

## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Report Title:** Roadblocks to Safer Evacuation in Marin  
**Report Date:** December 14, 2020  
**Response By:** Town of Fairfax  
**Response Date:** March 3, 2021

### FINDINGS:

- We partially agree with the finding numbered F5.
- We partially disagree with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F3, F4.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Recommendation numbered R1 has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future after MWPA has completed its work on evacuation routes.
- Recommendations numbered R2 and R3 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or reasonable.

Date: 3/4/21

Signed:   
Garrett Toy, Town Manager

Number of pages attached: 4

## ATTACHMENT

### RESPONSE OF THE TOWN OF FAIRFAX TO GRAND JURY REPORT ROADBLOCKS TO SAFER EVACUATION IN MARIN

#### FINDINGS AND RESPONSES

**F1. No single agency or jurisdiction is taking responsibility and authority for building infrastructure for safe evacuation routes across jurisdictions in Marin County.**

Response: Partially disagree. No single agency or jurisdiction carries full responsibility - the responsibility is shared because many factors contribute to evacuation readiness and safety. It's not yet clear that infrastructure is a major impediment to safe evacuation. Slow evacuation is not necessarily unsafe. Residents sheltering in vehicles on paved surfaces, even in traffic, are likely safer. Similarly, safe evacuation and traffic congestion during evacuations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Fairfax DPW and Ross Valley (Fire) are regularly engaged in hazard reduction along roadways. Vegetation fuel reduction along roadways is ongoing and increasing - with new funding online July 2020 through MWPA. Vegetation along the public right-of-way is the adjacent landowner's responsibility, not a public agency's in most cases. If vegetation and near roadway combustibles - on private property primarily - were managed appropriately, hazard would be nearly eliminated on residential evac routes. Private property hazards are being addressed as part of the increased defensible space inspection program.

**F2. There is confusion in the county as to who has ultimate responsibility and authority for ensuring that Marin has safe evacuation routes.**

Response: Partially disagree. There are many factors that contribute to safety and efficiency of evacuations, and responsibility for these factors may lie with multiple public agencies and/or private entities or landowners. The order to evacuate and responsibility lies with the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction. Since the early 2000's fire agencies and law enforcement have worked together to create pre-determined evacuation zones, regularly provided multi-jurisdictional exercises, common terminology and most recently the purchase of Zonehaven to assist, law, fire and residents in executing safer, timely evacuations.

**F3. Marin County Board of Supervisors and town and city councils have the responsibility for safe evacuation routing, and they have not sufficiently considered evacuation as a criterion when approving improvements to roads and traffic infrastructure in their jurisdictions.**

Response: Partially disagree. Roads and traffic infrastructure has not been identified as the major factor in evacuation safety. Hence the need for the MWPA evacuation study and a fact-based approach to evaluate potential hazards and impediments. The Grand Jury doesn't adequately consider other non-traffic related improvements that might have even greater impacts on evacuation safety: home hardening, near home defensible space, roadside vegetation, roadside combustible structures (incl fences, homes, other structures that might impinge the roadway with flames/heat). Traffic related improvements with the greatest impact are likely to be intersection related, including the ability to manage intersections effectively during power outages/PSPS, or when DPW and LEO availability is reduced (battery/generator backup for intersections, remote intersection control, real-time traffic monitoring, LEO control). Evacuation routes may have garnered less attention prior to 2017, since then regular coordination of fire agencies and public works has taken place. An example of this is engagement of Fire Safe Marin and Fire agencies regarding the center median project on Sir Francis Drake Blvd. through the Ross Valley.

**F4. County and municipal administrators, public works, and traffic engineers have not adequately considered mass evacuation as a criterion for planning and funding traffic infrastructure improvements.**

Response: Partially disagree. Prior to 2017 fire evacuation was not in the forefront of consideration as it is today after several years of devastating wildfires. Funding of traffic infrastructure improvements was highly focused on improving traffic flow (often benefiting evacuation), pedestrian safety and quality of life. Today, traffic planners and engineers consult with fire professionals and consider evacuation in concert with daily traffic impacts, pedestrian safety and a host of other traffic related considerations to best inform projects and spending priorities.

**F5. Most Marin jurisdictions have not yet included urgently needed evacuation plans in their general plans as required by state law and as recommended by the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.**

Response: Partially agree. Our understanding is that few Marin jurisdictions have included evacuation plans in their general plans. The Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) will be conducting an extensive analysis of evacuation routes including hazards and risks. When complete (projected completion 2021) this study will include ratings of roads and contributing factors to evacuation impediments. It will provide the guidance necessary to inform the MWPA's annual workplan as well as local hazard mitigation plans, public works agencies, traffic engineers and others making infrastructure improvements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

**R1. Within 180 days of the date of this report, the governing boards of the County of Marin and its cities and towns should direct their respective planning and public works departments to include evacuation needs among their criteria for evaluating and recommending public works projects.**

Response: This recommendation will be implemented after MWPA has completed its work on evacuation routes.

Specifically, the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (Fairfax is one of 17 member agencies) will be conducting an extensive analysis of evacuation routes including hazards and risks. When complete (projected completion 2021) this study will include ratings of roads and contributing factors to evacuation impediments. It will provide the data and information necessary to inform public works projects.

**R2. Within 180 days of the date of this report, the governing boards of the County of Marin and its cities and towns should adopt resolutions calling on the Transportation Authority of Marin to include evacuation needs among the criteria it considers when planning and funding public works projects.**

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable.

The Transportation Authority of Marin assists the Town of Fairfax and other jurisdictions in Marin County with the implementation of capital projects by identifying sources of funding and by ensuring that funding is distributed from other State and regional agencies in a way that is consistent with law and other shared agreements. While TAM provides a high level of support and works to ensure there is communication and coordination among the communities in Marin County, each jurisdiction is responsible for determining their own capital improvement project needs. As such, local governing bodies such as the Board of Supervisors and local Town/City Councils are best suited to address the needs and priorities of the communities they represent.

**R3. In calendar year 2021, the County of Marin and its cities and towns should update the safety elements of their general plans to include evacuation planning.**

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable.

The MWPA will be conducting an extensive analysis of evacuation routes, including hazards and risks. When complete later in 2021, this study will include ratings of roads and contributing factors to evacuation impediments. It will provide the data and information necessary to further inform public works projects, priorities, and policies. It is not clear absent the results of this study whether or when R3 is warranted and 2021 implementation is likely not feasible if warranted.

The Town of Fairfax's Safety Element has Goal S-3: Minimize risk due to fire hazards which includes a program for evacuation planning. The Town also has an adopted Local

Hazard Mitigation Plan. However, going through the process to amend the General Plan Safety Element for evacuation planning is not cost effective or reasonable. When the Town does pursue other amendments/updates to the General Plan Safety Element, we will consider the Grand Jury's recommendations in conjunction with MWPA's study findings at that time.