

July 11, 2019

Pat Randolph, Foreperson
Marin County Grand Jury
3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 275
San Rafael, CA 94903

RE: Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report: Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach

Mr. Randolph,

This is the official response of the Bolinas Fire Protection District to the Marin County Civil Grand Jury report entitled, "Wildfire Preparedness: A New Response." The Fire District Board of Directors approved the response at their regularly scheduled meeting held on July 1st, 2019.

FINDINGS

F1. Existing vegetation management codes are both inconsistent and inconsistently enforced.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

We cannot agree or disagree with this finding, because we are not in a position to evaluate all applicable agencies' vegetation management codes to determine their consistency or how they are enforced.

F2. There are not enough trained vegetation inspectors or fuel reduction crews.

Response: **Agree**

F3. Current vegetation enforcement procedures are slow, difficult and expensive.

Response: **Agree**

Each municipality has their own code enforcement procedure.

F4. Government agencies and safety authorities cannot currently manage vegetation on public lands.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

We cannot agree or disagree with this finding, because we are not in a position to evaluate how all applicable government agencies and safety authorities are currently managing vegetation on public lands. However, in Bolinas it is apparent that public lands are not managed properly in regards to hazardous fuel mitigation.

F5. All property owners are responsible for vegetation management on their property, yet they are not sufficiently educated about vegetation management and many do not have the physical and financial resources to create defensible space.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Some education has been provided through fire agencies and Firesafe Marin. There are regular community meetings and updates including online resources (Fire Safe Marin) and social media campaigns. We continue to strive to educate and motivate the public on issues surrounding defensible space. We agree there are sections of the population that may not have the physical or financial means to complete necessary work.

F6. Wildfire preparedness education is inconsistent and fails to reach most citizens, especially parents of young children.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

The messages and information are consistent countywide amongst the fire agencies and Fire Safe Marin. We agree the demographics of our hosted meetings/forums and exercises generally lack a younger demographic especially those with kids.

F7. The most effective method of education is person to person in neighborhoods.

Response: **Agree**

Defensible space home evaluations with a trained professional are the preferred and best method for educating the public and greater community. Although face to face communication is preferred, staffing limitations and time constraints don't allow this approach to be feasible for the entire community. There are multiple approaches that need to be taken with public education.

F8. Although Marin has 30 plus Firewise neighborhoods, the most in California, they only cover a small percentage of population and land.

Response: **Agree**

Firewise Communities are a great mechanism for bringing communities/neighborhoods together. They provide an organized approach to reducing hazards and risks.

F9. Sufficient public funds have not been provided to sustain comprehensive wildfire preparedness education.

Response: **Agree**

Generally, fire agencies are funded for the response and mitigation of emergency incidents. Development into the WUI, climate change and recent major fires are requiring resources greater than those available by local municipalities.

F10. Educating the public requires a different set of skills than firefighters usually have.

Response: **Disagree**

Firefighters have experiences that add value to educating the public; however, they also have other pressing responsibilities. Dedicated public education staff and defensible space home evaluators can spend more quality time on task than Firefighters.

F11. Any hesitation to use the WEA system can be deadly even if its alerts might reach people outside of its intended target zone.

Response: **Disagree**

The WEA system is not geographically specific and can bleed over to areas where evacuations are not necessary, adding unnecessary traffic to already congested roadways impeding egress of those most affected. We agree it is a useful tool but must be coordinated between the incident commander and Sheriff's OES.

F12. Alert Marin sends the most accurately targeted warnings to endangered populations, but it reaches too few residents because it is not well publicized. Both Alert Marin and Nixle require opt-in registration, a serious design flaw.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Alert Marin information is advertised and spoken about at almost every event hosted by Fire Departments, information is available on most if not all agencies web-sites. Additionally, information on Alert Marin is included in property tax mailings. Nixle and Alert Marin are two

very different systems. Nixle by design is an opt-in solution providing general information to the public. Alert Marin is an Opt-out system by design used to provide instruction or direction to the public. Hardline and voice over internet protocol (VOIP) data is purchased and requires residents to Opt-out. Currently, cellular data is not available to purchase. State Law will need to change for cellular information to be an Opt-out component.

F13. Sirens could be a useful and reliable warning system if their numbers and locations were increased to broaden their reach and if they were enhanced with a customized message through LRAD.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Long Range Acoustical Device (LRAD) is the name brand of one type of acoustical notification system. This system may have limited reach and limited ability to be heard inside a building. Local testing has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. This type of system does have valuable application in some areas within the County.

F14. In the WUI and in many town centers, infrastructure and roads are inadequate for mass evacuations.

Response: **Agree.**

Marin County has many narrow roads with limited access and overgrown vegetation. Much of the vegetation encroachment into the road right of way is the responsibility of the homeowners. Bolinas has roads that have become overgrown and either public land is not maintained or no one takes ownership of the unincorporated roads. Bolinas like other coastal rural towns has one road in and one road out. It is unknown how the infrastructure would hold up in a mass evacuation, but Bolinas has agreed to participate in a UC Berkeley traffic modeling study to look at this specifically.

F15. Evacuation routes are dangerously overgrown with vegetation and many evacuation routes are too narrow to allow safe passage in an emergency.

Response: **Agree**

Marin County has many narrow roads with limited access and overgrown vegetation. Much of the vegetation encroachment into the road right of way is the responsibility of the homeowners. Public works agencies regularly work with fire agencies identifying and working in the most critical areas that they have jurisdiction over.

F16. Emergency planners often do not publicize evacuation routes due to their mistrust of the public.

Response: **Disagree**

It is not an issue of mistrust with the public. In 2009 the Marin County Fire Agencies developed mutual threat zone maps, pre-identifying primary and secondary evacuation routes as well as evacuation zones. This information is available for first responders to access in conventional paper maps or online. It has also been made available to mutual aid responders outside of Marin County. The fire agencies are in the process of making these maps publically available. We do caution residents to take personal responsibility and identify and regularly travel different routes away from their home. Wildland fires can be very dynamic and depending on wind and topography can change direction with little to no warning.

F17. Town councils, planners, and public works officials have not addressed traffic choke points and, in some instances, they have created obstacles to traffic flow by the installation of concrete medians, bumpouts, curbs, speed bumps, and lane reductions.

Response: **Agree**

Town councils, planners and public works officials should consider the potential for use of roadways as evacuation routes when they approve, plan and implement infrastructure projects.

F18. No studies have been performed to determine how long it would take to evacuate entire communities via existing evacuation corridors.

Response: **Agree**

We are unaware of any studies performed on how long it would take to evacuate entire communities. Bolinas is looking at a study that would look specifically at this in a hope to find ways to expedite mass evacuation.

F19. The implementation of traffic-light sequencing and coordination to allow mass egress, and the conversion of two-way roads into one-way evacuation routes to ease traffic congestion, are dangerously delayed and years away from being implemented.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

We agree with the implementation of traffic-light sequencing and coordination to allow mass egress, and the conversion of two-way roads into one-way evacuation routes to ease traffic congestion, but we are not in a position to evaluate whether they have been "dangerously delayed" or how many years they are away from being implemented. It should be noted that

Bolinas doesn't have any traffic lights and turning both lanes into one direction flow would prevent all emergency access into the town of Bolinas.

F20. Public transit is a neglected asset of emergency response preparedness: all operators except one transit agency are left out of the command structure and none is integrated into the emergency radio communication system MERA.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

We cannot agree or disagree with this finding as we are not in a position to know how or whether public transit is neglected. We disagree with the statement that no public transit is integrated into the MERA system because we are aware that Transit Authority of Marin is represented on the MERA Board.

F21. A bureaucratic culture of complacency and inertia exists in Marin. Government often fails to act quickly to repair known gaps in emergency preparedness, to think flexibly, and to prioritize safety in its planning and policies.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

Marin's fire agencies work exceptionally well together; most recently a coordinated effort between cities, towns and fire agencies to hire a countywide disaster coordinator is evidence of this success.

F22. No countywide comprehensive, coordinated policies have been made and no funds have been allocated to prepare for wildfires.

Response: **Partially Disagree**

While we are unaware of available funding on a countywide level to prepare for wildfires, there are several coordinated documents, policies and procedures within Marin County including mutual threat zone plan, Community Wildfire Protection Plan, the 2017 North Bay Lessons Learned report and a countywide disaster mitigation plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS (R1, R3-13, R15)

R1. Create a comprehensive, countywide vegetation management plan that includes vegetation along evacuation routes, a campaign to mobilize public participation, and low-income subsidies.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by us as we have no jurisdiction to create a plan on a "countywide" basis. We will participate to the best of our ability as directed by any such countywide plan that is developed.

R3. Develop and implement a fast, streamlined procedure to enforce vegetation citations.

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future. Through a coordinated and collaborative approach, the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a countywide wildland initiative. Fire Prevention officers throughout the county are working on a countywide streamlined approach updating codes and processes. It is the intention of the group to implement some items as part of regular code adoption cycle this fall. Larger scale collaboration and a more streamlined approach will be addressed as part of the Countywide wildland fire initiative. Our first intention is to educate homeowners for cooperative compliance. Without additional resources any efforts to mitigate wildfire threat and risks will be insufficient.

R4. Adopt and deliver a comprehensive education program focused on action for all residents of Marin on a regular schedule by a team of expert trainers.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by us as we do not have jurisdiction to develop a “comprehensive” program for “all residents of Marin”. We will participate to the best of our ability as directed by any such countywide program that is developed.

R5. Promote the creation of Firewise Communities in every neighborhood by all local jurisdictions.

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented and will be in the future. Through a coordinated and collaborated approach the Marin cities, towns, County and fire agencies are addressing this recommendation through a county wide wildland initiative. This initiative includes but not limited to:

- Firewise community support
- Support and funding for Fire Safe Marin
- Public education

Funding will be pursued after public input with a potential ballot initiative in March of 2020.

R6. Employ individuals with skills in public speaking, teaching, curriculum design, graphics, web design, advertising, community organization, community relations, and diplomacy to educate the public.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by us, because we do not have, nor do we anticipate ever having, the resources to do so at the level suggested by the recommendation. We will participate to the best of our ability in any such educational programs as are developed and available.

R7. Collect Marin residents' information and add it to Alert Marin and Nixle databases to make them opt-out systems.

Response: This recommendation has been partially implemented in that we actively collect contact information for our district's "At-Risk" residents and property owners. As the opportunity becomes available, we will work with the proper authorities to add this information to the appropriate countywide emergency-alert databases.

R8. Expand the use of sirens with LRADs.

Response: This recommendation requires further analysis. Mechanical and acoustical device alerting systems have limited reach and ability to be heard inside of buildings. Local testing has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. We are currently researching implementation of a mechanical siren system in our community.

R9. Research, develop, and publish plans for the mass movement of populations along designated evacuation routes.

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented and we are unable to estimate a timeframe for its implementation, but we will participate in its implementation by whatever appropriate authority undertakes to research, develop, and publish such plans.

R10. Give the highest priority to mitigating known choke points and to maximizing the capacity of existing evacuation routes.

Response: This recommendation addresses activities that we have already begun to undertake through our vegetation management plan focused on maintaining emergency access roads. Bolinas has agreed to participate in a UC Berkeley traffic modeling study to look at this specifically.

R11. Incorporate and prioritize plans for mass evacuations in all pending and future traffic/road projects along major escape routes.

Response: This recommendation has not been implemented and we are unable to estimate a timeframe for its implementation, because we have no jurisdiction over traffic and road projects. We will actively participate in any new traffic or road projects in our District with mass evacuations as one priority.

R12. Educate, prepare, and drill for evacuations in all communities.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented in our community. Education and evacuation drills are held in our District annually.


R13. Fully integrate public transit into the MERA communications system without further delay.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented by us as we have no authority to determine how MERA functions or is structured. We would add that MERA has limited capacity and integrating public transit could further restrict the effectiveness of the current system.

R15. Establish in the form of a Joint Powers Authority an umbrella organization for wildfire planning and preparedness (vegetation management, public education, alerts, and evacuation), funded by a ¼ cent sales tax.

Response: We support the establishment of a JPA and will take required actions to participate in it should it be formed.

Respectfully Submitted,



David Kimball, President
Board of Directors