



TIBURON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

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RICHARD PEARCE, FIRE CHIEF

July 11, 2019

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

Subject: Grand Jury Report: *2019 Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach*

Dear Marin County Civil Grand Jury Foreperson,

I have been directed by the Board of Directors of the Tiburon Fire Protection District to respond to the Marin Civil Grand Jury Report titled, *2019 Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach* dated April 18, 2019. Attached please find our response.

The Tiburon Fire Protection District conducted this response in accordance with Penal Code section 933 (c) and was subjected to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Ralph M. Brown Act.

Should you have any question or require additional information, please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Richard S. Pearce
Fire Chief

AGENCY RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: *2019 Wildfire Preparedness: A New Approach*

Report Date: April 18, 2019

Response Date: July 18, 2019

Agency Name: Tiburon Fire Protection District

Agenda Date: July 10, 2019

Response by: Richard Pearce

Title: Fire Chief

FINDINGS (F1-F22)

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F1-F3, F5-F9, F14-F15, F18-F19

I (we) disagree *partially* with the findings numbered: F4, F10-F13, F17, F20

I (we) disagree *wholly* with the findings numbered: F16, F21-F22

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations numbered R3-R6, R8, R12-R13 have been implemented.
(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)

Recommendations numbered _____ have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.
(Attach a timeframe for the implementation.)

Recommendations numbered R1, R7, R9-R11, R15 require further analysis.
(Attached 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 the publication of the grand jury report.)

Recommendations numbered _____ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.
(Attach an explanation.)

Date: 7/10/19

Signed: _____

Richard S. Pearce, Fire Chief

FINDINGS - Vegetation

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

Agree. Fire agency policies differ, as do inspection and enforcement procedures.

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

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.

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

Agree. Although each municipality has its own code enforcement procedures, a consistent countywide approach would allow for a more efficient and effective enforcement effort.

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

Partially disagree. While municipal governments do not have authority beyond their own jurisdiction, a coordinated countywide effort could help bring focus and consistency, as well as potentially additional resources, to enhance existing efforts on 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 prevention program to be funded by a parcel tax 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.

Agree. Although education has been provided through individual fire agencies and FIRESafe Marin, we agree that education efforts need to be understood by broader

sections of the community. Grant programs should be considered for those that may not have the physical or financial means to complete the necessary work.

FINDINGS – Education of the Public

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

Partially disagree.

Education is offered in a 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. Agencies need to create new forms of outreach to garner participation from this demographic.

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

Agree.

Defensible space home evaluations with a trained professional are the preferred and best method for educating residents.

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

Agree.

Firewise Communities are a great mechanism for bringing communities and 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.

Agree.

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

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

Partially disagree.

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

FINDINGS - Alerts

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

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 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.

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 is an emergency notification system. Nixle and Alert Marin information is publicized at almost every community event hosted by Fire Departments and Sheriff-OES, with information also available on social media and agency websites.

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 for Alert Marin. 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. We are also pursuing newly available authority to cooperate with utility companies to obtain customer cell phone numbers for these purposes.

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.

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.

Partially disagree.

Long Range Acoustic 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 will not be effective in some areas of the County.

FINDINGS - Evacuations

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

Agree.

Often, historical roadways may lack the necessary width for rapid evacuations.

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

Agree.

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.

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. Fire agencies are in the process of making these maps publicly 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. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Disagree.

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” 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, cities and towns are working together to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program.

FINDINGS - Umbrella

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

Disagree.

There are several coordinated documents, policies or procedures within Marin County including: Mutual Threat Zone Plan, 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 GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends the following:

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

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The CWPP is the working document whereby each fire jurisdiction accounts for progress in reducing the wildfire threat respectively. Tiburon Fire District has introduced this document to the Town of Tiburon, City of Belvedere and County of Marin. Participation of stakeholders of public lands needs a higher funding priority however, the efforts of Tiburon Fire District are active and reasonable.

The creation of a Countywide Entity for the sole discretion of Wildfire Prevention efforts may conflict with the overall mission of all fire agencies in Marin. An additional parcel/sales tax measure would further burden constituents and perhaps dissuade public and private landowners from acting on their responsibilities individually while shifting the burden to this new entity.

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

This recommendation has already been implemented.

The District hired a full time Fire Prevention Specialist in March 2019 dedicated to Wildfire Risk Reduction Programs with an emphasis on vegetation management, defensible space, home hardening and Firewise Communities. Our intention is to educate homeowners toward cooperative compliance as citations do not typically rectify non-compliance. Constant, consistent and cordial efforts by our staff has proven more successful for non-compliant stakeholders to become compliant. At the extreme, our Board will adopt a Summary Abatement measure to enact compliant work to be performed by a contractor at the lowest bid which can be liened upon the property. Fire prevention officers throughout the county are working on a countywide, streamlined approach updating codes and processes.

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.

This recommendation has already been implemented.

The District hired a full time Fire Prevention Specialist in March 2019 dedicated to Wildfire Risk Reduction Programs with an emphasis on vegetation management, defensible space, home hardening and Firewise Communities. Education towards action has been a recurrent issue for emergency service providers. We have seen this time and again where current events help drive the message only to wax and wain until the next disaster strikes. Inserting Wildfire Preparedness into our already positive public education programs has proven effective in reaching desired audiences unfamiliar with these educational initiatives.

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

This recommendation has already been implemented.

The District hired a full time Fire Prevention Specialist in March 2019 dedicated to Wildfire Risk Reduction Programs with an emphasis on vegetation management, defensible space, home hardening and Firewise Communities. As the Grand Jury report points out, Marin currently has over 30 Firewise neighborhoods. We have enjoyed some success with Firewise Communities, this is a large commitment from the homeowners and requires continual maintenance to achieve the desired outcomes.

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.

This recommendation has already been implemented.

We currently have very effective fire professionals and FIRESafe Marin educating the public. However, we recognize more needs to be done and this work may not need to be done by our firefighters, who often have competing response priorities.

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

This recommendation requires further analysis.

This recommendation 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.

We are 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.

As much as we support a potential 100% of opt-in on Alert Marin and Nixle, we also should recognize the threshold of a citizen's right to not be required to participate.

R8. Expand the use of sirens with LRADs.

This recommendation has already been implemented.

The District has a robust siren program with our Peninsula partners. We are currently assessing the benefits and limitations of the LRAD upgrade.

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

This recommendation requires further analysis.

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 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.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

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 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.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

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.

This recommendation has been implemented.

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

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

This recommendation has already been implemented.

The Marin Transportation Authority is a MERA member.

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.

This recommendation requires further analysis.

The Marin cities, towns, fire agencies and county are addressing this recommendation with a working group to explore the creation of a countywide wildfire prevention program governed by a countywide joints power authority. The program scope for ongoing, locally-controlled, countywide wildfire prevention 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.

The creation of a Countywide Entity for the sole direction of Wildfire Prevention efforts may conflict with the overall mission of all fire agencies in Marin. An additional parcel/sales tax measure would further burden constituents and perhaps dissuade public and private landowners from acting on their responsibilities individually while shifting the burden to this new entity.