

# Wildfire Safety Presentation Summary and Chat Q&A

Hosted by the Garden Guild, Montclair Presbyterian Church and Oakland Firesafe Council

Wednesday, January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 7:00PM

## Meeting Summary (Zoom AI Companion, OFSC Corrections)

The meeting focused on wildfire safety and was hosted by the Garden Guild, Montclair Presbyterian Church and the Oakland Firesafe Council. Doug Mosher, the Acting President of the Oakland Firesafe Council, welcomed attendees and introduced the speakers.

### Oakland Fire Marshal

Fire Marshal Darin White shared Oakland's wildfire history and emphasized the importance of preparedness. He encouraged attendees to sign up for Genesis Protect for real-time situational awareness. Darin presented on wildfire preparedness and inspection programs, highlighting a 91% compliance rate for initial inspections and emphasizing the importance of having evacuation plans and go-bags ready. He discussed challenges with fire inspections, including hostile pets and homeowners, leading to new protocols for inspectors. The presentation covered the inspection process, how to find your inspection date, vegetation management, and the new \$463 fee for non-compliance.

### Oakland District 4 Councilmember Ramachandran

Next, Jared Savas, representing Councilmember Janani Ramachandran, spoke about the importance of fire safety and prevention, mentioning the reopening of fire stations and the passage of Measure MM for wildfire mitigation funding. Councilmember Ramachandran and Jared were thanked by the Oakland Firesafe Council for their work on wildfire safety for Oakland.

### Oakland Firesafe Council – Home Hardening

The Oakland Firesafe Council, represented by Doug and Wendy Goldsby, then presented on home hardening against wildfires. They discussed factors contributing to

wildfires, emphasizing ember penetration as a primary cause of structure loss. Wendy outlined steps to harden homes, including creating defensible space, using non-combustible materials, and installing ember-resistant vents. The Council encourages community members to inspect their properties, remove combustible materials, and consider professional audits for more comprehensive protection. They also provided resources for further information and emphasized the importance of preparedness during Red Flag Warnings.

Wendy provided detailed recommendations for home fire safety and wildfire mitigation, covering both basic measures like maintaining chimneys, and having smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, and more complex improvements such as fire-resistant roofing materials, non-combustible fencing within 5 feet of the house, and double-pane windows. She explained that while no single measure guarantees home survival in a wildfire, a combination of hardening the home, creating defensible space, and working with neighbors can significantly increase the chances of survival, with studies showing a significant improvement in the probability of home survival when both hardening and Zone Zero recommendations are implemented.

Doug discussed home hardening steps to protect against wildfires, emphasizing cost-effective measures first like clearing gutters and combustibles, and more expensive options possibly during a home remodel. He introduced the Wildfire Prepared Home program, which provides certification and potential insurance discounts. Doug highlighted the importance of Zone 0 regulations, which were delayed due to opposition but are expected to resume discussions in March. Doug encouraged community members to harden their homes and manage vegetation, noting that even small improvements can make a significant difference.

## Oakland Firesafe Council – Firewise USA

Joelle Fraser, the Firewise USA lead for the Oakland Firesafe Council, introduced the Firewise USA program, explaining its purpose, benefits, and steps to becoming Firewise recognized. She highlighted that the program reduces wildfire risks, educates communities, and prepares neighborhoods for potential fires, with Oakland currently having 15 Firewise recognized sites. Joelle emphasized that participation is key, and the process is manageable, free, and supported by various organizations. She outlined the four steps to becoming Firewise recognized: organizing a committee, planning the neighborhood boundary and assessment, tracking hours and expenditures, and applying for recognition.

Joelle presented on the Firewise program, explaining how to assess and create action plans for neighborhoods to reduce wildfire risk. She covered the three home ignition zones, recommended actions for each, and outlined the steps to become Firewise recognized.

## B&B Horticulture

Julia Blitch from B&B Horticulture provided landscape design guidance and plant suggestions for fire safety, emphasizing the importance of proper spacing, irrigation, and plant selection. Julia shared resources and encouraged attendees to take action in their own gardens and communities to prepare for fire season.

## Questions and Answers (from Zoom Chat)

19:17:30 From Fred Booker:

Q: For the most part, homeowners on my street are proactive in vegetation management. The problem is with the undeveloped lots. What can be done to improve that inspection system?

A: From Oakland Fire Inspector Edgar Molina-Perez: Vacant/underdeveloped properties are inspected annually and are exclusively inspected by Fire Inspectors, not Fire Crews. When properties struggle to gain compliance, they are flagged and inspected first at the beginning of the season. Vacant lots typically receive more attention. We are actively addressing the non-compliant property owners in a more deliberate manner with required legal and civil ramifications. Currently if a property is non-compliant fees are assessed and if the property continues to be non-compliant the city holds lien on the property with all fees due upon sale. We are now implementing steps to communicate the severity of the matter, compel action from the non-compliant property owner, and then involve code enforcement staff, and other consequences that should include a lien being filed and payable annually fees to at the time property taxes are due as opposed to the sale of the property. Furthermore the City also imposes a tax for vacant/underdeveloped properties to encourage property owners to build. This means new homes will be built with all pertinent high fire zone construction/fire codes (road width, fully sprinklered, fire resistant materials, fire resistant landscaping, additional water sources, fire alarm).

19:17:38 From David Boatwright:

Q: If homeowners can get an idea when fire inspectors are to visit properties (at least the week, but day if possible), the inspectors will be able to see more entire properties. The inspection of my neighborhood was mostly superficial.

A: The Accela application notes when vegetation inspections are planned to take place. Go to <https://aca-prod.accela.com/OAKLAND/>. Register if you haven't already, then Login. Go to Fire and search for your address at the bottom. Click on the Record Number for FDV26 (when it becomes available), then Record Info, then Inspections. Note that the inspection schedule is typically not available until May, and dates may change due to firefighter-inspector's workload.

19:20:27 From Dawn Chesney:

Q: Is there a map of the Very High Fire Severity areas?

A: <https://oaklandfiresafecouncil.org/the-oakland-hills-remain-a-very-high-fire-hazard-severity-zone/>

19:21:27 From John Imholz:

Q: I am concerned about dead trees in the Canyon under the Leimert Bridge and along Sausal Creek. What can be done about removing flammable material?

A: Report to OAK 311 under Category: Park - Landscape Maintenance. Include the location, description and photos. <https://www.oaklandca.gov/My-Household/Report-an-Issue-OAK-311>

19:22:29 From Lynn Derderian:

Q: Is there an inspection process for public lands such as the Dimond Canyon/Sausal Creek area?? Who is responsible for ensuring compliance of areas like that?

A: From Oakland Fire Inspector Edgar Molina-Perez: Yes, all publicly owned land/utility owned property is inspected and held to the same standard and process as any other property in our Hills. We typically work with stakeholders such as EBMUD, State of California, EBRP, Merrit College and PG&E to achieve targeted abatement around evacuation routes/corridors and provide defensible space around larger parcels that surround entire neighborhoods. As for City owned property, it is also inspected by the Prevention Bureau and then referred to Public Works. Public Works is responsible for conducting any abatement on City owned properties not covered by our Goat Grazing contracts. The City of Oakland and its partners work on timelines that best utilize our funding by prioritizing work on the aforementioned areas or areas where there has been a history of Fire Activity.

Please be advised that Creeks/Riparian zones are protected (within 10ft of the creeks) and we typically do have a rapport with community groups that are already working around these areas/or residents who are responsible for adopt a spot locations.

19:28:06 From Harriet Smith:

Q: I wanted to remove a highly combustible cedar tree that is about 12 feet from my house. My permit was denied because the tree is healthy. But I believe that if the tree is a reasonable safety concern, I should be able to remove it. The Oakland Municipal Code currently prohibits the removal of any healthy tree, with few exceptions. Has there been any thought about updating this code to reflect the current concern about fire safety?

A: From Oakland Fire Inspector Edgar Molina-Perez: Trees can pose a significant hazard to property. A variety of species are very flammable and as such, their health and size are considerations when deciding whether a tree should be removed. Trees are commonly referred to as hundred-to-thousand-hour fuels based on diameter. As long as trees are limbed up a quarter of their height or 6ft and are not surrounded by flashy fuels (dry grasses, leaf litter, duff ) and trimmed away from roofs, chimneys and other tree tops; they meet the goal of creating fire safe conditions. If we can slow the spread of fire/stop a fire in its incipient stage, this allows residents to evacuate and for Fire Crews and other emergency services to have access to freely attack the fire and defend structures. Zones 0-2 will provide more guidance and may involve other species aside from Italian Cypress, Juniper, Eucalyptus, etc.

There are codes and upcoming mandates from the state that will likely require the removal of trees, brush and other vegetation and flammable materials from within the first 5 feet of the structure. Zones 0-2 will provide more guidance and may involve other species aside from Italian Cypress, Juniper, Eucalyptus, etc. However, in your case, the tree is beyond the 10' radius that is referenced in the new 2025 California Wildland Urban Interface Code.

A: Reach out to the City's Parks & Tree Services Division of Public Works with your concerns. Tree Removal Permits [treeremovalpermits@oaklandca.gov](mailto:treeremovalpermits@oaklandca.gov) or 510-615-5934.

19:34:09 From REBECCA KURLAND :

Q: Please advise what are noncombustible elements for the 0-5 zone. Do well-watered plants work?

A: While there is debate over small, well-watered plants in Zone 0, the scientific consensus is that nothing combustible should be in Zone 0—and even well-watered plants will burn. It is possible that potted plants under 18” tall could be allowed in Zone 0 if not placed under a window. These could be moved outside Zone 0 in an approaching wildfire, if time allowed. For information on restrictions in each Zone, refer to recommendations in our Guide #13 (<https://oaklandfiresafecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/OFSC-Guide-13-Defensible-Space-Landscaping.pdf>)

20:03:28 From margaret plageman:

Q: My house complies with all the fire mitigation programs.. State Farm canceled my policy only because I live in 94611! What is our recourse? I now have Fair Plan, not ideal

A: From Ann H: Check the United Policyholders (UP) website. Lots of tips there.  
<https://uphelp.org/>

A: From Maryanne Hubbard: Here is a good page with what UP suggests:  
<https://uphelp.org/buying-tips/dropped-by-your-insurer-where-to-go-for-help-in-california/>

20:17:56 From Leslie Smith:

Q: What is strategy to lower overall heat, I.e. more greenery versus concrete lowers ambient temperature by 20 degrees for healthier living and less fire danger? Any thoughts?

A: While less overall heat is a good goal, more greenery equals more fuel that can feed a wildfire. Greenery should be spaced and maintained per recommendations in our Guide #13 (<https://oaklandfiresafecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/OFSC-Guide-13-Defensible-Space-Landscaping.pdf>). Note that high heat will dry out vegetation faster but it is not a direct factor for the National Weather Service to issue a Red Flag Warning.

20:34:26 From Leslie Smith:

Q: What about using Natives? Ready for CA fires and are food for native wildlife.

A: Yes, “native” plants, bushes and trees in wildfire-prone areas have adapted over time to become more firesafe. And local and migratory species of insects, butterflies, birds and other fauna have adapted to rely on natives for food and shelter. However, any

vegetation can burn, including natives. Spacing and maintenance are important factors as well.

## **Information/Announcements:**

19:21:58 From Jared Savas:

Jared Savas, Office of CM Ramachandran jsavas@oaklandca.gov, 510-238-7273  
<https://signup.e2ma.net/signup/1974154/1956121/>

19:46:04 From Peter Lindsay:

They'll probably talk about this when they get to zone zero but the state regulation is still being drafted and there's a lot of debate and ongoing research on this exact point re: whether or not low, well-watered, and well maintained plants should be allowed. Some say no plants, some say well hydrated and maintained plants can actually catch and defuse embers.

19:57:04 From Jen Grimm:

See our Zone 0 update blog (by Oakland Firesafe Council Board Member Christophe Marcant) <https://oaklandfiresafecouncil.org/zone-0-when-the-deadline-passed-and-what-that-means-now/>

19:59:40 From Jen Grimm:

Subscribe to the Oakland Firesafe Council Newsletter  
<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/s1/2RLOJoU/oaklandfiresafecouncil>

20:35:56 From david mcguinness:

Attend the annual Bring Back the Natives events starting May 2nd.