



Wildfire Prevention Assessment District
Citizens' Advisory Committee
Approved Retreat Minutes for
Saturday, February 7, 2015, 8:00 AM



Trudeau Center, 15500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland CA (Wheel Chair Accessible)

Committee Members in attendance:
Fred Booker, Chair (District 1)
Doug Wong, Vice Chair (At Large)
Mary Thiessen, Recording Secretary (District 4)
Ken Thames - Mayor's Representative
Susan Piper (District 1)
Clint Johnson (District 6)

Chief Teresa Deloach Reed, Chief Oakland Fire Department
Donna Hom, City of Oakland Assistant City Manager
Vincent Crudele, Vegetation Management Supervisor, Oakland Fire Department
Lin Barron attending for the Oakland Wildland Stewards (OWLS)

Among the 25 participants were current and former WPAD Board Members, representatives of Park Steward Groups, Hills Conservation Network and residents of the WPAD. All Council Districts within the WPAD were represented.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Fred Booker welcomed everyone to the WPAD Retreat. Introductions were made and participants were asked to state a positive or negative lesson learned in the past 10 years of the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD).

A. INITIAL LESSONS LEARNED/ POSITIVE

- Can't wait for the fire—we need to work with the City, public agencies and the private sector to make a difference before a fire occurs.
- Vegetation Management is a “how” questions, not an “either/or” question.
- WPAD should use a species neutral approach to vegetation management—it's low lying vegetation that acts as a fuel ladder to the trees that spreads fire. Trees need to be evaluated.
- Good quality control on trees

B. INITIAL LESSONS LEARNED/ NEGATIVE

- Most misunderstood and most co-opted district in the City—over the years the WPAD became the “let's fix Public Works, let's fix the budget department, let's fix Oakland Fire Department” rather than let's reduce the fuel load on city properties.
- Bureaucracy and obstructionism from the City created many roadblocks.
- Neighbors not complying with the Fire Code regulations but still passing—led to perception that WPAD wasn't effective.
- More education of public on wildfire prevention is needed.

II. Purpose of the Retreat

- Establish baseline information about status of vegetation management on City properties in Oakland
- Make informed recommendation of which scenario Oakland should use for future vegetation management efforts on City properties

III. Understanding Vegetation Management and the WPAD

Participants broke into four groups and rotated through four stations to review and discuss baseline information about the WPAD in preparation for the later discussion on WPAD priorities.

A. WPAD LOCATION, SIZE AND ROLES OF WPAD AND OFD VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

1. Oakland's High Wildfire Risk areas as designated by the State's Fire Marshall (MAP)

- 10,590 total acres
- 16.5 square miles
- 21.5% of the geographic area of City of Oakland
- 33.5 miles around the perimeter
- 26,000 private properties within the WPAD
- 1400 acres of City property within the WPAD
- 300 miles of public access roadway cleared
- Approximately 200 geographic locations within the District that are City-owned properties. *(24 parcels around Beaconsfield counted as one)

2. Roles

WPAD Board:

- Recommend Priorities
- Recommend Policies
- Produce a budget to be submitted to City Council
- Evaluate the performance of WPAD programs
- Receive the Auditor Report
- Elect its own officers
- WPAD funds vegetation management on Private and City-owned properties in the state-designated high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface:
 - Chipping services
 - Roving fire patrols on declared red flag days only
 - Community outreach and education
 - Goat grazing

OFD Vegetation Management Unit:

- Inspect all public & private properties
- Determines program priorities
- Vegetation management contracts

Challenges

- Some neighborhoods below 580 don't want to be included (i.e. Lower Laurel)
- City not maintaining its own properties to the City standards—conflict of interdepartmental priorities
- Aging urban forest—how to manage, what to replace it with and where
- Moving forward, role of Public Works and Oakland Fire Department as WPAD sunsets
- Long term maintenance of volunteer initiatives

- Lack of public understanding of which properties are City–owned and which are privately owned or owned by another agency
- Fire Assessment Map does not differentiate remediated zones, “monolithic red”
- Chipping program too expensive, takes up too much fire inspector’s time, Waste Management has a green waste program
- Problems with contracting/ budget timing constraints, clearance tied to budget not growth cycle/ weather
- Fundamental holes in tree policy
- Re-inventing the wheel- EBRPD already has solid policies
- Fuels Management is a subset of land management
- OFD focus/ policy values suppression vs. inspections/ fuels management/ prevention
- Homeowners ignorant of fire protection
- Inconsistent inspection from fire station to fire station inspectors, but the WPAD’s role is not home inspections
- Does the scope of the WPAD change/ not now- WPAD fiduciary responsibility for public parcels
- Need public information officer for competent outreach to residence and public

Opportunities

- Long-term reduction of fuel load in the hills to reduce the spread of fire
- Reducing risk of wildfire strengthens City of Oakland’s resilience following a major disaster (wildfire and/or earthquake)
- Better integration of volunteers in both processes and outcomes
- Why not use a contractor who will use a mentor program for High School students studying Forestry
- The WPAD should prepare a District-wide Vegetation Management plan with annual reports to the Council on yearly plans and implementation. The plan would include vegetation management plans for specific project areas, informed by volunteers and ecologists.

Lessons Learned/ Positive

- Designated funding over a long period allows for multi-year cost effective contracts, such as goat grazing contract
- Training of contractors includes best practices (timing, methods) along with protecting endangered species
- Use of outside contractors proves to be more cost effective than use of City crews
- As long as active management of vegetation management in the district continues, homeowners will find that they will continue to have ability to renew or acquire property casualty insurance for fire
- Timing of specific vegetation management tactics works

Lessons Learned/ Negative

- Unable to move forward due to lack of agreement within the City as a whole that Wildfire Prevention in the Oakland Hills is a top Public Safety Issue (and therefor a priority for Oakland Fire Department, Public Works, OPR, Planning, Finance and other Departments) (street sweeping in the hills to remove debris from streets, trim or remove at risk trees for fire prevention)
- Lack of a Risk Assessment and Vegetation Management Plan, with CEQA support has been a roadblock to getting beyond just annual maintenance
- Lack of coordination between City departments causes delays that impact a calendar of vegetation management response

- Certain City divisions don't make supporting public safety / fire prevention a priority: street sweeping on major roads in the hills, tree trimming removal, parking enforcement in the evening to cite people blocking narrow streets, building inspectors coordinate with OFD re welding permits, etc.)
- Doing same vegetation management practice(s) year after year doesn't always work
- Though not bad the last couple of years, must be prepared for multiple high wind/ low humidity days
- Currently not power to enforce policies or MOUs with other Departments
- WPAD can't elect their own Outreach Coordinator

B. VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN AND WHY IT'S NEEDED

Elements include

- Description of planning area (State designate high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface)
- On-site fire hazard assessment of city open space
 - Beaconsfield Canyon – 4.37 acres
 - Diamond Canyon Park – 77.06 acres
 - Dunsmuir House and Gardens – 63.94 acres
 - Garber Park – 13.82 acres
 - Grizzly Peak Open Space – 75.01 acres
 - Joaquin Miller Park – 427.03 acres
 - Kings Estates Park – 79.8 acres
 - Knowland Park - 454.94 acres
 - London Road – 10 acres
 - Montclair RR – 16.06 acres
 - North Oakland Sports Filed – 53.62 acres
 - Oak Knoll Redevelopment – 4.7 acres
 - Sheffield Village Open Space – 171.42 acres
 - Shepherd Canyon Park – 17.9 acres
- Development of a Defensible Space Vegetation Management Plan to reduce fuel load in the high fire severity zone
 - Inventory of plants and trees
 - Hazard risk of each City parcel
 - Proposed fuel management plan

Challenges

- Sufficient resources (expertise, time and funding) to complete the planning process
- Legal opinion that requires City to complete a CEQA and amending the City Integrated Pest Management Plan
- Size and complexity of project area
 - 10, 590 total acres
 - 16.5 square miles
 - 21.5% of the geographic area of City of Oakland
 - 33.5 miles around the perimeter
 - 1400 City-owned properties

Opportunities

- Completing a comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan provides the city with a road map for annual priorities and long term progress
- A Vegetation Management plan makes transparent locations and contracting elements-(best practices, protection of endangered species, timing)
- Plan/ CEQA- City Committee(s) (safety)- City Council. Communicates #1 priority throughout city structure. Priority of prescription/ most ignition prone areas
- WPAD monitors schedule
- Split plan into a General Plan and a Geo-Site Specific Plan. Specific Prescriptions/ timing/ schedule/ flexibility (weather)

Lessons Learned/ Positive

- Having a plan reduces conflict
- A plan provides prescriptions that work

Lessons Learned/ Negative

- Without a plan, the City has focused its resources on annual maintenance (road side clearance, goat grazing) and not on long-term defensible space projects in the state-designated high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface
- Lack of a plan creates inconsistencies in implementation
- Current plan does not include trees

C. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR) AND WHY IT'S NEEDED

Needed to meet federal, state and local requirements for City-owned properties only:

- Certain wildfire prevention mitigation practices impact protected species of flora and fauna; ensure those practices most positive for fire mitigation are not a negative impact on protected or threatened species.
- Required for implementation of FEMA Grant—at least for the projects under the FEMA Grant
- Other than routine exempted maintenance (ie. Roadside clearances) the EIR addresses long-term non-maintenance projects.
- We currently have a Federal EIS for the two project areas in the FEMA grant.

Challenges

- Not a general accepted understand of the EIR process and why needed—some people feel it is more than mitigation but for protection and outcomes
- Sheer cost and time of complying---hundred thousands of dollars and years
- Delay is the worst thing to do.

Opportunities

- Can refine the plan for outcomes and the acceptance of those outcomes
- Do it now, do it once
- Get quotes now:
 - FEMA projects only
 - Whole "District"
 - Whole City (Comment: WPAD funds cannot be used outside District)
 - Highest danger areas in the WPAD

Lessons Learned/ Positive

- Where this has been completed and implemented (EBRP) there is less conflict

Lessons Learned/ Negative

- Because it is drawn out, the processes are constantly changing
- Threat of litigation lengthens timing and cost—increasing the risk of major fire

Additional Comments

- How much will an EIR cost to the WPAD and the City?
 - Do we look at % of WPAD houses /all houses in Oakland
 - Or people in WPAD/all people in Oakland
 - Or Miles in WPAD/all miles in Oakland
- EIS/NEPA/CEQA with federal funds—years long process (Comment: geo-sites very different: trees vs. flash fuel clearance.)
- FEMA issues specific to a limited area—holding up the rest of the WPAD
- Staff time too valuable to spend on small parcels vs. entire WPAD
- Current clearance is under a negative declaration—some argue that goat grazing should be under EIR
- FEMA is “central traffic control” to collect, distribute, contact organizations, check-off/bureaucratic checklist, not judging environmental issues
- Is there a CEQA-qualified attorney in the City?
- #300K FEMA match should go to spending on CEQA/EIR
- Piecemeal approach is costly
- Using WPAD funds as matching funds for FEMA (\$300K) is inappropriate use of funds
- Will FEMA funds pay for the Administrative cost of a Program Analyst working on the project?

D. ORGANIZATION UNDERSTANDING OF CITY OF OAKLAND AS IT RELATES TO VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

Unofficial Organizational Chart (Attachment C)

Challenges

- Lack of clarity and value about the high priority of risk of wildfires in the state-designated high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface leads to conflicts among departments in terms of reducing fire risks in the hills
- Inspection fees and fines revert to the General Fund instead of to OFD
- When funding from WPAD sunsets, City still has the responsibility
- Residents within the state-designated high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface don't differentiate between city owned and private property
- Confusion results because residents pay an annual fee for the WPAD to pay for maintenance of public property—it implies that only public spaces are important
- Turnover in Fire Prevention Bureau leads to lack of consistency in inspections, loss of institutional memory and need for constant training. (Questions: what are the right range of skills needed, and where should the function reside?)
- Issues raised in the 2013 City Auditor's Report

Opportunities

- 2015-17 City Budget Process to be completed by July 1, 2015 provides opportunity to improve situation (although now, instead of a surplus, the City is asking departments to come up with 5%-10% cut recommendations) (Comment: What specifics should we advocate for)
- Change in City Administrator should lead to ownership and accountability for the process of vegetation management
- Implement a known policy and procedure within the Fire Department to accomplish the goals of vegetation management
- Need to define how City will handle vegetation management—it needs to be clear who does what
- Educate city staff and public about consequence of current dysfunction (Comment: How can we do this, who's role is what?)
- During Budget process, provide adequate funding for departments (especially PWA) and make clear each department's responsibilities

Lessons Learned/ Positive

- Wildfire Prevention and Vegetation Management is not just an OFD/WPAD responsibility alone—it is City-wide
- What has been done in past has worked—while we have small fires every season, we have not had a major wildfire within state-designated high fire severity zone/wildland urban interface. (Comment: Mostly luck, we haven't had high winds to spread the small fires.)
- Oakland not the only city with these issues
- Residents play a role in identifying non compliant properties
- Power of volunteers and probationary youth and other groups. (Comment: Volunteers are under appreciated and lost in the city structure. Because of an "us vs them" attitude in PWA, it is difficult to coordinate within departments and divisions. Everyone is focused on their own silos.)

Lessons Learned/ Negative

- Budget cuts to all departments and lack of wildfire prevention as a citywide priority has made it difficult to accomplish the goal of reducing the risk and spread of wildfire.
- Vast majority of residents don't comply with defensible space requirements until officially notified. 10% have to be told a second or third time, non-resident owners even worse.
- Vacant lots that cannot be built on are not maintained.
- Lack of inspectors to do the work.
- Large public open spaces—public needs to know who to communicate with so they are communicating with the right owner (EBRP, PG & E, etc.)
- Public concern: "If the City can't provide the basic services, why vote for supplement?"
- Insufficient communication about WPAD accomplishments.
- PWA doesn't want to take back responsibility for parks and open space.
- Current inspection system needs review (Comment: It's an OFD responsibility, not WPAD)
- Resources haven't been allocated to support staff—need sufficient resources for inspectors, tree services, volunteer coordination, etc.
- Haven't engaged new residents.

E. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Develop a GPS application that will show user public/agency vs. private ownership of properties in relation to user's location.
- Identify high-risk situations on specific properties.
- Use PWA Call Center, or See Click Fix to report non-compliant properties (and eventually 3-1-1-)
- Put message out that wildfire is the number 1 public safety priority for the Oakland hills.
- When the funding for WPAD runs out, how will the city pay for roadside clearance, etc.?
- Why not have PWA handle contracting? (Comment: PWA will charge overhead to do it in house and it will cost more than contracting through OFD.)
- Volunteers and wildfire activists need to be supported/ not alienated, if we want to pass a new district in the future.
- The number one priority for the WPAD is clearance of City property—that's where our money should go.
- What is PWA's vegetation management policies, priorities—what do they do?
- Find a California city where all city departments are working well in coordination on vegetation management, and adapt their success.
- State funding from Cal Fire is not supporting urban forestry management in the hills—100% of those funds are earmarked for disadvantaged zip codes alone.
- Public needs clear understanding from the Fire Chief of her direction on vegetation management.
- From the OFD Chief: Her WPAD dream team would consist of 5 full time inspectors, a supervisor and a program analyst.
- From Fire Inspection Supervisor: His WPAD dream team would consist of 11 full time inspectors, a supervisor and a program analyst.
- Consider moving chipping to Waste Management
- PWA/OPR don't perceive OFD as experts on fire

F. GENERAL COMMENTS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

- Advocate to state that wildfire issues are critical—because much of the decision making about standards, insurance, etc. is at the state level
- WPAD should connect with insurance companies/banks and mortgage companies about supporting Oakland's wildfire prevention efforts.
- Education of homeowners will help.
- Vegetation Management plan key to wider support of the WPAD.
- In Oklahoma, they sell the liens so that the city is paid up front—this might be a state lobbying issue.
- If every engine company did inspections the same way, we would have a better perception of compliance within the WPAD.
- Invite PWA, and other departments to WPAD meetings so that they are more engaged in the discussion.

IV. DISCUSSING AND CHOOSING PRIORITIES FOR USING THE REMAINING WPAD FUNDS (ATTACHMENT D)

A. Business as Usual

- Annual Vegetation Management Only- \$700,000/year
 - Road side clearance & flash fuel treatments
 - Goat grazing on City properties
 - Chipping Program
 - Overtime for fire patrols on designated red flag days only
 - Eliminate funding ecologist
 - Reallocate \$300,000 match for FEMA Grant to vegetation management
 - WPAD funding will extend through 2016-2017 Fiscal Year with only \$555,514 available for 2017-2018 Fiscal Year)

B. Business as Usual and the FEMA Grant

- Annual Vegetation Management & FEMA Match \$700,000/year + \$300,000 Reserve for FEMA Match & \$172,000 for CEQA
 - Road side clearance & flash fuel treatments
 - Goat grazing on City properties
 - Chipping Program
 - Overtime for fire patrols on designated red flag days only
 - Eliminate funding ecologist
 - Maintain \$300,000 match for FEMA Grant and do \$172,000 CEQA for FEMA projects
 - WPAD funding will extend through 2016-2017 Fiscal Year (with only \$83,514 available for 2017-2018)

C. District Wide Projects

- Annual Vegetation Management, FEMA Match and District-Wild Vegetation Management Inventory/Plan
 - \$700,000/year
 - Goat grazing on City properties
 - Chipping Program
 - Overtime for fire patrols on designated red flag days only
 - Eliminate funding for program analyst & ecologist
 - Road side clearance & flash fuel treatments
 - \$300,000 Reserve for FEMA Match
 - Maintain \$300,000 match for FEMA Grant and \$172,000 CEQA for FEMA projects
 - \$172,000 for FEMA & CEQA Reports
 - \$167,00 for District Wide Plan
- WPAD funding will extend through 2015-2016 Fiscal Year (with only \$636,514 available for 2016-2017)

D. Develop a Vegetation Management Plan that includes 1 year of regular maintenance prioritizing largest publically owned parcels, and do CEQA on those, and move forward from there.

E. Do away with the Program analyst altogether and spend \$500K-600K on Vegetation Management Plan and EIR/CEQA

F. Develop a comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan with EIR, and CEQA

- WPAD to reallocate funds and recommend at February or March Board meeting.
- WPAD to reallocate funds and recommend by June 2015
- WPAD to reallocate funds and recommend later
- Develop a comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan including specific plans for major open spaces and fire corridors. The plan will include inventory of existing vegetation, goals and objectives (e.g. flash fuels clearance, fire ladder mitigation, prevention of crowning) and will address both the schedule and methodology for each project, and will be informed by input from a qualified biologist and District residents. The goal of the plan will be to achieve long term and cost effective vegetation management to achieve fire safety in the high fire severity zone, wildland urban interface of Oakland (Wildfire Prevention District).
- The Plan will include CEQA analysis and documentation in a tiered structure so that there is quicker, lower level review for continuation of ongoing vegetation management in the short term, and higher level review for those activities with greater environmental impact.

V. FINAL OUTCOME

After much discussion, there was unanimous consensus that the WPAD should reallocate funds and recommend developing a comprehensive vegetation management plan with EIR and CEQA at its next Board meeting.

A. Additional Comments

- Will OFD actually take this input and act on it?
- Will Volunteers and their assistance be supported?
- Conflation of old district with a new one to be defined in the future (going out to voters again)