

Ashland Wildfire Safety Commission (WSC) 2020 Annual Report for City Council

This document represents a collaborative effort involving multiple authors. It has been approved for submission to Ashland's City Council by the WSC.

Wildfire Safety Commission has had a productive year, as outlined in the 5 page written report we submitted 10 days ago. What follows are highlights to accommodate Adam's suggested 10 minute limit.

June, 2019 concluded our first **WSC Wildfire Preparedness Campaign**. This now annual program has a three month tiered launch: April for home preparations, May setting up for possible evacuation or sheltering indoors, and June to prepare for smoke.

Prior to COVID-19, this year's outreach via email and in-person communication engaged over 60 community partners, including local churches/temples, hardware stores, and major email lists including KS Wild and the Ashland Food Bank. More recently we've been using Facebook and Nextdoor to get the word out.

WSC staffed a weekly table at the 2019 Ashland Farmer's Market, providing physical displays (including hard-scape samples), a range of evacuation and survival kit options, answering questions, and handing out brochures depicting ways to reduce wildfire risk in Ashland, as about our WildFire Preparedness Campaign.

This year, due to Covid-19, we're displaying a sandwich board with a 24" x 32" poster about the Spring Campaign at the market each week.

We initiated a **rotating cast of individual WSC members attending Tree and Forest Lands Commission meetings** to help coordinate areas where our responsibilities overlap.

Per the City Council resolution in conjunction with the passage of the **Wildfire Plant List** in October 2018, in the fall of 2019 we performed our **first annual review and update of The City of Ashland's Prohibited Flammable Plants** list.

At WSC's September 2019 In-Service meeting, the Wildfire Safety Commission arrived at a range of critical wildfire related issues we agreed to focus our attention on during the following year. We formed working groups for each topic. We are pleased to report substantial progress on a number of these topics:

Topic 1: Nuisance Ordinance expansion: The City of Ashland currently has limited capacity to motivate property owners to remove live and dead vegetation that pose fire hazards on private properties, particularly on vacant lots. The language in Ashland's Municipal Code also does not clearly define what constitutes excessive hazardous fuels. Further, this kind of work is a significant responsibility burden for property owners, particularly for those on a limited income.

A WSC Working Group which includes Fire Department staff has been assessing code enforcement language amendment options, and researching strategies adopted by other communities to mitigate excessive fuels on private properties and vacant lots.

Topic 2: Expanding wildfire-related home inspections capacity: The good news is that Ashland has the highest FireWise participation in the nation. The bad news is that AF&R's current staffing has been unable to keep up with the high demand for wildfire home assessments.

WSC has been exploring ways to accomplish this without increasing AF&R staff workload, potentially including volunteer efforts, contractors, and paid inspections.

3) Real estate inspection program:

While Ashland's recent ordinance changes assure that new home construction and major remodels minimize the potential for wildfire spread, the vast majority of our housing stock was built and landscaped before these standards were in place. These older homes expose our community to substantial risk.

Several California counties have added wildfire-safety home inspections into their home sales process. The California realtors I've talked to agreed this has had a major safety impact in those communities.

WSC, AF&R, and Ashland City Administration leadership have begun a collaboration with RVAR, the Rogue Valley Association of REALTORS®.

RVAR and WSC hope to have 5 programs in place before year's end, Covid-19 permitting:

- RVAR has signed off on a new brochure from our working group that covers homeowner wildfire risk reduction for all Ashland home buyers.
- Annual half-day wildfire-awareness trainings for local agents; a two-day training for inspectors — including how to prioritize for affordability.
- Related grant applications
- An Ashland Wildfire Hazard Zone Advisory passout for all local home buyers.

4) Interra Data Program: Street-side level Wildfire risk data collected on 6,600 parcels has been analyzed, augmented and transferred to the City's GIS system. Homeowner web portals will offer access to this information in a secure portals accessed only by the property owner.

5) Fire Adapted Community (FAC) Expansion / Integration: This is a rebranding of our overarching wildfire prevention program to coincide with the National Cohesive Strategy's structure and to increase management efficiency. Wildfire Division staff are working to help FireWise Communities become increasingly self-governing to free up staff time to manage the entire Fire Adapted program. A new website is unfolding this month and this item will be a work in progress.

Our Working Group identified eight tactics for this, including:

- WSC is exploring how Interra data could appropriately be made publicly available say in 2 years as a motivational tool to get work done and to enable peer pressure where there are non-compliant properties affecting neighborhoods.
- *Exploring Solutions for Property wildfire safety assessments without requiring more city staff*
- *Exploring ways FireWise Communities can become more self-governing to free up staff time*
- *Updating the Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (CWPP) in the next 2 years*

6) Nursery Education Program / Landscapers: While Ashland's Prohibited Flammable Plants List has been in effect since October of 2018, Wildfire Division staff sees new plantings of flammable plants frequently within the city. To reduce the staff time needed to enforce the removal of new planting of flammable plants, this working group has begun creating a course that would be provided annually to nurseries and landscapers in the region.

7) Wildfire-Safe Business License Program for Landscapers & Contractors

8) We have a working group that hopes to facilitate Adoption of New wildfire-related Building Codes, similar to Medford's

9) We have another working group titled "Assist with Public Messaging."

10) Identify alternative funding sources and grants

11) Electric Utility Fire Risk Assessment: WSC has been investigating the maintenance status of the power lines feeding Ashland, both within the purview of Ashland's own Electric Utility, and beyond those boundaries where we're fed by Pacific Power. We've discovered some potentially hazardous past practices involving sub-par vegetation and brush/tree clearing around some of Pacific Power's lines, and have been in discussion with their management staff to improve that situation. We're happy to report that Pacific Power has, to date, appeared interested and responsive regarding our recommendations, although this is a WIP that's been put on hold during Covid-19.