

## **Wildfire Prevention Zone (WPZ)**

(ballot measure to raise money to fund the 2024 Vegetation Management Plan) eks 6/15/24

### **Timeline**

#### **Vegetation Management Plan**

Oakland prepared and circulated a draft vegetation management plan in 2018 and received scathing public comments, including a coordinated effort by the Conservancy (Jon Kaufmann and Jerry Kent), Oakland Firesafe Council (Sue Piper), North Hills Community Association (Elizabeth Stage), and the Sierra Club (Norman LaForce). Without addressing these comments, in 2020 Oakland prepared the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) that was based on the draft plan. The Council Members who represented most of the high fire zone at the time, Dan Kalb and Sheng Thao, negotiated with the city staff/consultants and these community organizations line-by-line. It took nearly three years to complete the revisions in such a way as to be legally justifiable because lawsuits were expected, resulting in the Revised Vegetation Management Plan EIR (“revised plan”). The plan was improved considerably, with more extensive roadside clearing on evacuation routes and elimination of dead and dying trees; there were compromises (e.g., distances between trees to reduce the likelihood of lightning-ignited crown fires and thinning, rather than elimination of highly flammable trees like eucalyptus). The consensus was that the plan was good enough to provide a roadmap for improved fire safety and it was time to move forward. The Claremont Canyon Conservancy, the North Hills Community Association, and the Oakland Firesafe Council endorse the revised plan. The final revision was adopted by the City Council on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

While waiting for the final publication and adoption, Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries and/or OFD Chief of Staff Michael Hunt provided updates and listened to community input via the Oakland Firesafe Council monthly meetings. They wanted to make sure that the new ballot measure addressed the shortcomings of the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) that had expired in 2017 and failed by a very small number of votes when its reinstatement was on the ballot. In addition to having a robust plan that delineates the specific projects that will be undertaken—three priorities for each of the city properties that are included in the plan—they considered the lessons learned from the previous assessment district (see next page).

Immediately after the VMP passed on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the draft “Wildfire Prevention Zone” package was presented to the city council for its first reading on June 4<sup>th</sup> and is scheduled for the second reading and adoption on June 26<sup>th</sup>, leaving a few days to get it to the Alameda County Registrar of Voters by the July 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline.

Should the OFSC endorse the plan now so that we can have someone testify on June 26<sup>th</sup>? If you’d like to learn more, please see the following pages for the Executive Summary of the WPZ, links to additional information, and a list of issues for discussion.

## WILDFIRE PREVENTION ZONE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Adoption of this proposed resolution will authorize the placement of a special tax ("Special Tax") on the ballot to provide wildfire prevention and preparedness services to those communities within the boundaries of the City’s Wildfire Prevention Zone (WPZ). The WPZ is the same area as the City’s former Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD). It includes all areas of the City that fall in the California Department of Forestry and Fire Services (CAL FIRE) Very High Fire Severity Hazard Zone (VHFHSZ).”

Notes:

- A Special Tax is different from an Assessment; the tax will be assessed on the parcels in the area for the benefit of the area, not requiring a one-to-one correspondence between each parcel and each expenditure. Some parks, like Garber, have many homes within ignition range of highly flammable trees; others, like the North Oakland Sports field, have fewer homes adjacent but many within ember range.
- The area is defined by the maps that Oakland uses, based on the CalFire maps but more extensive.
- The initial tax will be \$99/year for a single-family dwelling, calculated similarly for multi-unit dwellings and commercial structures; there are reductions or exemptions for several categories of people (e.g., low-income), and its increase will be limited by the Bay Area Consumer Price Index or the comparable index for California.

The full legislative package is available here:

<https://oakland.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6693996&GUID=D0DA215B-C9A5-4DA1-8829-F17131389E3B&Options=&Search=>

Executive Summary continued:

“This Special Tax will create a dedicated funding source to support the City’s efforts to address wildfire risk by:

- Implementing a comprehensive vegetation management plan,
- Expanding roadside clearing to protect emergency evacuation routes
- Enhancing fire patrols on high-fire danger days
- Expanding goat grazing fuel reduction efforts
- Performing annual inspections of all parcels in the WPZ
- Providing public education efforts to help residents, businesses, and property owners protect themselves in their neighborhoods
- Providing community oversight and annual auditing of the funds.”

The 2017 WPAD Advisory Committee prepared a final report with recommendations for any new assessment district based on their experience of what worked and what needed to be improved.

<https://oaklandca.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/w/OAK063154.pdf>

Many of the challenges have either been addressed or are being given more attention, such as contracting (now done by Public Works, less inefficient than having OFD do it), staffing of the Fire Prevention Bureau (upgraded fire inspector classification and cross-training of fire and building inspectors), lack of support from OFD administration (strong support from the Chief of Fire and his Chief of Staff). The most prominent problem was the lack of attention to coordination within the city; this motivated OFSC to work with the City Council to adopt a Resolution making Wildfire Prevention a priority for all City departments. Subsequently the City Administrator established the Interdepartmental Wildfire Prevention Task Force, convened by Deputy City Administrator Joe DeVries.

Less evident in the report, but prominent in the view of the former members of the WPAD Advisory Committee, was the need to strengthen its role and relationship with the city staff. The relevant portion of the draft (from pages 8 and 9) is here:

#### 4.59.030. Planning, Oversight, and Accountability

A. Commission. The City Council shall enact additional legislation establishing community oversight and accountability of the Special Tax through the establishment of a new board or Commission or through an existing City Commission. The purpose and duties of the commission shall include: reviewing the annual operational use of the Special Tax proceeds in reducing wildfire risk, making advisory recommendations, including policy recommendations, to the City Council regarding the use of the funds to further prevention efforts, studying best practices from other jurisdictions, participating in regional wildfire prevention forums, and supporting outreach and public education efforts in the Wildfire Prevention Zone and Citywide.

B. Annual Financial Audit. An independent audit shall be performed annually to ensure accountability and proper distribution of the proceeds of the Special Tax in accordance with the objectives stated herein as provided by Government Code sections 50075.1 and 50075.3.

C. City Auditor's Audit. The City Auditor may perform audits to ensure accountability and proper disbursement of all revenue collection by the City from the Special Tax in accordance with the objectives stated therein and in compliance with provisions of California Law

Before the item went to the City Council, the Oakland Firesafe Council appreciated the opportunity for the community to make its recommendations directly to the City Council (liked the insertion of "policy recommendations" because it elevated the seriousness of the role) and suggested ways that an interactive process, modeled on the Budget Advisory Commission's participation in annual budget formulation might be specified. There's been reluctance to be too specific because any modifications must go back to the voters and the draft hasn't changed.

At the first reading of the City Council meeting June 4<sup>th</sup>, two points of contention were raised by the League of Women Voters and others with similar views, the use of the Consumer Price Index for annual increases (as opposed to a limit of 5% or some other cap) and the lack of a sunset (as opposed to a five- or ten-year expiration which they claimed inaccurately that sunsets have been used consistently in recent ballot measures). Council requested that a supplemental document be prepared by June 20<sup>th</sup> to inform the June 26<sup>th</sup> decision, addressing these concerns and providing a map at the parcel level. The Alameda County Registrar of Voters deadline to get on the November ballot is July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

If you read the full set of documents, you will see that OFSC is identified as an organization that is well positioned to provide "Public education efforts to help residents, businesses, and property owners protect themselves in their neighborhoods." Joe DeVries and Michael Hunt are true partners in making Oakland safer and reducing the likelihood of devastating wildfires.