

MINUTES FOR A MEETING OF THE WILDFIRE SAFETY COMMISSION

Wednesday, September 16th, 2020 11:00AM to 1:00PM Zoom

As the September 16th Wildfire Safety Commission (WSC) will be held electronically, any public forum testimony is to be submitted in writing by members of the public by 10AM the day before the scheduled meeting. Staff will compile all written testimony into one document and send the document to the Commission members and post the testimony on the agenda the day before the meeting after 10AM. The written testimony will also be included in the minutes.

Members of the public are welcome to listen or view the Wildfire Safety Commission meeting live. Please contact katie.gibble@ashland.or.us if you would like to listen to this meeting live.

Meeting protocol via Zoom: raise hand to chime in and Stephen or Katie will facilitate when you can begin speaking

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Stephen Gagne, Dan Dawson, Paul Behrhorst, Steve Asher, Chris Chambers, Charisse Sydoriak, Bruce Moats, Kent Romney, Tonya Graham, Katie Gibble

II. INTRODUCTIONS

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. August Minutes approved as submitted

IV. PUBLIC AND GUEST FORUM

- A. None

V. ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA

- A. Shift to begin conversation with Alameda Fire recap, all approve this shift

VI. CITY COUNCIL CHECK-IN

VII. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Working Group Check-ins *action items will be marked in **bold**
 - 1. Real Estate Engagement Program (SG, KG)
 - 2. Nuisance Ordinance Expansion (DD, CS, CC, KG)
 - 3. Home Inspector Capacity-building (Kent)
 - 4. FAC Expansion/integration (KG, KR, CS, DK)
 - 5. Spring Wildfire Preparedness Campaign (KG, KR, CS, DK)
 - 6. Intterra/WiRe Program rollout (DD, BM, KG, KR)
 - 7. Nursery/Landscaper Education (CS, KG)
 - 8. Fire-Safe Business License Program for Landscapers and Contractors (KG, SG)
 - 9. New Building Code Adoption advocacy (KG, SG)
 - 10. Consistent messaging by all departments (CS, KR) – Tonya check-in
 - 11. Identify Alternative Funding Sources (KR, KG)
 - 12. City Finances (SG)
 - 13. Electric Utility Risk Assessment (SA) – Steve check-in
 - 14. Illegal Camping Ignition Sources (KG, CC)
- B. Farmer's Market
- C. Homeland Security Grant for evacuation planning (Katie)

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D. DEQ Grant (Katie)

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Alameda Fire Follow-up (all)

1. Stephen: what stopped the fire?

a) Operations: fire running out of available fuel, as evening went on, more resources from multiple jurisdictions were pulled to the front of the fire to stop the spread in the late evening. More resources helped stop the fire. Retardant drops were successful slowing southward and westward expansion. Combination of housing and vegetation changes as you move toward Medford, which may have hindered some spread. Pulling resources away from Talent and Phoenix to the front of the fire was challenging decision, but helps stopping fire. Hydrants starting running out of water in Talent, engines started having to drive to Ashland to get water. There were tenders, but engines did have to go to Ashland, and certainly did cause some home loss. Still unknown: what caused this pressure to be lost? How can we learn from this to prevent it happening in Ashland?

(1) Stephen: More resources could have helped. Ashland and Talent engines got to event on time. Chris: this event should not be used as a reason for why should hire more fire fighters. Would have taken a dozen more engines to stop the Alameda Fire early on. Statewide, we were on our own; everyone in the state was short on resources, and with multiple events. Fewer air resources as well.

2. What Chris saw, as it relates to Firewise Landscaping:

a) bark mulch on fire everywhere, was a constant widespread battle. Embers from everywhere causing countless spot fires. In code, no bark mulch within 5 feet. Unaccounted for is the emberload caused by bark mulch.

b) Fences: countless fences broken up to stop fire. First suggestion: add ordinance to not build wood fence if setback is within a certain threshold. But how do we retroactively get people to replace fences?

(1) Stephen notes that these are good things to accomplish at homesale. These are two relatively inexpensive items to change relative to homesale

(2) Need to develop well-researched alternatives to fences in Ashland (potential task for commission)

c) What about businesses (Charisse) how did so many businesses burn in the flatlands?

(1) Barkmulch for some

(2) Chris: overall fire intensity was extreme: many embers, plus buildings burning. Thermal output swamps a lot of other factors. What predisposed first buildings to start

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burning, that triggered larger thermal output that made it more difficult for other homes to survive.

(3) There were no “miracle homes”, firefighters worked hard to put out fire around homes that survived

d) Steve Asher: any evidence of what caused fire at Burger King – grease?

(1) Unknown at this point

e) Kent: this supports Jack Cohen’s research that embers causes 90% home ignition

3. Evacuation discussion

a) 11:05 fire was reported

b) 11:28 evacuation notification via Nixle

c) Why the delay? Chris was initially not close to fire – other side of city.

(1) Do not want to send evacuation alert right away to avoid un-needed evacuation

(2) Firefighters arrived 5-6 minutes in to assess fire

(3) Moving forward, during sizeup of fire, could be good to request Nixle alert over the radio

(a) Firefighters were effective at protecting structures. Police went door to door evacuating. Before evacuation notice was sent out, people had already been evacuated

(b) Police Chief asked City Administrator to send evac notice, which was ultimately sent out one minute after first (the alert that Chris sent out)

(c) What was missing from evac order is directing WHERE to direct people, depending on fire direction/scenario

(4) If you sign up for Nixle and live in City of Ashland, if you live outside of Ashland, you need to sign up for the County system.

(a) Chris can’t speak to how rest of evacuations went. In the end, the number of fatalities was low. 2 fatalities on greenway, 1 possibly in structure.

(b) Door by door evacuation was very successful. Amazing that so few fatalities resulted. Sign of good law enforcement, non-Ambulance response. In many ways the evacuation couldn’t have been better

(c) We sent 16 Nixle alerts within 48 hours of event

(d) What is the evacuation plan?

(i) We need to do a better job communicating. This is a difficult question. We could have gotten people killed depending on the scenario. We should not provide certainty because the evacuation is not certain. Will be learning more about evacuation control. Maybe we should talk

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about taking evacuation signs down. If an evacuation route is compromised, could have loss of life

(ii) Perhaps change the signs to say – Time to evacuate? Sign up for Nixle.

(5) Charisse notes that our CWPP includes evacuation drills every year. We have not been doing this

(6) Tonya: The next 12 months will be very important. When we did last year's evacuation drill, interest wasn't there, but now it would be. We need to debrief the community, since we do not have that capacity in the City staff to do so right now. If we evacuate, it is going to be chaotic, we need to prepare community for that reality to help them make decisions in the moment.

(7) Look fresh at priorities, pick date for in service before end of this meeting

(8) Fire added 6000 contacts to Nixle. We could not have done that in 20 years of pushing Nixle

(9) Ashland only received one notification from Citizen Alert

(10) Kent: Emergency Broadcast system was not used.

(a) Chris: IPAWS would have been county-level decision. If you are within distance of a cell tower, you would have received message. We have to go through the County to get access. If it was used, Ashland may not have seen it if a "geofence" was used for just Talent and Phoenix.

(11) Stephen: idea, Citizen Corp to direct traffic, staffing key intersections and could get back to command if they are seeing something

(a) CERT can do that right away, we had public works jump in and do that quickly. Chris didn't see that as an issue.

(b) Chris would not put people out there without a lot of equipment and training to keep those volunteers safe

(12) I-5 traffic pushed into into Ashland.

(a) Not ideal in any way. Eventually they shut it down at the border with CA. People were turning around and driving the wrong way on the interstate. Now that this has happened, we will be able to plan for it.

(b) If we had a second fire in town, this would have been worst case scenario. This is being addressed, and will have better solution regionally.

(c) Is the county leading this effort? No other efforts going on in county. Coordinated evacuation plan for county would work well for traffic management.

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(13) City is planning own AAR. So many people participated that it may be hard to breakdown.

(14) Allow access via Mountain in an emergency.

(15) Tonya: narrative she reads from Ashland residents is that I-5 semis coming in town was a big mistake. But there was a reason these were sent into Ashland. By the time those trucks were being sent into Ashland, there was a reason, and the city needs to get that rationale out. Residents were scared. There was rationale, but improvements need to be made. People need to hear the narrative, how much hard work went in

(a) Stephen: can you post info on Chief's narrative? Press story, how do we do this? Does the commission send out a press release?

(i) Kent: crisis communication – get out to the point, fully transparent release. Recommend that be drafted and put out this week to quash rumor and get stories straight. Radio, print, television would be best

(ii) Kent back on 24th, wants to do a in-depth documentary.

4. GIS team in Ashland is taking over the GIS management for damage assessments. There is a story to tell of the person-to-person response/organization response.

5. Kent: because this is a declared emergency, federal and state partners could provide people from joint information center to create communications plan. Chris: the county has already put in that request

6. Stephen requested info on if he should disseminate information based on what's being learned in the commission - Leave your association to the commission out of any political discussions

7. Stephen suggests getting more electric signs in town

8. 1700 radio station was not updated until Wednesday. Is it possible to make it easier to send out radio station.

9. Kent, another resource that is available to us at this time. We could invite a CMAT team to come here to assist on more of a county-wide level.

a) What is schedule – how long would it take to get mobilized. Could be a recommendation to council. No cost to hosting agencies. Requested that local officials provide attention to CMAT

B. Water Tanks (Stephen)

1. Two of four water towers require electric pumps to fill. There is a generator for backup at the main water center, but no back up generators for non-gravity refilled tanks. There are ports for generators, and the city does have two back up generators. Potential become the new normal for backup generators to be staged at tanks for red flag days.

C. Discussion of date for in-service: September 28th, 1-5PM

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IX. REPORTS AS TIME ALLOWS

- A. Forest Lands Commission Report (Charisse)
- B. Tree Commission (Katie)
- C. Chamber Wildfire Task Force (Katie)

X. NEXT MEETING

- A. ~~Wednesday, October 21st 2020, Zoom~~
- B. Wednesday, October 14th, 2020 Zoom

XI. ADJOURN