



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 10/6/2020

To: Board of Supervisors, County of Sonoma
Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma Fire Prevention Division
Staff Name and Phone Number: James Williams, 707-565-1154
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisory District(s): Countywide

Title:

Vegetation Management Inspection Agreements with Fire Protection Districts Enforcing County Ordinance No. 6314, Duty to Maintain Defensible Space and Abate Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Material

Recommended Action:

Authorize the Director of Permit Sonoma to enter into contractual agreements with local Fire Protection Districts to continue the effective vegetation management inspection program through FY 2022-23. Funding will not exceed annual allocations from the Expanded Fuels and Landscape Resiliency Campaign Budget, which currently stands at \$900,000. Any remaining funds at the end of each fiscal year to carry over to the next Fiscal Year.

Executive Summary:

On April 22, 2019, the Board of Supervisors authorized funding for the Expanded Fuels and Landscape Resiliency Campaign with an annual allocation of \$900,000 for Fiscal Years 2019-20 through FY 2022-23. The small parcel defensible space inspection program is a key component of the program. The budget funds contracts with fire districts to perform inspections (\$378,000), enforcement activities (\$80,000), outreach (\$13,000) and administrative costs (\$42,000), increasing the number of inspections across jurisdictional boundaries to enhance public safety (Attachment 1-Map of Fire Districts).

As of September 14, 2020, 1,939 inspections have been performed. The County's interactive dashboard depicts the location, amount of inspections, and responsible entity participating in the program. (<https://sonomacounty.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/79d62156f69d47b889fad3fd035dadf6>) With the

\$270,000 of funding restored by the Board of Supervisors on September 9, 2020, staff expects to continue inspections in FY 2020-21 at the same level as in FY 2019-20. In addition the Board allocated \$150,000 more dollars to increase the pace and scale of providing chipping services to the public in the early fall and winter months. As of September 25, 2020 850 applications have been received and 731 jobs have been completed.

Recognizing the importance of partnering with local jurisdictions to support fire safety, the Fire Prevention Division proposes the use of the attached template agreement (Attachment 2-Contract Template) as the mechanism to compensate the Fire Protection Districts listed in the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County for implementing vegetation management inspection activities. Under this Agreement, the County will reimburse Fire Protection Districts for staff time to conduct targeted-area vegetation management inspections, complaint-based inspections, and provide assistance to support inspection and enforcement

activities. This funding, authorized by the Board of Supervisors, is a critical component of the County's Wildfire Risk Reduction efforts.

Discussion:

Increasing wildfire frequency and severity in Sonoma County and across the west clearly indicates the need to increase our communities' resilience to wildfire. The Vegetation Management Inspection Program (VMIP) supports removal of near-home hazardous vegetation and combustible material through inspections, community education, and actively involving residents in creating defensible space and maintaining wildfire-resilient homes and landscapes.

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. Communities where all properties are compliant with defensible space regulations can have significantly reduced risks to life, property and the environment in the event of wildfire. Targeted inspections and enforcement are extremely effective means of accomplishing community-wide compliance. Sonoma County Code Chapter 13A and State Laws provide regulations for Improved and Unimproved parcels in unincorporated Sonoma County.

On June 23, 2020, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors ratified amendments to Sonoma County Code Chapter 13A, "Duty to Maintain Defensible Space and Abate Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Material," Ordinance 6314. The purpose of the ordinance is to support community safety and reduce the risks and threats associated with wildfire by ensuring that hazardous vegetation and combustible materials are removed on properties with buildings ("improved") and without buildings ("unimproved") in the unincorporated areas of Sonoma County.

Community-Wide Proactive Inspection Program

In June 2020, the Fire Prevention Division and contracted Fire Districts began proactive, community-wide inspections. Sonoma County Fire Prevention Division and the local Fire District staff collaborated to identify program inspection areas scope. For the 2020 Defensible Space Inspection season (late June through October 30, 2020) fire districts were selected based on those districts that cover the local responsibility area. Those areas have the greatest population density and values at risk. In addition areas were selected using a variety of criteria including past inspection areas available budget and fire hazard risk. In future years, the inspection areas will be identified using the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) to be updated prior to next season and other relevant data. For future inspection seasons, staff anticipates that inspection areas will integrate updated risk-assessment data generated through GIS data to pinpoint locations where concentrated inspections should occur.

Complaint-Driven Inspection Process

In the past, Sonoma County Fire Prevention Staff has inspected vegetation complaints in areas under its jurisdiction. Ordinance No. 6314 added an important enforcement component to bring properties into compliance and remove hazardous vegetation or combustible materials on a specific parcel. If a property is not under County Fire Prevention's jurisdiction, staff refers it to the local Fire District, who carry out inspections based on the contract provisions.

Data Collection Process

Inspection results are tracked using Collector App, an ESRI GIS-based platform which provides inspectors with accurate maps and parcel data while they are in the field. During an inspection, all inspection information, including specific violations and photographs, are entered and stored in Collector App. Inspection data is centralized across districts, and is tracked, analyzed, and monitored on a per-parcel and collective scale.

EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY BENEFITS:

An inspection program provides the opportunity for fire officials to explain actions that will improve wildfire safety while allowing residents to ask specific questions about their property. Information delivered by a fire inspector is more likely to be understood and acted upon. The communications and public outreach component further enhances the educational benefits of the inspection program. The best results of fire prevention in the Wildland Urban Interface will be achieved when entire communities have embraced the concept of defensible space.

SUMMARY

This report seeks authorization for the Director of Permit Sonoma to enter into vegetation management inspection agreements with the entities listed in Attachment 1 for a term of three years, as funding permits, not-to-exceed the annual amount budgeted. As of September 25, 2020 the vast majority of 1st inspections have been completed. Depending on Fire District activity, re-inspections are expected to be completed by October 30, 2020. These contracts will allow the County and local Fire Districts to be compensated for the current inspection season and to be prepared to begin inspections in 2021.

Prior Board Actions:

March 29, 2016, Ordinance Adopting 13A to the County Code requiring the Abatement of Hazardous Vegetation and Combustible Material; April 19, 2016, Resolution No. 16-0118 Combustible Materials Ordinance; June 9, 2020: Public Hearing to Consider Ordinance and Adopt Resolution to Introduce and Waive Reading of Ordinance.

June 23, 2020: Final adoption of Chapter 13A.

Vegetation Management Inspection Program Reports - March 29, 2016, July 11, 2017, October 23, 2018, April 2, 2019, October 1, 2019 and June 9, 2020.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Expenditures	FY 20-21 Projected	FY 21-22 Projected	FY 22-23 Projected
Budgeted Expenses	\$378,000.00		
Additional Appropriation Requested			
Total Expenditures	\$378,000.00		
Funding Sources			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Transient Occupancy Tax/Measure L	\$630,000.00		
PG&E Settlement Fund	\$270,000.00		
Contingencies			

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Total Sources	\$900,000.00		
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Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

The FY 2019-20 vegetation management inspection program efforts will be completed within the authorized budget, there is no additional impact.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Att 1: Fire Districts

Att 2: Contract Template

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

N/A