

OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

September 24, 2019

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SUBJECT: Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and Parcel Tax Initiative

RECOMMENDATION: Staff is recommending the following actions:

1. Adopt resolution authorizing the County's participation in the Joint Exercise of Powers Agreement (JPA) to participate in and form the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority;
2. Direct staff to seek approval of JPA (Attachment A) from all fire responsible agencies; and
3. In November, consider placing Parcel Tax on the March 2020 ballot.

BACKGROUND: The deadliest and most destructive wildfires in our state's history have occurred in recent years, and Marin's wildlands and lush vegetation leave us particularly vulnerable. We know that fire does not respect jurisdictional boundaries and that we need immediate action and sustained commitment to better protect our community. Given the changing climate and increased risk of wildfires, we have been partnering with FIREsafe Marin, fire agencies and cities and towns in Marin to develop a countywide Wildfire Prevention program and authority to coordinate and oversee the ongoing programs to make our community safer and better prepared.

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority – New Marin Joint Powers Authority

Consistent with our "Community Wildfire Protection Plan," the "Lessons Learned from North Bay Fire Siege" report, and this year's "Marin Civil Grand Jury Report on Wildfire Preparedness," we recognize the importance of a countywide, multi-agency approach to better protect our residents.

A countywide coalition that includes the cooperation of all Marin fire and city/town agencies has proposed a new joint powers agreement (JPA) (please see Attachment A) and funding measure that would raise approximately \$21 million per year dedicated to local wildfire prevention. The JPA agreement would consist of these local fire agencies, our cities and towns, and the County. The mission of the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority would be to fund and oversee the following efforts:

- Wildfire detection and evacuation system improvements
- Vegetation management and fire hazard reduction
- Defensible space and home hardening evaluations
- Public education and neighborhood wildfire preparedness
- Local specific wildfire prevention efforts

After more than 30 meetings over the past six weeks, including informational briefings of Marin fire-responsible agencies, we have revised the JPA to reflect input and concerns. Significant amendments are outlined in the table below:

Feedback	Proposed Response
Lack of representation from all member agencies on governing board	Expand the governing board to all 19 members with approval requirement of <u>both</u> majority of members and over 50% of represented population.
Length of measure and ability to adjust program spending categories	Every 5 years the JPA will review the programs and consider changes in the proportion of core programs and defensible space efforts. To allow member agencies to adapt to change, there will be a 2-year notice before the changes are implemented.
Citizen oversight	There will be a nine (9) member citizen oversight committee that will include representation from all 5 zones, as well as taxpayer, environmental, fire prevention and non-partisan civic organizations.

March 2020 Revenue Measure

We are proposing a new revenue measure to be considered by countywide voters in March of 2020 to support vegetation management, evacuation plans and perform thousands of wildfire defensible space evaluations per year to educate property owners across Marin to keep all residents safe. Overall, an estimated \$21 million annual funding plan would include:

- 60% to core functions such as vegetation management, wildfire detection, evacuation system improvements, grants, and public education
- 20% for annual defensible space and home hardening evaluations
- 20% for local-specific wildfire prevention efforts

Based on a parcel tax study, we are recommending a rate of 10 cents per building square feet for improved commercial and residential parcels; \$75 per unit for multi-family residential (3+ units); and \$25/\$100/\$150 per parcel for unimproved parcels based on acreage. We estimate that this tax structure will result in approximately \$21 million annually after accounting for exemptions for low-income seniors. We are also recommending an annual inflator equal to the San Francisco Area Consumer Price Index (CPI) with an annual cap of 3 percent.

A revenue measure approved by Marin voters will provide improvements to alert and warning systems, evacuation planning, and protect critical infrastructure - including emergency communications, schools, police and fire facilities - to remain functioning in a disaster. With longer and hotter fire seasons, Marin needs to be proactive to reduce vulnerability to wildfires.

Proposed ballot language is as follows:

Marin Wildfire Prevention Measure. *To support coordinated wildfire prevention including improving early wildfire detection, warning and alerts; reducing brush and vegetation; ensuring defensible space around homes, neighborhoods and critical infrastructure; and improving disaster evacuation routes/procedures; shall the Marin Wildfire Prevention Measure, levying a 10¢ per building square foot tax (described in the ballot pamphlet) until repealed by voters, providing \$21,000,0000 annually, with annual inflation adjustments, independent citizen oversight/audits, and low-income senior exemptions, be adopted?*

Importantly, all funds would stay local and would be protected from any taking by the State. Funds must be used for wildfire prevention and cannot be diverted. Independent oversight and annual audits would be required. Finally, the new revenue source would help Marin qualify for state and federal grants that otherwise will go to other communities around the state.

Next Steps

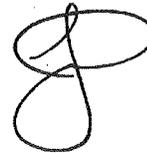
Over the next six weeks, staff will request approval from all Marin agencies with fire suppression responsibilities to adopt a resolution to join the new JPA and request the County to put a Marin Wildfire Prevention Initiative on the March 2020 ballot.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew Hymel
County Administrator



Jason Weber
Fire Chief