



# Fire Safe San Mateo County

January 13, 2021  
General Meeting Minutes

Online conference call. No in-person meeting

**\*If you would like a copy of the recording, please email  
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**Commence 9:47 AM**

## Attendance:

Online Zoom conference call in lieu of in-person meeting due to COVID-19 meeting restriction due to sheltering-in-place order. Technical difficulties occurred, and the meeting commenced later than usual as a new meeting ID was created.

65 members attended the meeting.

## I. Introduction

Council President Denise Enea welcomed all members who called into the meeting. Introduced first presenter, Rebecca Miller.

## II. Recent Wildfire Legislation in Sacramento – Rebecca Miller – Stanford University

- Joint project between 3 people, Lin Shi and Kiran Chawla are collaborators on the project but not in attendance for the presentation.
- The California Legislature follows a two-year legislative calendar for each session
  - o Split into first year and second year, with a short window in which policy makers and legislators can actually introduce bills
  - o The legislative cycle does not match up with the yearly fire cycle
  - o Legislative bills have become far more common in the Ca state legislature
- 31% of bills that use the word wildfire don't actually have anything substantive to do with the bill
- 15 bills so far in 2021-2022
- 2019-2020 legislative priorities reflected primarily pre-wildfire concerns, though mitigation bills had only 22% pass rate.
- Bills broken into categories

- Mitigation, preparedness, response, relief/ short term recovery, long-term recovery, emissions
- Most of the proposed bills are in regard to mitigation and preparedness, however a large proportion of these categories of bills fail.
- Most bills that fail do so early in the legislative process (especially mitigation bills) and rarely by veto.
- 22% of mitigation bills passed, but 50% failed before clearing the first house, meaning they didn't make it far in the legislative process.
- Why are bills failing in the first house?
  - So many are proposed that many of them are not substantive or well thought out
  - Many bills get sucked into a larger wildfire bills. Language from one bill gets absorbed or combined into another larger bill.
- Most bills fail, regardless of who proposes them, where the legislators came from, or who the bill is trying to help.
- Most wildfire related bills are proposed by Democrats
  - Bills that mentioned minority groups or disenfranchised communities, usually did not pass.
- Non rural districts proposed more bills than rural districts – indicating that wildfires are not just a rural problem, but more so a WUI/ urban problem.
- Bills related to reducing wildfire risks have become more popular in recent legislative sessions
  - Starting in 2017-2018 prescribed fire related bills experienced an uptick
  - 2019-2020 defensible space experienced an uptick
  - Home hardening did not experience an uptick.
- Many prescribed burn bills passed, and new initiatives were implemented
  - Training and cert programs
  - Increased funding
  - Education programs
  - Changes to personal liability/ insurance (assuming trained burners)
  - Vegetation treatment program (Cal VTP)
- Most defensible space/ home hardening bills failed. These bills included:
  - Low interest fund for 1 billion in home hardening
  - Requirements to have 5 feet of defensible space around the home
  - Create a local inspection program for defensible space
  - Development restrictions in high risk areas
  - All failed
- Other themes
  - Climate change and insurance have become more prominent
  - As has evacuation
- Last week, the governor's office released a wildfire and forest action plan
  - Fuel treatments scaled up to 500,000 acres per year by 2025
    - 100,000 acres per year of prescribed burns + training center + support more private landowners and tribal burning
  - Expand wood products market for biomass

- Streamline fuel treatment through CalVTP
- 2021-2022 budget includes 1 billion for wildfire priorities
- A sampling of the bills proposed in the current legislature:
  - Create the Office of Wildfire Technology Research and Development within CalOES to identify, study, test, and advise on wildfire technologies (SB 109)
  - Create a wildfire smoke strike team to enforce N95 availability and use among agricultural workers during wildfire events (AB73)
  - Establishes financial penalties for failing to create clearance between vegetation and electric transmission/distribution lines (AB 21)
  - Prevent local agencies from approving development not adequately protected from fire hazards or meeting wildfire-resistant construction standards (SB 12).
  - Insurance companies must submit report on fire risk information for residential property policies (SB 72).
- No one from San Mateo has proposed a wildfire bill so far!
- Questions:
  - How does wildfire legislation compare to baseline legislation
    - Unsure on how many bills actually get proposed each year. 150 bills in 2019-2020 were related to the word pandemic. Typically 2500-3000 bills are proposed each year (via Josh Hugg (MROSD)).
  - Where are these bills failing?
    - Not sorted by specific committee. They were failing in the third, second, or third house within the senator house.
  - The definition of disadvantaged communities largely excludes bay area communities. Prop 68 used as an example.
    - High risk wildfire communities do not always match up with disadvantaged communities.
  - Are there any examples of local taxes being approved for fire issues?
    - There is a study at Stanford looking at local fire initiatives. Didn't have the answer off the top of her head, but she would look into it and pass it along to Denise or Sheena.
- Resources
  - Predicting the success of fire-related ballot measures  
<https://devpost.com/software/wildfires-economics-and-cities-ballot-measures>
  - California's Wildfire Resiliency Plan:  
<https://fntf.fire.ca.gov/media/cjwfpckz/californiawildfireandforestresilienceactionplan.pdf>

### III. *Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire (CPAW) – Kimiko Barrett Ph.D. Headwaters Economics*

- Research and policy analyst for Headwaters Economic

- Headwaters Economics
  - Non partisan independent research group
- Presentation Road Map
  - How a home burns down
  - What we can do about it
  - Who is doing what
- Wildfire are inevitable, wildfire disasters don't have to be
  - We know how to build homes and communities to survive a wildfire
  - We have the materials, science, and engineering to build smarter homes.
- Fire demo video:
  - Within 4 minutes of demonstration, bark mulch along house caught fire, spreading to vegetation near the house, spreading onto the cedar siding, and getting into the home via eaves and air vents.
  - The other side of the house, made of fire resistant materials did not catch fire.
- Primary culprit behind home loss during wildfire is through ember cast
- The structure will often burn when green vegetation and green canopies do not
- Voluntary measures aren't enough, you need 100% compliance to be effective
- Land use planning tools can help
  - Used to integrate wildfire risk reduction into the development process
  - WUI code, landscape regulations, density bonus, steep slope ordinance, subdivision standards
  - Community Planning Assistance for Wildfire Program (CPAW)
  - Land use planning
  - Hazard assessments
  - Capacity building
  - Research and science
- Sample communities
  - City of Austin, Texas
    - Fastest growing city in the country
    - Increased wildfire risk
    - 2016 applied and accepted into CPAW program
    - 2018 CPAW developed a vulnerable populations tool
    - 2020 Wui Code adoption
      - Applies to all new proposed development, not retrofits
        - Eaves, siding, roofs, and exterior doors
        - Tempered windows
        - Attic vents must be 1/8" or smaller
        - Defensible space
        - And wui code applies to all accessory buildings around the property
  - Boulder County, CO
    - Public private partnership

- Launched in 2014
  - Over 40 participating organizations and 2100 homeowners
  - Insurance played key role from the beginning
  - Funded by the county, state, and FEMA
  - What is provided
    - In person assessment
    - Customized reports
    - Follow up inspections
    - Certificate and a yard sign for eligible homeowners
    - Can submit to insurance to help buy/renew/retain coverage
- Park County, Montana
  - Custom research projects
  - What does it cost to build a wildfire resistance home?
    - Exterior walls, roof, decks, near home landscaping
    - For structures in the intermountain west
    - Typical home costs \$81,140 vs \$79,230 for a wildfire resistant home.
    - The study is currently being replicated for California (southern, northern, and central)
  - What are the full community costs of wildfire?
    - Suppression costs 9%
    - Other costs and damages: 91%
      - Evacuation
      - Road stabilization
      - Property loss
      - Lost tax revenue
      - Rehabilitation
      - Infrastructure
      - Human casualties
    - Much of these costs fall on the local community
- There is no silver bullet solution
- Creating change will take all of us
- Questions:
  - What is the largest benefit for a community? If they could only pick one thing.
    - This is a social science question. The bigger challenge is the political and social piece. Providing resources to elevate the dialogue is imperative.
  - What types of communities make the most progress?
    - The most immediate correlation is experience with a catastrophic wildfire.
    - Our goal is to persuade 3-5 elected officials, not the general public.

- What can you do best for communities that are already built out?
  - California will lead international debate about retrofits. What happens in California will set the precedent for other areas. Retrofit needs to be part of the equation. We need to deliberately think about how we will do things differently, and that includes retrofits.
  - We can't continue to rely on suppression in the manner that we have been.
- How much exposure has your presentation received by architects?
  - We work with them locally, catered to southwest montana and the intermountain west.
  - The push is to market architects the "fire savvy" architect. Ability to market communities as wildfire resistant communities.
- How do you promote communities to achieve 100% compliance?
  - Firewise is a prerequisite for our efforts to come in. It shows that the community understands the fire risk. It's a very necessary step in creating a fire adapted community. Need to compel homeowner regulations at the policy level. Elected officials place the policy level measures.
- What is your progress in getting large landowners to construct fuel breaks?
  - We don't work with individual landowners or homeowners. We work with fire chiefs, planning departments, etc. Working with individual landowners and handholding fuel break work is not within our job realm.
- Resources:
  - IBHS videos: <https://ibhs.org/risk-research/wildfire/>
  - Wildfire research, Near-building noncombustible zone: <https://ibhs.org/wp-content/uploads/wpmembers/files/Near-Building Noncombustible Zone Report IBHS.pdf>

#### IV. Highway 35 (Skyline Blvd.) Shaded Fuel Break Update – Debra Born

- Started an initiative to plan a shaded fuel break for the entire length of highway 35.
- The road has significant safety hazards and would help prevent fire from moving to the east side of the Santa Cruz mountains
- Project has been broken down into phases
  - CEQA is in place for a 6 mile stretch of skyline in the southern end of San Mateo county
  - Seeking funding this winter to clear the first phase, beginning at grizzly flat trailhead.
  - Starting to collect names for the task force and having more people join.
  - The task force will incorporate mapping, funding development, narratives to write, cost information, etc.
- Working on an initial request to supervisor Horsley and other groups.
- Working with CalFire to get maps prepared.

- The entire stretch is close to 40 miles in length
- Within San Mateo county, the stretch is 24 miles.

## V. Announcements and Discussion – For the good of the group – All membership

- Lena Silberman
  - o Coordinating with County Park’s Director Nicolas Calderon to develop a comprehensive list of fuel reduction projects.
  - o What needs to be done, what are barriers, and what are next steps for the board of supervisors.
  - o Steering committee meeting will be held next week.
- Rich Sampson
  - o No specifics, but there should be additional funding coming soon.
  - o All dependent upon what the budget will end up at the end of the fiscal year. But, it’s looking very good.
- David Weinberg
  - o Are there any dates yet for the chipping program?
    - Not yet, still working with contractors and getting pricing. Potentially can start work in May or June.

## VI. Adjourn

- Meeting adjourned at 11:26 A.M.
- Meetings the second Wednesday of every month
- **February 10, 2021**