



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 6/12/2023

To: The Board of Supervisors of Sonoma County
Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma
Staff Name and Phone Number: Steve Mosiurchak 707-565-1380
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:

Vegetation Management Services, Chipper Service, and Fire Prevention Service Contracts

Recommended Action:

1. Delegate authority to the Director of Permit Sonoma, in consultation with the County Administrator's and County Counsel's Office, to enter into contractual agreements with local fire protection districts to implement the Vegetation Management, Fuels Reduction, Inspection Program and Chipper Services through FY 27-28, with funding not to exceed annual allocations from Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) Community Investment funds for Expanded Fuels and Landscape Resiliency, which is currently \$900,000 per fiscal year.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Permit Sonoma to enter into fire prevention services agreements with local Fire Protection Districts for the Fire Prevention Division to perform fire prevention services including inspection and plan check services.

Executive Summary:

Sonoma County Code Chapter 13A establishes the vegetation management and defensible space requirements for improved and unimproved parcels in the unincorporated area and requires property owners and those in control of the parcel to comply with fuel management requirements. Since the ordinance was adopted in 2020, the County has contracted with local fire protection districts to conduct inspections and aid in implementing and enforcing the ordinance, as is expressly contemplated in and authorized by Chapter 13A. Also, the Fire Prevention Division and local Fire Districts work together on education and other community projects to promote landscape resiliency and community wildfire protection. The Board further established the Expanded Fuels and Landscape Resiliency Campaign Budget with annual allocations to fund the Vegetation Management Program. Staff recommends delegating authority to the Director of Permit Sonoma to continue to enter into contracts with local Fire Protection Districts to effectively implement the program through FY 27-28 in accordance with the allotted annual budget.

Additionally, certain local Fire Protection Districts have historically contracted with the County to conduct fire prevention services such as inspections, plan check, training, and investigations. These services have been provided on an as needed basis and paid in accordance with the duly adopted fee schedule. Due to the reorganization of some of the Fire Districts, staff recommends authorizing the Director to enter into updated fire prevention services agreements in consultation with the County Fire Marshal.

Discussion:

Vegetation Management and Defensible Space Program

Permit Sonoma Fire Prevention's Vegetation Management and Defensible Space Program supports continuous removal of hazardous vegetation and combustible material for fire prevention through community education and inspections, and by actively involving residents in creating and maintaining wildfire-resilient homes and landscapes. The program is guided by the Duty to Maintain Defensible Space and Abate Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Material Ordinance, Sonoma County Code Chapter 13A, adopted in June 2020. The ordinance clarifies the responsibility of property owners and persons in control of any parcel and requires compliance with fuel management on those properties. The ordinance also outlines enforcement procedures and authorizes the Fire Marshal and the local Fire Protection Districts to issue administrative citations and quickly enforce vegetation management and defensible space violations.

There are a wide variety of specific factors that contribute to home ignition from wildland fire. Defensible space, especially when accomplished community-wide, is one of the most important means to prevent home ignition. Targeted inspections and enforcement are extremely effective means of educating residents and moving to community-wide compliance. Communities where all properties are compliant with defensible space regulations can have significantly reduced risks to life and property in the event of wildfire.

The Sonoma County Fire Marshal has been in active communication with all Sonoma County Fire Districts to coordinate the collaborative Vegetation Management, Defensible Space Inspection and Public Education Program. Several Fire Districts have already begun to coordinate this effort with Permit Sonoma's Fire Prevention Division. These include North Sonoma County Fire District, Sonoma Valley Fire District, Sonoma County Fire District, Rancho Adobe Fire Protection District, Cloverdale Fire Protection District, Gold Ridge Fire Protection District and Kenwood Fire Protection District. The County of Sonoma Fire Prevention Division currently performs vegetation complaint inspections for the following Fire Districts, Occidental Fire Community Service District, Timber Cove Fire Protection District, Graton Fire Protection District, Shell-Vista Fire Protection District and still support the volunteer fire companies of CSA40 not covered under contract with Gold Ridge Fire Protection District.

Staff recommends delegating authority to the Director to enter into service agreements with each of the local Fire Districts (as those may be reorganized or renamed from time to time) to implement and support the Vegetation Management and Defensible Space Program through FY 27-28. Contracted services may include defensible space inspections, structural hardening inspections, supporting vegetation wildfire resiliency programs in Federal and State grant funded project areas, issuance of notices of violations or other enforcement actions, education and outreach, and community project support including environmental review and coordination with state partners to develop enhanced fuel reduction and management techniques also known as the California Vegetation Treatment Program and services directly related to the program. The terms of the contracts and related amendments must substantially conform to the template included in Attachment A.

Fire Prevention Services Agreements

Staff recommends delegating authority to the Director of Permit Sonoma to enter into fire prevention services contracts to assist Fire Districts when needed or on an annual basis. Fire Districts lack the staffing to support fire prevention programs such as plan review and development inspections; the Fire Life Safety Inspection Program (SB 1205) required by the Office of the State Fire Marshal; Community Care and License Inspections for children the elderly and disabled persons; fire investigations, public education and fire life safety training for career and volunteer staff. The Mission of the County of Sonoma Fire Prevention Division is to provide support to local Fire Districts and the community they serve when requested, to help support adoption of the countywide Fire Safety Ordinance Chapter 13 and 13A, and to support adoption and implementation of the Hazardous Materials Code Chapter 29 based on the state mandate of the California Unified Program Agency for support and training in relation to hazardous material emergencies. These fire services agreements fulfill the Division’s mission and ensure valuable safety programs are implemented. The fire services agreements and related amendments must substantially conform to the template included in Attachment B and must not require additional appropriations for the Fire Prevention Division.

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County’s Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

Pillar: Climate Action and Resiliency

Goal: Goal 1: Continue to invest in wildfire preparedness and resiliency strategies

Objective: Objective 2: Expand outreach and education on vegetation management and provide additional resources to landowners to help mitigate fire risk.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?

No

Prior Board Actions:

In FY 21/22: Sonoma County Fire Prevention Division requested additional approval to expand vegetation services for Sonoma Valley and Sonoma County Fire District for Chipping Services and Community Project Support for a California Vegetation Treatment Program.

06/06/2020: Chapter 13A Vegetation Management Inspection Ordinance with Administrative Citation Enforcement

10/23/2018: Vegetation Management Inspection Agreements with Fire Protection Districts for Abatement of Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Materials

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 23-24 Adopted	FY-24-25 Projected	FY -25-26 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000
Funding Sources			
General Fund/TOT Funds	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000
State/Federal			
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
Contingencies			
Total Sources	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

These contracts are funded by the annual allocation of \$900,000 from the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) fund for vegetation management, approved by the Board of Supervisors in Fiscal Year 2018-19. The remaining balance of the allocation will be used to support the chipper program operation. Sections 4 and 14 of the Vegetation Management Services and Fire Prevention Services agreements, respectively, allow for the contracts to be terminated at any point with written notice, should there be a change in direction in the allocation of the \$900,000 TOT funding.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

- Att A: Vegetation Professional Services Agreement
- Att B: Fire Districts Professional Services Agreement

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A