

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: December 05, 2025

TO: Honorable Members of the City Council

FROM: Sharon M. Tso *Motion for*
Chief Legislative Analyst

Council File No.: 25-0006-S1
Assignment No.: 25-01-0059

SUBJECT: Request for authorization to contract with Critical Preparedness and Response Solutions for an After-Action Report on the City of Los Angeles' Preparation for and Response to the Windstorm and Fires of January 2025

SUMMARY

This report is presented in response to a Council action (Park, Lee – Rodriguez Motion; CF 25-0006-S1), which instructed this Office to procure an outside entity to prepare a comprehensive, independent After-Action Report (AAR) of the City and County emergency response to the January 2025 wildfires. After completing a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, we request the Council's authorization to finalize a contract for an After-Action Report on the City of Los Angeles' Preparation for and Response to the Windstorm and Fires of January 2025 with the firm Critical Preparedness and Response Solutions ("CPARS Consulting, Inc." or "CPARS").

This Office conducted a competitive RFP process for this work. After reviewing bids from five firms, we recommend awarding the contract to CPARS. CPARS presented a comprehensive proposal with an experienced team knowledgeable about the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) operations, and with strong experience in AAR development. The proposed CPARS budget and timeline exceed the \$150,000 appropriated for this purpose (CF 24-0600-S121) on June 10, 2025. The work would take about 18 months and require a budget of \$580,000. After reviewing the bids and discussing the budget and timeline with CPARS, we believe this timeline and budget appropriately reflect the complexity and scope needed to produce an AAR that also includes a review of the LAFD's decisions and actions related to following up on the Lachman Fire and the adequacy of LAFD policies and procedures relative to managing the risks posed by holdover fires. As we finalize the contract with CPARS, we will be meeting with the LAFD to discuss how this report might assist with their independent review of the Lachman Fire response.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with an overview of the RFP process and the highlights of the CPARS proposal and to request the approval of the Council to 1) move forward to finalize a contract with CPARS for this work and 2) set aside an additional \$430,000 in the 2026-27 budget to fully fund the proposed two-year contract.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. AUTHORIZE the Chief Legislative Analyst to negotiate and execute a contract with Critical Preparedness and Response Solutions (CPARS) to prepare and present an After-Action Report on the City of Los Angeles' Preparation for and Response to the Windstorm and Fires of January 2025, for a term of two years and an amount of \$580,000, with a scope that is substantially as described in this report.
2. REQUEST the Mayor to include funding in the amount of \$430,000 in the 2026-27 proposed City budget for this contract.

BACKGROUND

On January 7, 2025, a wildfire and windstorm event unprecedented in scope wreaked destruction across Los Angeles, with the Pacific Palisades, Eaton Canyon, Hurst, and the Hughes Fires burning over 50,000 acres combined throughout the County of Los Angeles and causing loss of life, displacement of families and businesses, and tens of billions of dollars in damage. As the recent Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) AAR noted, the fire was the tenth-deadliest and third most destructive vegetation fire in California's history. The City, the residents, the business owners, and others affected by the fires face years of recovery work.

On January 14, 2025, the Council adopted a Motion (Park, Lee – Rodriguez) instructing this Office to procure an outside entity to prepare a comprehensive, independent After-Action Report of the City and County emergency response to the January 2025 wildfires (for clarity in this report, this will be referred to as the “Council-mandated AAR”). On June 10, 2025, Council approved \$150,000 as part of the Fourth Financial Status Report (CF 24-0600-S121) to support a contract for this After-Action Report.

DISCUSSION

Council-mandated AAR scope and relationship to other AARs

The Council-mandated AAR would be one of a number of after-action reports related to the windstorm and fire event that are either underway or have been completed, including City departmental reports, County reports, state reports, and federal government reports. These are summarized in Table 1, below.

Table 1. After-action and other reviews of the 2025 windstorm and fires

Report/Review Name	Organization	Status	Key Focus Areas
After Action Review of Alert Notification Systems and Evacuation Policies for the Eaton and Palisades Fires	LA County (prepared by McChrystal Group)	Completed	Alert notification systems, evacuation policies
After-action review to evaluate recovery and repopulation efforts	LA County (prepared by McChrystal Group)	In progress (projected completion in approx. 9 months)	Recovery and repopulation efforts, coordination of services, debris removal, strategic communications, repopulation notification and procedures, best practices
California Fires Independent Analysis, Phase One Report	Fire Safety Research Institute	Pending	Comprehensive timeline of events
California Fires Independent Analysis, Phase Two Report	Fire Safety Research Institute	Pending	Effectiveness of prevention and alerting efforts, conditions influencing fire, attempts to stop progression, evacuation efforts, review and analysis of state and local

Report/Review Name	Organization	Status	Key Focus Areas
			policies ¹
Council-mandated AAR	City of LA	Proposed	City wind and fire response as a whole, from Jan 1, 2025 through February 7, 2025
Departmental reviews	City departments (LAFD, LAPD, LADWP, EMD)	LAFD and LAPD reports recently released; others anticipated	Department performance during emergency incidents
Report on false alerts issued during the Kenneth Fire	U.S. Representative Robert Garcia	Issued May 12, 2025	False alerts issued during the Kenneth Fire
Statewide AAR on the “2025 Wildfires, Winds, and PSPS [Public Safety Power Shutoffs]”	Cal OES	Pending	Application of Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), modifications to SEMS, training needs
Investigation tracing source of ignition of Palisades Fire	Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives	Concluded (resulted in arrest)	Source of ignition of the Palisades Fire
Congressional investigation of adequacy of emergency preparation	Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee	Announced (September 8, 2025) ²	Adequacy of emergency preparation, availability of water for firefighting

Although, as shown in Table 1, some AARs on the January 2025 fires have been completed and a number of others are underway, the proposed Council-mandated AAR would be the only AAR to focus directly on the City’s response as a whole, not only on a granular departmental level or on an overall regional level. In addition, this report would serve as the report that the City’s Emergency Management Department (EMD) is required to submit to Cal OES, relieving EMD of the responsibility of either preparing this report using existing staff or identifying funding to contract for a report. As part of work under the proposed contract, the selected contractor would facilitate City departments in developing a Corrective Action Plan that can serve a resource for Council and Mayor oversight of implementation over the identified improvements in the City’s emergency preparation and response.

¹ Source: FSRI website, <https://fsri.org/research/california-fires-independent-analysis>

² September 8, 2025. “U.S. senators probe lapses in L.A. response to Palisades fire” by Grace Toohey and Ana Ceballos. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-09-08/senate-republicans-investigation-palisades-fire#:~:text=Republican%20Sens.,and%20quickly%20overwhelmed%20firefighting%20resource>

The Council-mandated AAR will include discussion of the following general topics, focusing on the period January 1, 2025 - February 7, 2025, the date on which the Emergency Operations Center transitioned the event from Level 2 to Level 3 status:

- Emergency management
- Evacuation and re-entry management
- Fire response and incident command
- Infrastructure systems (water and power)
- Communications, public information, alerts, and warnings
- Continuity of operations of City services
- Initiation of recovery activities (up to February 7, 2025)

The AAR will include an examination of the City's response to the Lachman Fire³, the Palisades Fire, the Hurst Fire, and the Sunset Fire. The focus will be on the City's response, not the County response. However, the ways in which the City and County either succeeded or struggled in working together effectively will be considered.

The RFP process

In response to the Council's instruction, this Office first reviewed a "bench list" of pre-approved firms provided by the City Administrative Officer (CAO) to identify whether any pre-approved firms would be a good fit for this work, enabling the City to avoid a lengthy RFP process. Our review indicated that, while a number of the pre-approved firms had auditing experience, none of these had significant expertise in conducting the kind of wildfire AAR needed for this assignment.

Accordingly, this Office conducted a competitive RFP process to identify potential contractors for this work. We developed an RFP in consultation with EMD and with the Council offices of districts in which fires occurred; published the RFP on the RAMPLA system on June 25, 2025; hosted an online bidders' conference on July 8, 2025; and posted responses to bidder questions on RAMPLA. Bids were due August 18, 2025. Bidder outreach was conducted through RAMPLA and also via direct emails to twenty-seven firms we identified as potential AAR providers, based on online research and recommendations provided by EMD. Approximately 100 firms viewed the AAR on the RAMPLA system, indicating a robust level of awareness of the opportunity. The City received five proposals and interviewed three finalist firms. The proposal evaluation team consisted of three staff from the Office of the CLA and one staff member from EMD.

Basis for recommending CPARS

Four out of five proposers offered thorough, responsive proposals,⁴ and each brought some level of emergency management, real-world AAR, and/or wildfire expertise to the table, in some cases very impressive experience. Our recommendation of CPARS for the contract is based on the following factors:

Team qualifications and experience. We were looking for a team that had both experience developing AARs for real-world events and fire management expertise. Key strengths of the CPARS proposal in this area included the following:

³ The Lachman Fire was identified by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives as the source of ignition for the Palisades Fire.

⁴ There was one out of the five proposals that did not offer enough detail for a complete evaluation.

- The CPARS team had the best combination of those qualifications of any of the proposers. The team consists of nationally recognized emergency management and public safety professionals with experience in designing, facilitating, and producing comprehensive After-Action Reports for both training exercises and a range of real-world events.
- CPARS has extensive experience working for the City of Los Angeles. CPARS authored the After-Action Report on the City's Covid response. In addition, CPARS is currently completing work on an update to the City's Emergency Operations Plan and its Annexes, so they will begin the AAR project with a strong knowledge of the City's established emergency procedures.
- In addition to members with general expertise in emergency response, the team includes two retired LAFD personnel, a former Chief Deputy and Assistant Chief, both with experience in LAFD's Emergency Operations.
- The CPARS proposal was also the only proposal with a primarily locally-based team, allowing for greater flexibility in scheduling in-person meetings, when appropriate.
- To support the proposed work, the CPARS proposal includes a number of sub-contracting firms. CPARS is a California-certified Small Business Enterprise, and three out of the five participating subcontractors are certified (either in LA or through another government agency) as Small Business Enterprises (SBEs), Woman-Owned Business Enterprises (WBEs), Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBEs) and/or Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs).

Workplan. The workplan proposed by CPARS is comprehensive and addresses all of the items requested in the RFP.

- In addition to meeting the City's stated requirements, the CPARS proposal identified some additional areas of review that should be included to make for a more complete AAR—for example, review of "Continuity of Operations," or how well the City was able to continue to provide normal necessary services during the emergency. CPARS has also agreed to include a review of the LAFD's decisions and actions related to following up on the Lachman fire as part of this AAR.
- CPARS is committed to providing an impartial and independent report. The CLA's role will be to facilitate the firm's access to information, to ensure that the report is complete in terms of coverage of the required scope items, and to work with City departments to validate that final observations are factual and well supported by evidence.
- After interviewing CPARS, we believe they are the only firm that both fully understands the complexity and challenge of the project and are undertaking the project without imposing limits on crucial elements, such as the number of documents to be reviewed, findings to be identified, or pages in the report.

Budget and timeline considerations. A significant factor for the Council's consideration is that the budget and timeline of the work are both well beyond the targets indicated in the RFP and initially budgeted for this work. \$150,000 was allocated on June 10, 2025, for the Council-mandated AAR, and the initial timeline developed by this Office aimed to have a final report within six months of contract execution. This was communicated in the RFP, which stated that "Funding is currently budgeted at \$150,000," and that "The anticipated Term of Contract is one year, with a target to complete the report within the first six months." However, because we were not confident that the \$150,000 budget would be sufficient to allow contractors to cover all the scope elements required

in sufficient detail, the RFP included the instruction that “To the extent there are any additional tasks the proposer recommends, or tasks that the proposer recommends be included at an augmented level, any associated costs should be clearly separated and identified in the proposed budget.” In addition, the RFP stated that “The City may, at its discretion, accept or reject proposals that exceed budgeted funding.” Two other bidders included proposed optional additional services at additional costs, indicating that the potential to propose work beyond the budgeted amount was understandable to bidders.

CPARS proposes a roughly 18-month timeline for the final report and a budget of \$580,000. After a thorough review of the proposals received and discussion with CPARS, the proposal evaluation team concluded that this budget and timeline appropriately reflect the scope and complexity of the effort needed to provide an adequate review of the windstorms and fires. Drawing on their experience preparing the City’s Covid-19 After-Action Report, CPARS noted that there are likely thousands of documents that would be part of a thorough review and that time must be allowed, not just for conducting interviews, but for scheduling interviews as City staff handle other priority work and events such as the upcoming World Cup. CPARS also noted that 18-24 months is a fairly standard timeframe for an After-Action Report on a significant event. For example, this amount of time is consistent with the County and state Fire Safety Research Institute timelines. Recognizing, however, that 18 months from contract execution is a long time to wait for findings, CPARS has offered to provide a high-level executive summary of preliminary findings approximately nine months into the project at no additional cost.

The CPARS budget includes substantially more hours compared to the other proposals received, reflecting their understanding of the level of effort needed to satisfactorily complete a thorough Report. On an hourly basis, CPARS rates are roughly at the average of the hourly rates among the bids received.

Under the payment schedule proposed by CPARS, payments due in 2025-26 would not exceed the \$150,000 approved by Council on June 10, 2025, to fund the Council-mandated AAR. However, to cover the full cost of the contract, an additional \$430,000 would need to be included in the 2026-27 Budget.

Louisa Lund
Analyst

Attachment: 1. Park, Lee – Rodriguez Motion

MOTION

SPECIAL 1

Since the posting of the agenda, it has come to the attention of the City of Los Angeles that in response to the Palisades Fire, the Eaton Fire, the January 2025 Windstorm, and related fires, it is necessary for the City to immediately address dozens of issues related to response and recovery, including but not limited to: FEMA reimbursement, financing strategies for fire recovery, public safety in evacuation areas, lost pets, price gouging, FEMA's Direct Lease program, relief from LADWP bills, assessing infrastructure and facilities, ongoing federal coordination, an ad hoc committee for fire recovery, LADWP infrastructure and the offline reservoir, support for dislocated workers, mitigating debris flows and landslides, exempting additional positions from the prioritized critical hiring process, a centralized permit operation center, additional resources for LAFD, creation of a recovery plan, mitigation of toxic hazards, federal resource centers, tenant protections for impacted persons and pets, and financial assistance for impacted persons and businesses.

These fires created an unprecedented crisis, threatening communities, destroying thousands of homes and structures, in addition to multiple fatalities, and displacing residents. The fires, including the Palisades, Kenneth, Archer, Hurst, Sunset, and Woodley, have caused significant damage across thousands of acres, with significant loss of life and numerous individuals arrested for looting. The devastation has taken an immense toll on families and individuals who have lost their homes and sense of security. While our communities pull together in the face of this crisis, the road to recovery and rebuilding will be long.

We continue to support the Los Angeles Fire Department and all first responders in their tireless efforts to contain the fires and keep Angelenos safe. However, while mitigating the Palisades Fire, firefighters reported a critical shortage of water pressure and supply. The impacts of these fires continue to affect the city, resulting in losses of life and property, as well as severe disruptions to everyday services and long-term fiscal and environmental challenges.

As the City's leadership, the urgency of the situation requires accountability for our city and proprietary departments. Further, we are responsible for ensuring that an event similar to this never happens again. The scope and scale of the devastation requires answers for those who have been impacted and strategies to ensure that a similar disaster does not occur again.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council determine, as provided in section 54954.2(b)(2) of the Government Code, and pursuant to **Rule 23** of the Rules of the City Council, that there is a need to take immediate action on this matter AND that the need for immediate action came to the attention of the City subsequent to the posting of the agenda on Friday, January 10, 2025 for today's Council meeting.

I FURTHER MOVE that the Council instruct the Chief Legislative Analyst, in coordination with Los Angeles County, to procure an outside entity to prepare a comprehensive, independent After Action Report of the City and County emergency response to the January 2025 wildfires.

PRESENTED BY:



TRACI PARK
Councilwoman, 11th District

PRESENTED BY:



JOHN S. LEE
Councilmember, 12th District

SECONDED BY:



JAN 14 2025

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