steve Mendelson, Keara O’Doherty, Sue Piper, Dale Risden, Elizabeth Stage, Nate Stalnaker, Nathan Suslow, Doug Wong, 510-421-0279

There was a board meeting in December, but no general meeting, so there were no minutes to review.

Treasurer’s Report. There is a $40,114 bank balance, of which $13,108 will cover invoices from Placeworks, the MOU attorney, and web design and support, leaving a net of $27,006 of which $16,826 is unencumbered. Moved by Steve Mendelson and seconded by Sue Piper, the report was accepted.

3. Old Business

Oakland Neighborhood Organizing Update- Doug Mosher. They have continued to do a lot of outreach and support, less during the holidays, several scheduled in February. They are also presenting short “public safety announcements” on topics such as Red Flag Warnings, also adding new radio users. Firewise is promoting Firewise communities and working with Jen on firescaping workshops for landscapers and gardeners.

The East Bay Regional Wildfire Prevention Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Update (eastbaywildfire.org)-Elizabeth. The working group members were generally satisfied with the draft MOU, enough that they were sharing it with their jurisdictions’ attorneys to see if these attorneys would recommend it to their governing boards. If that goes smoothly, it will be shared with all the jurisdictions involved; perhaps this will be completed by September. In the meantime, the fire chiefs from Contra Costa County have been working on a model fire code based on the expected state code revisions; they’ve shared it with the fire chiefs and/or Fire Marshals from Alameda County. The rationale is that the fire leadership should be knowledgeable before they present it to their jurisdictions’ governing boards. Having common standards is an important step towards having consistent implementation across jurisdictions.

City of Oakland. Michael Hunt, Oakland Fire Department. Michael gave a summary of the Fire Department’s accomplishments in 2022, notably that there were no wildfire events. The Chief has made filling firefighter positions a high priority so that they can alleviate mandatory overtime. They’ve focused on lateral hiring, recruiting people who have experience in other fire-fighting agencies and want to work in Oakland to attend an Oakland academy; lateral hires are more likely to be successful because they know what’s expected and aren’t shopping for multiple employment offers. OFD is upgrading their equipment, purchasing instead of leasing and saving money by changing past practice. They’re working on staffing up, training, and becoming more efficient and effective in existing and emerging programs, including Emergency Services and MACRO. The Fire Prevention Bureau conducted 27,000 private property inspections with an 88% compliance rate, also 3,300 state-mandated inspections (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.), more than any previous year. A recent federal grant was awarded to install 25 wildfire sensors that will cover all areas of high fire risk in Oakland by May or June, the first example in an urban area.

Olga Crowe, Emergency Management Services. During the recent storms, EMS activated the Emergency Operations Center, at first virtually, during then in person on January 3rd for ten days, then partial for another week. It was all-hands-on deck (vacation recall and overtime) plus CERT volunteers. Major activities included shelter locations and sandbag distribution.

Joe DeVries, City Administrator’s Office. The Climate Fellows are researching compost as a fire prevention mechanism by capturing moisture and conducting an assessment of city facilities to build them out as resilience hubs for all emergencies(warming, drying, resting).

The Vegetation Management Plan is currently expected Fall 2023. They’re continuing to work on moving contract administration for vegetation management to Public Works. From Oakland’s perspective, the regional planning MOU will go forward; they’re providing technical guidance from emergency personnel to the elected officials have and to make sure that they don’t trigger the Brown Act (i.e., that they aren’t circumventing their obligation to do their work in public). Ken responded to Joe’s question about our priorities with agreement that we still need to look at pinch points for evacuation; in addition, we need to conduct road and transportation studies, continue with Zonehaven outreach and education. Lin raised a question on behalf of the OWLS that comes from the efforts of the Friends of Joaquin Miller Park and Friends of Knowland Park as they develop a proposal to CalFire; specifically, we are we working towards an inventory of the trees that need to be removed for the whole City (in the Vegetation Management plan?) and opportunities for further CalFire grants? Joe agrees that partnerships between the City and the OWLS are needed, hopes to set up a meeting.

Advocacy issues—Elizabeth Stage. Locally, after the election, we’re in good shape in both Berkeley (mayor and council) and in Oakland, with a mayor who’s been a regular participant in OFSC activities since she joined the Council, plus new and continuing Council Members who are represented at this meeting. As community representatives, it’s easier for us to support the staff’s needs with Council if we hear them from Michael and Joe. At the state level, the Governor’s budget is not abandoning wildfire and climate goals as some press coverage indicated; rather, it’s slowing down the rate of increased investment after a year of ramp-up. Elizabeth invited people to email her (stage@berkeley.edu) if they are interested in working on a legislative task force.

4. New Business
University-based initiative on climate change—Ahead of the meeting, Louise Comfort from UC Berkeley sent a summary of a new proposal that they are working on, building on the evacuation proposal that OFSC endorsed and was funded by the National Science Foundation. She invited anyone who’d like to attend the first grant’s initial community partner meeting on risk reduction on February 15th at 10am at the EMBUD headquarters in downtown Oakland. The new initiative centers on community resilience, how to change behavior across jurisdictions and levels; there are five separate projects, one of which is evacuation. Would OFSC be willing to be an end-user at each stage of development? Ken noted that he had sent OFSC’s support letter earlier in the day to meet the deadline to be included and there were no objections.

5. Open Forum. Dale Risden gave an update on the proposal that Lin described above (FoJMP and FoKP); they’re constructing a collaboration between the City and the volunteers, focusing on the outer edges of these parks.

 Joyce Mapp from the District 4 office announced that City Council had passed the local state of emergency proclamation and that the Governor declared a state of emergency on the 4th. President Biden approved the Governor’s request for federal aid, but at the time of the meeting the list didn’t include Alameda County.

Jen Grimm announced that there was a new Winter Storm Preparedness guide on the website; they’ve established an OFSC page on Next Door, please “fave” it.

Next Meeting February 15th 7-8:30pm by Zoom.

Adjourned at 8:38pm.

Respectfully submitted, Elizabeth Stage