



Wildfire Prevention Assessment District  
Citizen's Advisory Committee  
Retreat Notes for  
Saturday, February 25 2017  
9 am-12:30 pm  
Trudeau Center, 15500 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA

**Advisory Committee Members in attendance:**

Sue Piper, Chair (District 1)  
Martin Matarrese (Vice Chair (District 7)  
Steve Hanson (District 1)  
Lin Barron (District 4)  
Mike Petouhoff (District 4)  
Doug Wong (At Large)  
Glen Dahlbacka (District 7) (arrived late)

Anette Boulware, Program Analyst, OFD  
Claudia Albano, volunteer scribe

Among the 56 participants were current and former WPAD Board members, representatives of Park Steward Groups, Hills Conservation Network, Oakland Urban Forestry Forum, and residents of the WPAD. All Council Districts within the WPAD were represented.

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Chair Sue Piper welcomed everyone to the WPAD Public Hearing. Participants were asked to state their name and the group they represented or what neighborhood or Council District they lived in.

**2. Overview of WPAD and Input from February 7, 2015 workshop**

Chair Sue Piper explained that the purpose of the hearing was to gather input from residents to assist the WPAD Advisory Committee in preparing a final report to the Council, now that the WPAD funding will be expended by June 2017. The plan is to present the report to the Public Safety Committee in May, prior to the final meeting of the WPAD Advisory Committee on June 15, 2017. She said that the Advisory Committee had a fiduciary responsibility to complete this final report, as they were charged with developing the budget and providing oversight of the spending of WPAD funds since the district was formed in 2004.

Participants were provided with the notes from the February 7, 2015 retreat that included facts about the WPAD's location, size and purpose; explanation of what goes into a Vegetation Management Plan; explanation of the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) review process; and an outline of how the WPAD fits into the City's organizational structure. The notes provided facts and bullet points about challenges, opportunities, positive and negative lessons learned. Participants were given 30 minutes to review the information in their agenda packets and posted on the wall, along with a map of the district and an enlarged organizational chart. The goal was to ensure that participants all have common information to work from prior to the public hearing.

Two questions came up: Sue Piper explained what CEQA was and how it was going to be incorporated into the current Vegetation Management Planning process, which was a unanimous recommendation from the 2015 retreat. Public input for this plan is supposed to begin within the next month, with the goal of completing a fire risk reduction plan for each of the City's large open spaces by December 2016. That plan will then become the "project" for the CEQA review, which is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2018. The plan and CEQA are slated to go before the City Council in December 2018.

The other issue was a correction to the February 7, 2015 notes that incorrectly stated that the WPAD was responsible for both fire inspections on both public and private properties. In fact, it is the Fire Prevention Bureau of the Oakland Fire Department that is responsible for the inspections. The WPAD's funds are primarily used to reduce fire risks on city-owned properties, with a small amount of funds set aside for chipping services for private property owners, the mailing of the annual inspection notice, and paying for temporary data input staff to transfer the inspection data to the City's computer system.

### **3. Public Hearing**

45 statements were made, including several read by WPAD Advisory Committee members from statements emailed in by those who could not attend. (See Attachment 2.) Several participants returned to the podium to make additional comments, for a total of 45 statements.

Statements were organized into three categories:

- A. What Worked
- B. What Didn't Work
- C. Lessons Learned

✓ means more than one person made a similar statement

We are adding a 4<sup>th</sup> category called "Vegetation Management Plan Issues" because there were a number of comments that didn't deal with the WPAD itself but did have something to do with issues concerning the Vegetation Management Plan.

#### **A. What Worked**

- Moved the meetings from City Hall to here in the WPAD
- Developed multi-year service contracts that save money over time.
- Had a major fire in 1991, and haven't had one since. Humans caused it.
- Chipping program, owners maintain their own property, roadside clearing. ✓
- People volunteered to be on the WPAD board. Appreciate what the board has done, without them it would just be the city. ✓
- WPAD done an adequate job, doing the best they can, but it's worthless if you can't get the city to work with you. And that won't happen unless the Council cares about this topic. So we need to work with others because we are in the same boat. ✓
- The WPAD Volunteers worked well with the City staff, however there is a challenge between the City and its activists/volunteers. Need to model ourselves on best practices so the city values the work of volunteers. ✓

- I appreciate the information I got from the Fire Department about keeping the vegetation around my own house fire-safe. I learned useful information, for example, about fire ladders near the eaves of my roof.

## **B. What Didn't Work**

- Everything—nothing done about the field; didn't respond to phone calls or emails. The Fire Department is totally unresponsive. ✓
- Education and outreach was insufficient. The homeowner doesn't know what to do. (*Why a book was written to help them*) ✓
- The City didn't work as a partner in the process. No management/oversight or follow through. In its later years, the WPAD Advisory Committee did not have a good relationship with the city.
- Concerned that no one from the command staff from OFD in attendance at this public hearing. ✓
- The WPAD getting involved in trying to change the Integrated Pest Management Ordinance in the City was a big mistake.
- Execution and the efficient use of manpower were not evident, i.e. 98<sup>th</sup> Ave, and Golf Links open space parcel. A crew came in with weed whackers instead of a tractor. Project took a whole day instead of a couple of hours. Inefficient. (*Note: was a Caltrans project.*)
- Clear cutting on Tunnel Road at lower Hiller. All trees destroyed. Bentley School not notified. Eyesore and concerns about erosion. An example of what didn't work in WPAD—no notification to do what they intended to do. The WPAD should represent all people who live in Oakland. Destroying the forests won't result in a fire strategy. (*Note, this was not a WPAD project, but a Diablo Fire Safe Council project on private property.*)
- WPAD must stop. Don't represent who does business here. No poor people in attendance due to the location of the meeting.
- The City Fire Department is dysfunctional with foot dragging to fill positions so inefficiency results.
  - The City doesn't have enough staff and no experts on staff like a botanist. The Vegetation Management Plan is an excellent step in finding out what we have without destroying everything.
  - No program analyst hired for 2 years. \$190,000 set aside for public outreach funds were not spent. No botanist hired. WPAD web page not kept up to date. A significant number of minutes and agendas not filed with the City Clerk. One of the most competent part-time temporary fire inspectors was not rehired. Time wasted on FEMA grants that didn't materialize.
  - Record keeping and retention, and accuracy of reporting inspections and compliance. Records from 2005 through May 2010 are missing
  - The FEMA grant, Skyline Blvd. tree removal project and Chabot Observatory projects were poorly management or delayed, or in some cases funding lost outright. As a result, most WPAD funds went to annual maintenance projects, rather than to those that would have long-term impact.

- Not enough done to clear fallen trees, clean up of debris. Bikes create soil compaction, heavy weeds in medians. Hills Park are not patrolled and in bad shape with a higher fire danger.
- Proper inspection and fines. Inconsistent enforcement of the Fire Code—residents and WPAD members repeatedly shared stories of properties that had passed but clearly were out of compliance. One time there appeared to be fabrication of inspection results. Process was undercut by turnover in part-time and full-time inspectors, causing backlogs as well as inconsistent inspections. ✓
- The District hasn't been honest. The materials didn't say the WPAD was responsible for public property. People assume it is for private property.
- Departments are siloed. OPD doesn't report unsafe conditions. City departments aren't working together. Took weeks to get issues even looked at. ✓
- Who in the city will now manage the goats and other contracts with the WPAD funding goes away? Vegetation management staff in the city was cut by 2/3. We need funds for adequate resources.
- We are working against each other. ✓
- No road access for the fire trucks and for getting people in and out. This makes talking about trees less effective.
- Lack of community involvement regarding fire safety issues. Need to reach out to our neighbors to educate and involve.
- Oakland Fire Department gives fire prevention lip service. Lack of Support of Fire prevention staffing and staff. ✓
- Problems aggravated by the discrepancy in the salary between Fire Prevention Inspectors and Commercial inspectors in OFD, leading to regular vacancies. In some cases, new staff was not properly trained. Still a problem.
- No plan for replacing vegetation in aging and fire prone forest of the city.
- Lack of support from other city departments
- Ineffective partnerships with other public or private partners—such as UC Berkeley.
- Missed opportunities to harness volunteer power—It wasn't until 2015—after the renewal failed—that the WPAD actually hosted a volunteer broom pulling effort on Skyline Blvd. between Keller and Grass Valley. Subsequent efforts were thwarted when the Fire Chief prohibited fire inspectors from working overtime or flex time on the weekend, when volunteers are typically available. There are a number of part steward groups that could be tapped.
- City leaders undercut the ability of the WPAD to achieve its goals by shifting all of the management responsibilities to the Fire Department in 2004 and then in 2008 cutting back significantly on PWA involvement with park and open space management, and needed tree planting, care and removals. Experience has show that the Fire Prevention staff's expertise is not in project management or contracting, causing delays and inefficiencies over the past 14 years.
- The failure of the renewal election falls squarely at the feet of senior city staff. The mayor, city administrator and the fire chief. Volunteers—Oakland citizens on the WPAD—gave city staff the guidance and tools to fight this fight and win. It's not that those senior city staff dropped the ball; they refused to pick it up in the first place.
- Joaquin Miller Park not included in WPAD efforts. It is the elephant in the room. If a fire were to start there. It is the quintessential "aging forest" City has

insufficient staff to clear trees that are dead/dying/fallen over. So include Joaquin Miller in the Vegetation Management Plan (*Note: It is.*)

- Don't hear our voice downtown at Council, public safety committee. We need accountability about what is not being done. Can't get through to our elected officials. ✓
- 85% of firefighters don't live in the area, so in an emergency how can they get here? We need a requirement that fire fighters live within a certain radius so they can attend in an emergency.
- When trees are cut, the stumps and debris are left. The City needs a plan to deal with that.
- Getting the contracts out to clear the brush has been a problem. There is a complex bidding process that needs to be simplified. The City needs to fix this.
- Public doesn't understand roles of WPAD and OFD.
- WPAD doesn't have anything to do about implementation of the money that is budgeted.
- When we hear that the African American Fire Chief needs to be fired, we need to see why the failings happen, because it is complex.

### **C. Lessons Learned**

- Need a consensus on a vision for what we want the hills to look like. ✓
- Develop program to include schools, youth groups and young adults in fire safety education.
- Any effort must have a robust public education and outreach plan. ✓
- Need a process that gets more city departments involved and partners more effectively with private sector organizations and leaders in implementing needed programs for vegetation management.
- If there is a new district
  - A commission or committee that is more than advisory must govern it.
  - Need 3-year terms for board members.
  - How can Oakland NOT have a fire district to protect us? We need another election. There is a fire every 20 years.
- Consider a City Vegetation Management and Urban Forestry and Landscaping agency or a different approach for effectively managing our vegetation on public/private properties in the district. It should have a clear plan, capable and experienced staff and significant resources allocated to help in converting our fire-prone and rapidly aging vegetation on both public and private properties into a much more fire-resident landscape—with long term goals, not just annual plans.
- Need to find more ways to help private property owners remove fire-prone vegetation to reduce the fire risk. The fire doesn't care if the property of private or public. Learn to be good stewards. ✓
- Need to incorporate volunteer activities into the city's efforts in our parks and open spaces.
- Residents need to show up
- Need full time inspectors that are trained and connected to their neighborhoods
- We should streamline the contracting process; Management of contracts should go back to Public Works

- Target management of public lands
- Cooperation, collaboration and learn to work together, otherwise we will lose our families, homes, trees ✓
- Use GIS for vegetation management.
- We need to preserve human life
- For those who like trees, plant in the flats where they are really needed. Temperatures are higher there than on the ridgeline.
- Need strong enforcement. We need to do something immediately are we are going to have another fire.
- Need to have a more inclusive policy. No people of color at the meeting.
- Fire safety is more than vegetation management; Blocked access on our narrow streets is problematic. There is a pilot project to work with neighbors about street access for emergency vehicles and residential vehicles.
- Need a youth employment component to the plan.

#### **D. Vegetation Management Issues**

- The City needs to fund this Vegetation Management Plan. Can the Fire Department have a review board for Vegetation Management?
- Save the eucalyptus trees. If you clear cut the hills there will be nothing left but stinkwort.
- I don't support the eucalyptus trees, non-native and not firesafe.
- Pesticide use is a big mistake —pollutes the lakes and poisons get into our bodies. ✓
- Eucalyptus get cut and come back. Decide what to do about resprouting.
- The FEMA EIR process didn't listen to us about putting poison on the areas/trees/lands. The eucalyptus trees are good. Lots of important properties re health, grassland produce more fires.
- Trees produce oxygen and good for the environment so don't cut trees. That won't prevent fires. The trees hold water and protect homes. ✓
- No more vegetation management—that is a deforestation campaign. It took a lawsuit to stop you. Fires start in the grasslands. Charade of fire prevention. Trees need fire. If you are afraid of trees don't live in a forest.
- WPAD says natives are less likely to burn than non-natives and it's not true.
- If you cut down the trees you get grass and that leads to fire. It's low growing vegetation that builds a ladder to the trees. ✓
- Everyone needs to be involved in the Vegetation Management Plan. Tell Angela Robinson Piñon, who is the point person, you want to be involved and she will let you know about the process and dates. 510 238-4055.
- We need a deadline date for a Vegetation Management Plan, because we are going to have a fire season this year.
- The concern about wholesale tree removal is coming from the FEMA grants. WPAD doesn't advocate for widespread tree removal. The FEMA grant was wrong. We need input at the beginning of the process to develop plans. People felt unheard. That is why the Vegetation Management Plan we are now developing is important. Let's get it right.
- The Vegetation Management Plan/CEQA and GIS system need to be knitted together in the plan so it is reflected in the contracts.

- Weed trees, etc., do come back so in the Vegetation Management Plan, it's a waste of money to cut without addressing the seeds. Vegetation Management Plan is very important.
- Clogged gutters are as much a problem as debris. Our homes are fuel load.

Attachment 1: List of attendees

Attachment 2: Written Comments

ATTACHMENT 1: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Carole Agnello
2. Adam Ball
3. Jerry Baer
4. Lin Barron
5. Dinah Benson
6. Ken Benson
7. Kate Bernier
8. Olga Bolotina
9. Barbara Brochard
10. Shelagh Broderson
11. Carolyn Burgess
12. Mimi Chan
13. Glen Dahlbacka
14. Isis Feral
15. Aileen Frankel
16. Elaine Geffen
17. Barbara Goldenberg
18. Barbara Gordon
19. Steven Hanson
20. Madeline Hovland
21. Sally Hutchinson
22. Jim Kaller
23. Richard Kauffman
24. Howard Keylor
25. Sue Kramer
26. Barbara Kluger
27. Mary MacAllister
28. Dave McGinness
29. John Madden
30. Helga Mahlmann
31. Martina Matarrese
32. Howard Matis
33. Nelson Max
34. Mary Sue Meads
35. Maeve O'Connor
36. Keara O'Doherty
37. Assata Ologhala
38. Mike Petouhoff
39. Sue Piper
40. Jim Rivers
41. Dee Rosario
42. Emily Rosenberg
43. Martha Rossman
44. Maria Sabatini
45. E. G. Seaman
46. Marla Schmalle
47. Peter Scott
48. Robert Sieben
49. Tanya Smith
50. Teri Smith
51. Elizabeth Stage
52. Roberta Traina
53. Nicholas Vigilante
54. John Ulakovic
55. Zac Unger
56. Doug Wong
57. Bill Woodward