



Wildfire Prevention District (WPAD)
Advisory Board Meeting
Thursday, October 27, 2005 - 7:00 p.m.
Trudeau Training Center
11500 Skyline Boulevard, Oakland, CA

Ken Benson, Chair; Robert Sieben, Vice Chair; Carol Bernau; Susan Burnett; Ben Fay; Barbara Goldenberg; Carl Hackney; Tamia Marg; Gordon Piper; Ernest A. Robinson III; Allene Warren.

Minutes

- I. **Call to Order** – Ken Benson, Committee Chair
Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

- II. **Roll Call** – Ken Benson, Committee Chair
Present: Susan Burnett, Robert Sieben, Ben Fay, Allene Warren, Ken Benson, Ernie Robinson, Carol Bernau, AFM Leroy Griffin, Kristine Shaff,
Excused: Barbara Goldenberg, Tamia Marg, Gordon Piper **Absent:** Carl Hackney

- III. **Public Comment**
 - Andy Miloslavich – Piedmont Pines Homeowners' Association – Suggested that the Advisory Board recommend and/or present to Council the automatic Gas Shut Off Valve as a good safety measure for reducing the risk of fire in the event of an earthquake. They are about \$100. The Board's endorsement might have some impact. Los Angeles and other counties also recommend it.
 - Roger Brett – Montclair West Neighborhood Association – Update on the Pershing tree removal project. It's taken 3 months and now have received 3 quotes for the cost of the smaller of two projects. Staff will meet next week to select a contractor and do a walk through to make sure everything is included in the contract. Looking for progress on this project.
 - Ron Barklow – Nice to see the crews out on Joaquin Miller and Skyline. The crews were well equipped with safety devices. Suggested that more limbing-up be done as they are hanging into roadway and blocking signage in addition to roadside clearance treatment.
 - Nick Vigilante – Endorsed the previous idea recommending the Gas Shut Off Valve as fire would be our greatest threat in an earthquake. Perhaps a partnership with PG&E could be pursued. Had an issue (not a complaint) that roadside clearance on Shepard Canyon on the left looked very good (done by EBCC) but wondered about work done on the right side (by CDF). AFM Griffin responded that a meeting is scheduled next week with CDF to discuss this issue and others.
 - Karen Paulsell – Friends of Sausal Creek – Volunteered time both to put up and to take down the caution tape around desirable plants along Skyline before and after the roadside clearance treatment. Suggested that it would be better to find new ways to do the treatment so that we move beyond maintenance to making a real difference in the landscape. She expects that the new Vegetation Management Plan will address these issues.
 - Ralph Kanz – Has done research on the Shut Off Valve. Wanted to know if we are following the Hills Emergency Forum (HEF) roadside clearance standards.

He questions the value of the work done on Skyline, because he believes that if it did catch fire, it would just burn up to the redwoods and then stop.

Recommended that the work be done more like the work near where the UC trains are on the northern border with Berkeley, because it looks like it is making a real difference in reducing the fire risk. Wants to know that the money is being spent wisely.

- Robert Faber – Had a question regarding what the standard clearance height for local roads is. Also wanted vegetation clearance around power lines in Butters area.
- John Bouey – Piedmont Pines NA Board of Directors – submitted a written public comment – attached as Appendix A to these minutes.

IV. **Approval of Minutes**

- September 29, 2005 minutes – Board voted unanimously to accept the minutes.

V. **Vegetation Management Staff Report**

- Staff of the Fire Prevention Bureau has completed a Notice of Intent for a grant to FEMA for a Disaster Mitigation Project for a fuel reduction program. It will bring significant funding resources, \$2.6 million for major tree removal work over three years and \$300,000 for project management which will include a technical removal expert. The grant itself is due in December, but initial approval has been received. Staff will be busy preparing the grant over the next month.
- Inspection and Compliance Status: Thank yous to both private residents and the public entity parcel owners because compliance rate is higher than ever. This is not to say it's all done, but 89% of private homeowners are in compliance, a larger number than ever before. Final notices are being sent out to non-compliant properties with significant violations.
- AFM Griffin suggested we remove a word from our thinking – “maintenance” – because our efforts need to be fuel reduction and fuel management. Fire Prevention Bureau is in the process of meeting with City agencies including Public Works Agency (PWA) to determine specifically what their responsibility is and what falls under Vegetation Management in the Fire Department.
- We need to have a “paradigm shift” in that we all need to focus more on year-round compliance, rather than thinking we just need to “race to the rains” and the so-called “end of the fire season.” It is true that there are several months of the year with an extremely high fire hazard, but on any day of the year, devastating wildfire could occur in the hills due to the high fuel load. We need to emphasize defensible space habits and actions in a year-round way. There will be a year round activity chart on the website soon.
- Public Outreach – There have been several outreach efforts in the past month, including tonight's presentation.

VI. **Advisory Board Committee Reports** – None scheduled.

VII. **Presentation - *Firescaping: Creating fire-resistant landscapes, gardens, and properties in California's diverse environments*** by Douglas Kent, 2005 Wilderness Press

- Mr. Kent presented a slide show and presentation based on his book of the same title. Open discussion followed. He touched upon several issues, including:

- “Could your house withstand a “*rain of sparks?*” - an interesting way to look at home maintenance issues all residents face (clean gutters, removal of dead and dying debris, etc.)
- “What can you do *together* with your neighbors, to make your house and your neighborhood more fire safe?” His idea was that all houses in the neighborhood need to be equally safe for the *area* to be safe.
- “It’s not the inevitability of fire we need to consider, it’s the *intensity* of the fire we need to be concerned with.
- *Zones* of landscaping around the home and how to share those zones with your neighbors for increased safety.
- Year-round maintenance is the key. “*Garden like a fire.*” The book has a calendar of events to encourage this year round thinking. Winter is the best time for pruning several trees.

VIII. **New Business**

- Kristine asked the Board to volunteer at the Holiday Lights Exchange that Office of Emergency Services is partnering with, in an attempt to be energy wise and fire safe. Allene Warren and Susan Burnett expressed interest in helping out.
- A new map of the City Council Districts and the WPAD sub-districts was distributed and is on the website as requested by the public.
- A new public outreach survey was distributed and will be on the website also. Results will be reported at next meeting.

IX. **Old Business**

- Financial Report – Treasurer Ben Fay presented Budget Update (handout).
- Contract Report – Ben Fay and Kristine Shaff attended a meeting with representatives from Contract Compliance and the City Attorney in the effort to better understand the contracting requirements and what options are available to us in the efforts to streamline the process and include more contractors in the process. It is required that 20% of the total funds spent go to Oakland certified businesses. One idea being considered is a ‘pre-approved contractor list’ that would have an open enrollment once a year. Another idea is to write the contracts for year round maintenance, so that the right work be done at the right time of year for the best results.
- The WPAD needs to have an external audit done for 2004-2005. Bids were requested, and one came in for \$9000 (\$1000 less than budgeted) from a private company that also does the Measure Y and DD programs. The Board voted unanimously to have this company do the audit.
- Several questions were brought up from board members regarding current status of unresolved issues, including:
 - had the City’s arborist surveyed the dead and dying pine trees. AFM Griffin responded that it is on the arborist’s list and that the area will be one of the areas on the new FEMA grant.
 - had the previous FEMA grant in Claremont Canyon begun yet.
 - can the eucalyptus in Grass Valley be cut, or just the debris picked up. There are several stacks of debris to be removed and this has just gone out to contract.
 - clearing needs to be done at Parkridge and Skyline. That also has gone to contract.

- Board was reminded to use the Vegetation Management Hotline 238-7388 for all issues and requests so that it can be an effective monitoring and tracking informational system.
- Kristine Shaff (Public Outreach Coordinator for WPAD) reported on recent progress made towards having City Council proclaim a date as Wildfire Prevention Day. Building upon the initial ideas of the Board for a date, a proclamation, associated workdays and educational workshops, perhaps in partnership with Earth Day, she is developing a proposal as part of the public outreach plan. The proposal will be presented at a meeting in the near future.

X. Vegetation Management Plan

- Ernie Robinson reported that the Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) committee met for an initial meeting (Barbara Goldenberg, Bob Sieben, Ben Fay, Leroy Griffin, Ernie Robinson, Karen Paulsell, Mike Petouhoff) and began scoping out the work of the group, the overall plan and purpose, etc. Meetings were scheduled for the third Wednesday of the month so that report can come back at each Advisory Board meeting. Public input will be an important part of the process and will also need to be informed of progress made, and that will occur at each Board meeting.
- After additional research with the City Clerk and the City Attorney, the VMP committee asked that an adjustment be made in the type of structure - from a standing committee to an ad hoc group - because the VMP will not make any final decisions or funding decisions (it will offer recommendations to staff and the Board) and it will meet for less than 12 month period. These three criteria were central to whether a group be required to additionally meet public noticing and Sunshine rules. Chair Ken Benson wanted to make sure that the process is open, and that the public is an important part of the process. The VMP assured this to be the intent. Two of the public are members of the VMP and others will be invited as experts and for input as specific topics are considered. Additional public meetings will be held when the VMP is ready for public input on various elements and periodic drafts of the plan. The Board voted for the change to an ad hoc meeting with six votes for and 1 vote against (Ken Benson).
- The goal is for an informational report at Public Safety Committee in January with an overview of the process.

XI. Public Comments

- A member of the public suggested we do more with the State Senators on fire prevention so that the message gets out further with more impact. She does not think we send out enough information to the public and that citizens need help in how to reduce fire risk to our homes.
- Another speaker suggested a color brochure to all homeowners to educate the public on specific ideas which are recommended. Kristine said she is in the process of drafting one.
- Board member Susan Burnett thanked (and congratulated) AFM Griffin for his proactive efforts (and accomplishments) on behalf of vegetation management.
- Next meetings are November 10 and December 8.

XII. Adjournment: 9:02 p.m.

Appendix A

October 27, 2005

From: John Bouey, Piedmont Pines Neighborhood Association Board of Directors

To: Wildfire Prevention District Board of Directors

Subject; Open Forum

1. Continuing Problem with WPAD Compliance Inspections:

- Oakland Unified School District, Joaquin Miller Elementary near Mountain Blvd. and Ascot Drive
- Six parcels at Scout Road adjacent Ascot Drive
- Undeveloped parcels 5800 block ascot drive
- Developed parcels at 6001 and 6031 Ascot Drive
- Developed parcels at 6160 and 6214 Ascot Drive (these parcels have been in non-compliance for over two months, also a traffic hazard)
- Developed parcel across from parcels 6567,6571 an 6575 Ascot Drive (actual parcel address is 6576 Ascot Lane)
- Undeveloped parcels between parcels 9155 and 9057 Skyline Blvd.

When is WPAD going to send in a contractor to finally obtain full compliance with City of Oakland Fire Code with respect to these parcels?

2. Vegetation Removal Efficiencies:

Now that the 2005 vegetation removal effort is nearing completion, when will we see a true cost-effectiveness analysis of the performance of the various types of vegetation removal options available the WPAD, i.e., goats, CCC, contractors, volunteers, etc. We all need to know that the assessment payees are getting the “best bang for their bucks”. It’s simply not enough for Board Member Mr. Ben Fay to report every month the dollars spent on total vegetation management activities. We need to know precisely how much was spent on each type and by individual vendors (do we need to file a formal request for public records with the City Attorney’s office to obtain the detailed information?). It would also be appropriate to know the acreage (including what WPAD district#) and the volume of vegetation materials removed under each contract let by WPAD. Until these individual contracts and amounts are revealed to the public, we can’t feel confident that the WPAD is being managed as effectively as possible.

There also needs to be a set of standards of performance for WPAD vegetation removal contracts so that the district can be assured that consistent quality work gets done. The range of performance that WPAD received on the multiple contracts that were recently let for vegetation removal along Skyline Blvd. in Joaquin Miller Park highlights this need.

3. Consistency in WPAD Parcel Inspections:

At the most recent Piedmont Pines Neighborhood Association Annual Membership meeting on October 17, 2005 several comments were voiced in open forum regarding the lack of consistency in the WPAD’s Annual Parcel Inspections carried out by Oakland Fire Department personnel and followed up by WPAD inspectors. It seemed that the level of detail and required corrective actions varied all over the map. Some even indicated that they received blank inspection forms and they didn’t know whether they

were in or out of compliance. This problem must be addressed by WPAD before the inspections begin anew after the first of next year. Hopefully, this can reduce the amount of corrective action that WPAD needs to take in order to bring the entire district into compliance and it may even significantly reduce the number and complexity of calls to the WPAD hotline in June of next year.

4. WPAD # Needs:

Many of the resident of WPAD#4 (Councilmember Jean Quan's city council district) are feeling neglected by WPAD. Wasn't WPAD District #4 the reddest of the Red Zone on Sue Piper's map when the WPAD concept was "sold to the hill area residents? We seem to be the last in line for fuel load reduction projects and didn't receive even the basic level of weed abatement until very late in the fire season along Skyline Blvd., especially in Joaquin Miller Park where the work wasn't even initiated until the last month of the fire season. There are also numerous stands of heavy fuel load, mainly large eucalyptus trees, in our district (Sheppard Canyon and along Westover Drive and Girvin Drive). What plans does WPAD have to reduce the fuel load in district #4 and when might they appear on a schedule? Can we count on WPAD to place District #4, i.e., the public right-of-way through Joaquin Miller Park, higher on next year's list of cleanup priorities? The trailheads in Joaquin Miller Park represent a very high fire danger as visitors park their cars in the tall, dry grasses during the summer months while attending activities such as the youth day camps and simply just during many daytime visits for a walk in the park.