

CITY HALL
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012

October 7, 2019

The Honorable Monica Rodriguez
Chair, Committee on Public Safety
Los Angeles City Council
200 N Spring Street, Room 455
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Chairwoman Rodriguez:

We write in response to the report conducted by the Chief Legislative Analyst, CF #18-1120, on the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Hazard Mitigation Task Force (Task Force). This report was written in response to a motion introduced by Councilmember Bonin and adopted by Council on April 17, 2019, which called for the formation of a multi-agency task force to address the unique challenges of the “Wildland Urban Interface areas” -- those areas that straddle the line between urban environments and wildland.

The motion called for strategies to mitigate the risk of wildfires and better prepare for emergencies; however, the subsequent report, released August 7, 2019, falls short of providing comprehensive planning and coordination that the City of Los Angeles needs. While the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) convened a meeting with several city departments on January 31, 2019, the group did not make specific recommendations to achieve the objectives sought by the initiating motion.

Given the unique threats faced by our neighborhoods in Wildland-Urban Interface areas, and given that the climate crisis has significantly exacerbated that risk and extended fire season year-round, it is imperative that City of Los Angeles conduct a more comprehensive study and make a series of recommendations for changes and multi-disciplinary improvements to our current procedures. Relevant departments and agencies should consult with relevant council

offices, constituents, climate change experts and others and issue a report with concrete proposals for City Council to consider.


Accordingly, we request that the Public Safety Committee take the following actions.

1. RECEIVE AND FILE the August 7, 2019 report from the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Hazard Mitigation Task Force.
2. DIRECT the Los Angeles Fire Department and the CLA to convene a Wildland-Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation Working Group, in consultation with the offices of Council Districts 4, 5, and 11.
3. DIRECT the Wildland-Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation Working Group to prepare a multi-faceted report with specific recommendations addressing the unique challenges of neighborhoods in Wildland-Urban Interface zones, and recognizing that the climate crisis has worsened the risk of dangerous brush fires, and extended fire season year-round. The report should address, at minimum, the following topics: Citywide Wildfire Preparation and Planning; Notification and Evacuation Strategies; and Recovery and Citizen Empowerment.


A list of suggested subjects of the report and topics for potential recommendations are attached to this letter (Attachment A) and will be provided to the departments and Working Group.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and for your mutual interest in safeguarding the health and safety of residents of Los Angeles.

Regards,



MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District



DAVID RYU
Councilmember, 4th District



PAUL KORETZ
Councilmember, 5th District

The Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Hazard Mitigation Working Group should consider and make recommendations on, at minimum, the following topics:

Wildfire Preparation and Planning

- Review post-fire analyses of the causes of loss of life and property from wildfire prepared by other California jurisdictions
- Identify specific areas within the boundaries of the City of Los Angeles, including those already identified in the City's Sustainability Plan, that are particularly at risk of future weather events due to climate change; include recommendations for planning in these areas (i.e., how to responsibly develop or maintain) and disclose the imminent threats to hillside communities posed by a warming climate;
- Identify and map the number and percentage of Hillside and VHFHSZ homes built before 2008, when California building codes included a fire safety update.
- Identify and map the number and percentage of hillside and VHFHSZ homes located on single egress routes and/or substandard and withdrawn hillside streets and disseminate this information publicly to ensure property owners are aware of their personal risks.
- Create special plans for residents who have no exit route in case of fire. Plan secondary or new routes in these cases.
- Review the boundaries of Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ) and recommend updates if needed.
- Require all updates to Community and general Plans for areas in the WUI contain policies and programs designed to anticipate and prevent likely loss of life caused by fire.
- Diagram the organizational responsibilities of the city's fire preparation and response, identifying any missing roles, work products, and partners and look for methods to reduce overlap in responsibility.
- Develop a comprehensive fire plan using Federal and State best practices that looks at implementing a citywide fire prevention, retrofit, mitigation, and evacuation system.

Notification and Evacuation Strategies

- Update notification, evacuation, and public safety plans for increasingly powerful weather events, wildfires, and mudslides.
- Use the modeling software housed at Old Dominion University and used by FEMA to model nuclear evacuation plans, or a comparable system to analyze realistic evacuation times, as the LA Times did in looking at evacuation models from Paradise, CA.

- Establish plans that coordinate evacuation and emergency response procedures with state and national entities
- Identify necessary road and infrastructure upgrades necessary for evacuations in hillside communities, and identify source of funds and timeline to do so
- Expand the use and function of NotifyLA and Everbridge for mass notification and messaging, including regular testing and verification of functionality
- Analyze the likelihood that a digital notification system will fail in the event of catastrophic fire and compare against the benefit to installing physical siren systems, which do not require voluntary enrollment.
- Identify necessary upgrades to or expansion of communications systems, including cell phone and WiFi towers, to ensure connectivity in the event of emergency; and need for warning systems such as hi-lo sirens
- Identify any needed improvements to existing evacuation plans for large animals
- Recommend changes to the “Red Flag Warning Days” Parking Program

Recovery & Citizen Empowerment

- Compare citizen preparation methods used by other county governments, such as the implementation of CA Fire Safe Councils, and LA County’s Forestry Division Vegetation Management training program with the City’s programs.
- Identify potential grant funding and other policies the City might employ to implement fire-hardening retrofits for older structures at greatest risk of fire.
- Identify public locations for shelter in place facilities and a ranking system of locations which would provide the most benefit.
- Identify outreach plans so that the public can be trained in emergency procedures