



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** May 17, 2016

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**FROM:** Fire Prevention Division, Fire Department

**SUBJECT:** Renewal Of Levy For Fiscal Year 2017 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 2016-17.

### **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 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 nine years. This year, in cooperation with the BREN School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara, we have worked with graduate students in a study of the relative effectiveness of the program and expect the final report in the coming weeks.

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 2016 we cleared 11.3 Miles of roadways, deferring 2.7 miles of State Route 192 to next season, when we expect a greater ability to effect a necessary traffic plan with Cal Trans.

**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. As of this report the Fire Department has chipped 100 tons of material and by the end of the chipping season in mid-June, the Fire Department will have chipped approximately 250 tons of material for district properties.

**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 a large amount 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 6 acres in Fiscal Year 2015. These projects require staff to strengthen the public-private relationship by working with multiple, individual property owners and contract crews to link individual parcels across larger areas of adjacent land. 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 4% 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 2017, staff and the Assessment Engineer propose a CPI increase of 2.0%. The rate for Fiscal Year 2017 as suggested in the Engineer's Report will therefore be set at \$77.82 per single family home in the Foothill Zone and \$96.50 per single family home in the Extreme Foothill Zone. The total revenues from the assessment will be \$257,403 for 2017.

The Fiscal Year 2016 rates were \$76.27 and \$94.57 respectively, for a total assessment of \$252,046. The increase for Fiscal Year 2017 will allow us to continue to provide the same level of service in all three areas

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 assessments. 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 3, 2016, the Council adopted Resolution No. 16-025 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, May 17, 2016, 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 2017 to fund and deliver these successful mitigation programs.

### **BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:**

The estimated \$257,403 cost of providing services in Fiscal Year 2017 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 2017. 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 2016 we exceeded that goal, achieving 99% reuse.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

On May 4, 2004, the City Council adopted the City's Wildland Fire Plan and certified the corresponding Environmental Impact Report (EIR) making the required CEQA findings. The proposed assessment will fund activities that implement the Wildland Fire Plan and which were analyzed within the Wildland Fire Plan EIR. City staff have reviewed the scope of the proposed work effort to be funded by the proposed assessment and concluded that the work will cause no new effects on the environment or require any new mitigation measures. Therefore, no additional environmental review is required.

**PREPARED BY:** Joe Poiré, Fire Marshal

**SUBMITTED BY:** Patrick McElroy, Fire Chief

**APPROVED BY:** City Administrator's Office