



NOVATO FIRE DISTRICT

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July 4, 2019

The Honorable Judge Paul Haakenson
Marin County Superior Court
P.O. Box 4988
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Re: Marin Civil Grand Jury Report responses:
2018-2019 Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report: *Wildfire Preparedness A New Approach*.

Dear Judge Haakenson:

Attached is the official response of the Novato Fire Protection District to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury's report titled, "*Wildfire Preparedness A New Approach*". The Novato Fire Protection District (District) is required to respond to Findings 1 - 22, and to Recommendations 1 - 13 and 15. Our required responses to the report's finding and recommendations were approved by the Novato Fire Protection District Board of Directors at their meeting on July 3, 2019.

The Fire District appreciates the attention that the Grand Jury has given to wildfire preparedness.

The Novato Fire District responses to the Grand Jury Report are listed with detailed explanations in Attachment 1.

Respectfully submitted,


James Galli
President
Novato Fire Protection District Board of Directors

Cc: Fire Chief Bill Tyler
Marin County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson Pat Randolph

Attachments: Agency Response to Grand Jury Report

AGENCY RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: **Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach**

Report Date: **April 18, 2019**

Response Date: **July 18, 2019**

Agency Name: Novato Fire Protection District

Agenda Date: July 3, 2019

Response by: Bill Tyler

Title: Fire Chief

FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the findings numbered: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 19
- I (we) disagree *partially* with the findings numbered: 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 20
- I (we) disagree *wholly* with the findings numbered: 10, 21, 22

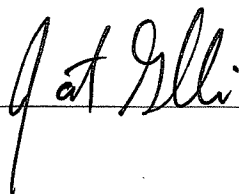
(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons therefor.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered 5, 6, 12 have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)
- Recommendations numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 15 have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)
- Recommendations numbered _____ require further analysis.
(Attach an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or director of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.)
- Recommendations numbered 7, 8, 13 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 7/3/2019

Signed: _____



Number of pages attached 12

Novato Fire Protection District Responses to the 2018-2019 Marin County Civil Grand Jury Report: *Wildfire Preparedness A New Approach*

RESPONSE TO MARIN CIVIL GRAND JURY FINDINGS:

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

Response: **Agree.**

State and local fire codes addressing vegetation management for both public and private lands, as well as local fire agency policies differ; as do inspection and enforcement procedures.

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

Response: **Agree.**

Although fire agencies are doing their best to reduce vegetation around existing homes, additional resources and dedicated staff are necessary to enhance existing efforts. The cost of these resources and staff is significant, and new or increased funding sources would be required.

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

Response: **Agree.**

Legal due process requirements by their nature are not designed to be particularly fast or efficient.

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

Response: **Partially Disagree.**

The Novato Fire District (NFD) properly manages 100% of the vegetation on its own properties. NFD does not have authority to manage vegetation on other public lands; a coordinated countywide effort could help bring focus and consistency to other Marin County agencies and municipal governments, as well as potentially additional resources, to enhance existing efforts on all public lands.

Government agencies and safety authorities can and do manage vegetation on public lands over which they have jurisdiction to the extent that resources and funding are available. Much more can be done, which is one of the many reasons the Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and County have formed a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire public safety program to be funded by a tax measure on the March 2020 ballot.

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: **Agree.**

Although education has been provided by NFD and other individual fire agencies and FIRESafe Marin, we agree that education efforts need to be understood by broader sections of the community. NFD has initiated the hiring of one or more limited-term, fulltime Wildfire Mitigation

Specialists as funds allow, to go door to door in our Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Areas, to meet with property owners and evaluate the defensible space and ignitability of the structures in those areas. In addition, our matching grant program has been expanded to be an incentive. A Marin County wide grant program should be considered for those 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.**

Education is offered in a fairly consistent fashion countywide by the fire agencies and FIRESafe Marin. The demographics of our hosted meetings/forums and exercises generally lack a younger demographic - especially parents of young children. Novato Fire holds an annual open house and participates in local community events such as the Novato Art and Wine festival, Tour of Novato, National Night Out, 4th of July Parade staffing information booths and providing wildfire preparedness materials to all demographics. The fire engines and fire fighters are a big draw for families with small children. We regularly use this opportunity to communicate with families and have face to face interactions, often following up with free home evaluations and other fire hazard follow ups.

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 residents. NFD has initiated the hiring of one or more limited-term, fulltime Wildfire Mitigation Specialists as funds allow, to go door to door in our Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Areas, to meet with property owners and evaluate the defensible space and ignitability of the structures in those areas. In addition, our fire crews are annually assigned to go to neighborhoods in high fire hazard areas, and provide door hangers with specific information on steps homeowners can take to reduce wildfire hazards. They engage in meaningful conversations and provide advise based on their experiences defending homes in other communities during the fire season.

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

Response: **Agree.**

We agree that Firewise Neighborhoods are a great mechanism for bringing communities and neighborhoods together. Their numbers and size are steadily growing. Novato currently has 7 Firewise designated neighborhoods, and we expect to grow to 10 by the beginning of this summer. They provide an annual, ongoing commitment to get organized, do a neighborhood wildfire assessment, and create an action plan, implement a fuel reduction or wildfire outreach event, commit a minimum of \$25.00 per household, and effectively reduce hazards and risks year after year.

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

Response: **Agree.**

Generally, fire agencies are funded for response and mitigation of emergency incidents. Development into the Wildland Urban Interface and climate change, with attendant major fires in recent years, are requiring resources greater than those currently available to local municipalities and fire agencies.

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

Response: **Wholly Disagree.**

Firefighters have experience that adds value to educating the public; however in Novato, their primary responsibilities are focused on readiness and emergency response to over 6300 calls annually. NFD has a wildfire preparedness door hanger program whereby fire crews drive through wildland urban interface areas and meet with neighbors providing advice on reducing neighborhood hazards. These interactions will sometimes generate additional follow up by prevention staff to either provide additional education and resources, and sometime enforcement to observed fire hazards. 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: **Partially Disagree.**

All appropriate emergency alert systems should be used to the fullest capacity as soon as possible depending on the conditions and needs to maximize safety. The WEA system is not geographically specific and can bleed over to areas where evacuations are not necessary. This would result in adding unnecessary traffic to already congested roadways impeding evacuation egress of those most affected. We agree it is a useful tool, but it must be well-coordinated between the incident commander, local law enforcement agencies, and Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services.

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.**

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, however, is an emergency notification system. Listed and unlisted/blocked Marin County landline and VoIP (Voice over Internet protocol) phone numbers are already included in our emergency notification system (Alert Marin),

unless the owner specifically requests to have their phone number opted-out. Cell phone numbers are not included in Nixle and do require registration in our Self-Registration Portal. We agree that more of our residents need to “opt-in” with their cell phone numbers. Additionally, we support changes in State law mandating that cellular information be accessible with an “opt-out” provision like landlines and VoIP data. OES is also pursuing newly available authority to cooperate with utility companies to obtain customer cell phone numbers for these purposes.

Nixle and Alert Marin information is publicized at almost every community event hosted by Fire Agencies, Law Enforcement and OES, with information also available on social media and agency websites.

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. These system have limited reach and little or no ability to be heard inside buildings or vehicles. Local testing in Marin has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. This type of system will not be effective in many areas of the County.

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

Response: **Agree.**

The existing roadway system was not designed specifically for mass evacuation.

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

Response: **Agree.**

Novato and Marin County has many narrow roads with limited access and overgrown vegetation, often in sloped and difficult terrain. Much of the vegetation encroachment into the road right of way is the responsibility of homeowners. Public works agencies regularly work with fire agencies identifying and working in the most critical areas.

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

Response: **Partially Disagree.**

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 Novato Fire District is working with the Novato Police Department and are in the process of making new evacuation maps publicly available. Other Marin fire and law agencies are doing this as well. In addition, we are identifying areas of temporary refuge as an alternative to mass evacuation by car, in order to give the public information on finding location(s) near where they live to relocate to during a fire that can be reasonably safe until the fire passes, and then they could be safely evacuated out of the area.

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. A pre-identified evacuation route may not be the safest route for residents to take depending upon the specific type and location of the incident.

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, bump outs, curbs, speed bumps, and lane reductions.

Response: **Partially Disagree.**

Although we agree that more needs to be done, we do not agree that public officials have not attempted to address these issues to date. Additionally, while we agree that traffic flow in an evacuation warrants renewed attention in our circulation planning, many of the elements labeled as “obstacles to traffic flow” by the Grand Jury are intended to increase public safety on a daily basis under regular conditions. Each agency must weigh these daily safety concerns against the use of roads during an evacuation.

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

Response: **Agree.**

The fire chiefs are exploring opportunities with technology companies and higher educational institutions studying this type of work. Large scale evacuation planning needs further study and development within Marin.

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: **Agree.**

Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify which corridors would benefit greatest from contra-flow traffic-light sequencing. Coordination with public works agencies and identification of funding sources would be needed to make this a reality.

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.**

Use of the term “neglected” suggests an active decision to exclude transit from emergency response preparedness. The current arrangements reflect an assessment by transit officials of their ability to respond to disasters. Many of these protocols reflect planning for a broad spectrum of disasters that might occur, and it would be appropriate to revisit these protocols for the “new normal” concerning wildfire preparedness and response to an event concentrated in Marin County. Marin Transit, including Whistlestop, is an original member of MERA. The Golden Gate Transit District is included in the MERA Mutual Aid and Communications Plan.

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: **Wholly Disagree.**

To the contrary, all fire agencies, the County, cities and towns are working together to explore the creation a countywide wildfire public safety program. Part of the impetus for this program is that we already acknowledge that more needs to be done to address this critical public safety issue in the face of what now is commonly referred to as the “new-normal.” Accelerating climate change has led to larger, costlier, and more frequent wildfires in the state than ever before, burning almost year-round.

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

Response: **Wholly Disagree.**

There are several coordinated documents, policies or procedures within Marin County including: Mutual Threat Zone Plan, 2016 Community Wildfire Protection Plan, and the 2017 North Bay “Lessons Learned” report. All of Marin’s agencies are evaluating their budgets and making

difficult decisions to make more money available for wildfire preparedness. It is our belief that a stream of revenue dedicated to this purpose is the best route to addressing the resource needs identified in these documents.

RESPONSE TO MARIN CIVIL GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

Recommendation R1 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. The Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and the County are addressing this recommendation with a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire public safety program governed by a countywide joint powers authority. We agree that more needs to be done to address this critical public safety issue in the face of what now is commonly referred to as the “new-normal.” Accelerating climate change has led to larger, costlier, and more frequent wildfires in the state than ever before, burning almost year-round. Because of this, all fire agencies, the County, and its cities and towns are working together to explore the creation a countywide wildfire public safety program.

The program scope for an ongoing, locally-controlled, countywide wildfire public safety program would include the following:

- Fire fuel reduction and vegetation management
- Defensible-space home evaluations and education
- Evacuation planning and neighborhood preparedness
- Alert and warning enhancements
- Pursuit of grant funds for countywide efforts, as well as grant funding to assist seniors, financially disadvantaged and those with access and functional needs with preparedness measures.

This program would require new ongoing funding. We are currently exploring a potential countywide tax measure in March 2020.

R2. Hire at least 30 new civilian vegetation inspectors and at least eight fire/fuels crews focused on fuel reduction in the high-risk areas of the county, including federal, state and local public lands.

Recommendation R2 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. NFD has initiated the hiring of one or more limited-term, fulltime Wildfire Mitigation Specialists as funds allow, (WMS) to go door to door in our Wildland Urban

Interface (WUI) Areas, to meet with property owners and evaluate the defensible space and ignitability of the structures in those areas.

As stated in our response to Recommendation No. 1, a countywide wildfire public safety initiative would include expanded defensible-space home evaluations, inspection and education. A working group of fire chiefs and city/town managers are exploring options to ensure the most appropriate and cost-effective solutions are considered to improve defensible space and reduce structural ignitability countywide. This enhanced program would require new, ongoing resources. The staffing of this effort would be subject to policy decisions of a countywide JPA and/or the governing board of responsible fire agencies.

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

Recommendation R3 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. Legal due process requirements by their nature are not designed to be particularly fast or efficient. At the Novato Fire District our intention is to educate homeowners for cooperative compliance. Compliance can best be achieved by education and cooperative analysis of existing conditions. We are in the process of creating a new “Compliance Ordinance” that provides for faster streamlined procedures including citations and Notice and Orders once it is demonstrated that educative and cooperative approach and measures have failed to gain compliance. The timeframe for the adoption of the ordinance is December 2019.

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 wildfire public safety program. Addressing non-compliance would be a matter for each jurisdiction to address.

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.

Recommendation R4 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. NFD is participating in the creation and delivery of a comprehensive wildfire preparedness presentation entitled, “Living with Fire.” This is a presentation that is designed to reach all the majority of adults, including those with small children. We will deliver the presentation on a regular basis across the county, and it is our intent to hold at least three presentations in Novato through June 2020.

A countywide wildfire public safety program would include a comprehensive education program for all residents.

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

Recommendation R5 has already been implemented.

Novato currently has 7 Firewise designated neighborhoods, and we expect to grow to 10 by this summer. They provide an annual, ongoing commitment to get organized, do a neighborhood wildfire assessment, and create an action plan, implement a fuel reduction or wildfire outreach event, commit a minimum of \$25.00 per household, and effectively reduce hazards and risks year after year.

Novato Fire has identified all of its WUI neighborhoods as areas of concern and called out as a goal to have Firewise neighborhoods in each of these areas in the 2016 Marin community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Novato Fire District continues to promote and support all of its neighborhoods to become Firewise designated.

As the Grand Jury report points out, Marin currently has over 30 Firewise neighborhoods. With the creation of a countywide wildfire public safety program, our current efforts can be substantially enhanced and expanded throughout the County.

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.

Recommendation R6 has already been implemented.

We currently have very articulate fire professionals and FIRESafe Marin assisting with community organizations and educating the public. The Novato Fire Chief has taken a lead role in public outreach and diplomacy presenting at the January 24th “Wilder than Wild” documentary and wildfire forum, the May 2nd Novato PG&E Wildfire Public Safety Power Shutoff presentation, the May 4th 2019 County Wide Wildfire Forum, and other neighborhood homeowner association meetings. NFD has worked closely with design and marketing professionals on outreach materials including but not limited to: living with fire magazine, WUI mailers, door-hangers, banners, website information and updates, and draft evacuation maps for public use. We will continue to work in this area of graphic design and messaging that connects to diverse groups. We will also remain in the forefront with public meetings and additional civic engagement.

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

Recommendation R7 will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. Recommendation R7 is beyond the Fire District’s authority and would require changes in State law. We will work with legislators to support bills like SB 46 (Hueso; 2019), which would allow local governments to enter into agreements to access resident cell phone contact information for enrolling county residents in a county-operated public emergency warning system. Novato Fire promotes the voluntary signups for this service and includes computer stations for the public to do so at all of its annual evacuation drills.

The County of Marin OES is also pursuing newly available authority to cooperate with utility companies to obtain customer data for these purposes, but state legislation would be needed to obtain cell phone contact information.

R8. Expand the use of sirens with LRADs.

Recommendation R8 will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. These siren systems have limited reach and little or no ability to be heard inside buildings or vehicles. Local testing in Marin has provided mixed results based on topography and other outdoor existing noise. This type of system will not be effective in many areas of the County.

There is a lot of debate about the effectiveness of warning sirens, especially in this era of advanced communications. There are many negative aspects to sirens/LRAD that need to be taken into consideration:

- **You Can't Hear Them:** Outdoor sirens not designed to be heard inside a structure; commercial or residential. Even people who live very close to a "tornado" siren can't hear them if they're sleeping, playing music, watching television, or are otherwise preoccupied. Outdoor warning sirens cannot be heard as designed in most new homes and commercial structures. In addition, if the wind is blowing the wrong way the range of the sound is limited.
- **Unclear message:** To whom and for what reason is the warning siren alarm intended? Outdoor sirens/LRAD was never intended to warn people who are inside a structure. They were designed to notify people who were outside to move them inside into some kind of shelter. There is no "all clear" message with sirens, correcting false alarms.
- **False Sense of Security:** Sirens create a dangerous dependency on these fragile, unreliable devices. There seems to be a thought within everyone that it's not "bad" unless the warning sirens go off. Just because a siren isn't sounding doesn't mean a fire, flooding, or tornado isn't immediately about to hit you. Sirens create a dangerous false sense of security which may keep people in homes until the fire hits.
- **Regular testing of use and volume/sound** spill over and sound noise restrictions exceeded (monthly tests).
- **Malfunctions**-not working as intended-unreliable, many examples of this, then the public tend to blame government officials; there are some reports of high false alarm rates.
- **Number of sirens required** to cover the city and unincorporated areas would be excessive (NFD 75 sq. miles to cover)
- **Costly to install power and maintain sirens;** and back-up generators for if the power goes off.

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

Recommendation R9 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify which corridors would benefit the most from contra-flow and traffic-light sequencing. The use of experts in this field should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies and additional funding from a countywide wildfire prevention initiative will be a critical component to our success.

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

Recommendation R10 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. Large scale evacuation planning needs to identify “choke points”. The use of traffic analysis experts in this field should be engaged. Coordination with public works agencies and additional funding from a countywide wildfire public safety initiative will be a critical component to our success.

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

Recommendation R11 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. Consideration of mass evacuations is an important element for agencies to add to their assessment of road-related capital projects. However, prioritizing evacuation plans above all other considerations may lead to design decisions that impair other important considerations, such as safe use of roads on a daily basis. A balanced lifestyle of each project is required.

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

Recommendation R12 has been implemented.

The Novato Fire District in conjunction with the Novato Police Department, Marin Sheriffs and CHP partners, conduct evacuation drills annually in neighborhoods on a rotating basis in May of each year. Thousands of Novato residents are contacted and invited to participate.

Although all Marin Fire agencies have done this work to some extent, a countywide wildfire public safety program would substantially expand efforts to educate, prepare and drill for evacuations throughout Marin.

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

Recommendation R13 will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The Novato Fire District has no authority to force the integration of public transit into the MERA communications system. Marin Transit, including Whistle-stop, is an original member of MERA. The member agencies of MERA welcome the addition of transit agencies serving

Marin. It will be necessary to analyze how to integrate these agencies in a manner that is fair and equitable. The Golden Gate Transit District is included in the MERA Mutual Aid and Communications Plan.

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.

Recommendation R15 has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, pending a County Wide Wildfire Public Safety JPA and the passage of a successful tax measure in March of 2020. The Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and County are addressing this recommendation with a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire public safety program governed by a countywide joint power authority. The program scope for ongoing, locally-controlled, countywide wildfire public safety program would include the following:

- Fire fuel reduction and vegetation management
- Defensible-space home evaluations and education
- Evacuation planning and neighborhood preparedness
- Alert and warning enhancements
- Pursuit of grant funds for countywide efforts, as well as grant funding to assist seniors, financially disadvantaged and those with access and functional needs with preparedness measures.

This program would require new, ongoing funding. We are currently exploring a potential countywide tax measure in March 2020. We believe that this could be in the form of a ¼ cent sales tax or a parcel tax, whichever gets us to our funding needs is the appropriate funding mechanism.

In addition, we believe the Grand Jury's recommendation may have been based on their assumption that "each jurisdiction would have to pass exactly the same parcel tax measure for the same amount at the same time." It is worth noting that, based on the support of agencies that are responsible for fire suppression, it is allowable for the Board of Supervisors to place a single, countywide parcel tax measure on the ballot. A recent example is Measure A on the November 4, 2014 countywide ballot, which implemented a countywide parcel tax for the Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA). Therefore, the results of a countywide measure would require a two-thirds support countywide, but would not require two-thirds support in each jurisdiction.