



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: June 5, 2011

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Fire Prevention Division, Fire Department

SUBJECT: Renewal Of Levy For Fiscal Year 2013 For The Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council adopt, by reading of title only, A Resolution of the Council of the City of Santa Barbara Declaring Its Intention to Continue Vegetation Road Clearance, Implementation of a Defensible Space Inspection and Assistance Program, and Implementation of a Vegetation Management Program Within the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones; Declaring the Work to be of More Than General or Ordinary Benefit and Describing the District to be Assessed to Pay the Costs and Expenses Thereof; Approving the Engineer's Report; Confirming Diagram and Assessment; and Ordering Continuation of the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District for Fiscal Year 2012-13.

DISCUSSION:

On July 11, 2006, the City Council adopted Resolution 06-064 which declared the Council's intention to order expansion of vegetation road clearance, implementation of a defensible space inspection and assistance program, and implementation of a vegetation management program within the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. The Resolution described the special benefit to be assessed and approved an Engineer's Report, confirmed the diagram and assessment, and ordered a levy of the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District for Fiscal Year 2007. As required by the Resolution, the Assessment must be renewed annually by the Council. The City has renewed the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment for the past five years.

Assessment funds continue to reduce the risk and severity of wildland fires through the reduction of flammable vegetation. The assessment provides three primary services:

Vegetation Road Clearance: Each year the assessment provides approximately 14 miles of road clearance in the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones. The frequency is such that most roads in the District are cleared of impeding vegetation every three years. Clearing vegetation from the roadways is required of property owners by law and allows for safer egress of residents and ingress of first responders during an emergency. In Fiscal Year 2012, 14 miles of roadway were cleared to benefit the District.

Defensible Space Inspection and Assistance: This element of the assessment provides assistance to property owners in creating defensible space around their homes. Defensible space is a key element in preventing the ignition of homes during a wildfire by reducing the exposure of the home to burning vegetation. Defensible space assistance will again involve scores of site visits to assist homeowners. In addition, the assessment provides chipping services to residents of the District after the vegetation has been cut. Chipping services provides a cost effective way for homeowners to dispose of cut material. The chipped vegetation may be reused as a ground cover in landscaping.

Vegetation Management: Vegetation Management is the selective removal of flammable vegetation in open land outside of property owner's defensible space. The goal is to lessen the severity of a fire, in the event that one occurs, by depriving the fire of large amounts of fuel. This is accomplished by preferentially removing exotic plants; thinning, pruning and limbing vegetation to remove fire ladders; limbing up the canopy; and, pruning out dead material. Vegetation management retains the overall look of wildland areas and minimizes impacts to natural resources while reducing the amount of flammable vegetation. Vegetation management was successfully completed on 26 acres this year. This project required staff to strengthen the public-private relationship by working with multiple, individual property owners and contract crews to link individual parcels across large areas of adjacent land. By working in cooperation with multiple property owners, there is a greater impact on reducing the community threat from wildfire. In addition to vegetation removal, this project also accomplished education, protection of natural resources unique to the area and outlined individual maintenance programs. The project areas are identified in the Wildland Fire Plan.

ANNUAL LEVY:

The Wildland Fire Assessment may be annually increased by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in an amount not to exceed four percent per year. In adjusting for the Consumer Price Index, the allowable increase is calculated using the CPI from the past year plus any deferred increases from previous years. For Fiscal Year 2013, staff and the Assessment Engineer propose a CPI increase of 2.17 percent. The rate for Fiscal Year 2013 as suggested in the Engineer's Report will therefore be set at \$73.72 per single family home in the Foothill Zone and \$91.41 per single family home in the Extreme Foothill Zone. The total revenues from the assessment is estimated at \$239,133.

The Fiscal Year 2012 rates were \$72.16 and \$89.46, respectively, for a total assessment of \$231,771. The increase for Fiscal Year 2013 will allow staff to provide the same level of service as in previous years.

As required in Resolution 06-064, an updated Engineer's Report has been prepared and includes the proposed budget and assessment rate. The updated Engineer's Report must be considered by the City Council at a noticed public hearing and serves as the basis for the continuation of the assessment. The updated Engineer's Report is available for review at Fire Department Administration, 925 Chapala Street and the City Clerk's Office at City Hall at 735 Anacapa Street.

Hearing

On May 22, 2012, the Council adopted Resolution No. 12-031 to declare its intent to renew the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District within the Foothill and Extreme Foothill Zones and to set a time of 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 5, 2011, in the City Council Chambers for a public hearing on the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District. Staff recommends that the Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment District be continued for Fiscal Year 2013 to fund and deliver these successful mitigation programs.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

The estimated \$239,133 cost of providing services in Fiscal Year 2013 is recovered through the resident-approved Wildland Fire Suppression Assessment levied on the annual property tax bills of property owners within the Assessment district boundaries. Both the cost of providing the services and the assessment district revenue have been included in the Wildland Fire Assessment District Fund budget for Fiscal Year 2013. No additional budget appropriations are necessary.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

Vegetation removed through vegetation road clearance and the defensible space chipping assistance program is chipped and spread back on to the ground or in areas of local parks where feasible. The goal is reuse at least 80% of all chipped material locally avoiding the cost of disposal fees, extra vehicle trips and landfill use. Non-native pest plants are not chipped, but rather hauled off-site to be disposed of properly. In 2012, staff exceeded that goal, achieving 99%.

ATTACHMENT: Engineer's Report
PREPARED BY: Joe Poiré, Fire Marshal
SUBMITTED BY: Andrew DiMizio, Fire Chief
APPROVED BY: City Administrator's Office