

Council Business Meeting

January 5, 2021

Agenda Item	Mayor Request for Wildfire Town Hall on January 14	
From	Adam Hanks	City Manager Pro Tem
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SUMMARY

Mayor Akins has proposed that a virtual live town hall be held on January 14 to discuss the Almeda Fire. The request includes various Department Heads who would need to attend and respond to questions. As this request will require more than two hours of staff preparation and participation time and will involve other Council members' participation, a majority vote by the Council is required to move forward.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

City Council 2019-2021 Biennial Goals

F. Enhance and improve transparency and communication

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

At the November 30, 2020 Study Session ([staff report](#), [minutes](#)), staff summarized the Community input received in a Citizen Survey regarding the Almeda Fire. The summary included 534 Citizen responses to an online survey focusing on communication from the City during the Almeda Fire and the evacuation process. Staff is utilizing the feedback and takeaways from the survey to formulate a work plan and ensure the City's response improves for future emergencies.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mayor Akins has proposed a live Zoom Town Hall on January 14, 2021 from 6 to 8 p.m. The Town Hall would allow citizens to share their ideas and opinions regarding the City's response to the Almeda Fire and ask the City Council and staff questions. With the current COVID restrictions, any variation chosen would be virtual and carry with it the limitations of zoom-style constraints.

Town halls, listening sessions and community forums are all similar types of events that occasionally have been used to engage the community on particular issues, events or decision-making processes. These events take considerable staff, Mayor and Council time for content preparation, community outreach for wide reaching engagement and participation and the summarizing of input and follow up work with Council to determine how best to utilize the community input collected.

Because of the nature and locations of the Almeda fire, Ashland City staff mostly served in support of other jurisdictions personnel during and after the fire. A Town Hall session with only Ashland staff and elected officials could serve to highlight problems related to the fire but would likely provide only limited insights on possible solutions that necessarily involve other regional entities. As reported at the November 30 Study Session, Jackson County has engaged an outside company to conduct a County-wide assessment of preparations for and responses to the fire, which is to be completed in the late summer of 2021. The assessment will include citizens, staff and local public officials from the region to ensure opportunities for input into this assessment. Regional information gathering is a current priority of staff and will be incorporated into the work plan that will be shared with the Mayor and Council and the community as soon as it is complete.

FISCAL IMPACTS

None

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff understands and agrees with the need for continuing conversations on the best ways to deal with the issues that arose during the Alameda Fire. As an alternative to hosting a wide-ranging citizen brainstorming session in January, a targeted virtual Town Hall focused exclusively on City of Ashland emergency preparedness could be scheduled in February to focus on upcoming Firewise and Ashland Forest Resiliency wildfire mitigation projects and wildfire mitigation measures proposed by the Wildfire Safety Commission on November 2, 2020 ([staff report](#), [minutes](#)).

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

- 1) I move to approve the City Manager to dedicate staff resources to develop a Wildfire Town Hall event on January 14, 2021 with both Council and Department Head participation
- 2) I move to approve holding a Mayor's Wildfire Town Hall as a means for additional community input to supplement the online survey input already received and limit staff involvement to noticing, scheduling and notetaking.
- 3) I move to defer holding a Wildfire Town Hall until staff has developed and presented its final After Action Review report and workplan for improved City and Community response to wildfire emergencies.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

None