



Office of the City Manager

March 27, 2023

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: *Dee* Dee Williams-Ridley, City Manager

Subject: Fire Safe Berkeley Campaign Overview

The potential of a wind-driven wildfire threatens most of the City, *not just the hills*. September 17 will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1923 fire that ignited in the Lake Anza area and swept into downtown Berkeley – it only stopped after the winds subsided (Fig 1). More recently, wildfires devastated communities with relatively flat terrain, including the Tubbs Fire that destroyed Coffey Park, Santa Rosa, in 2017.

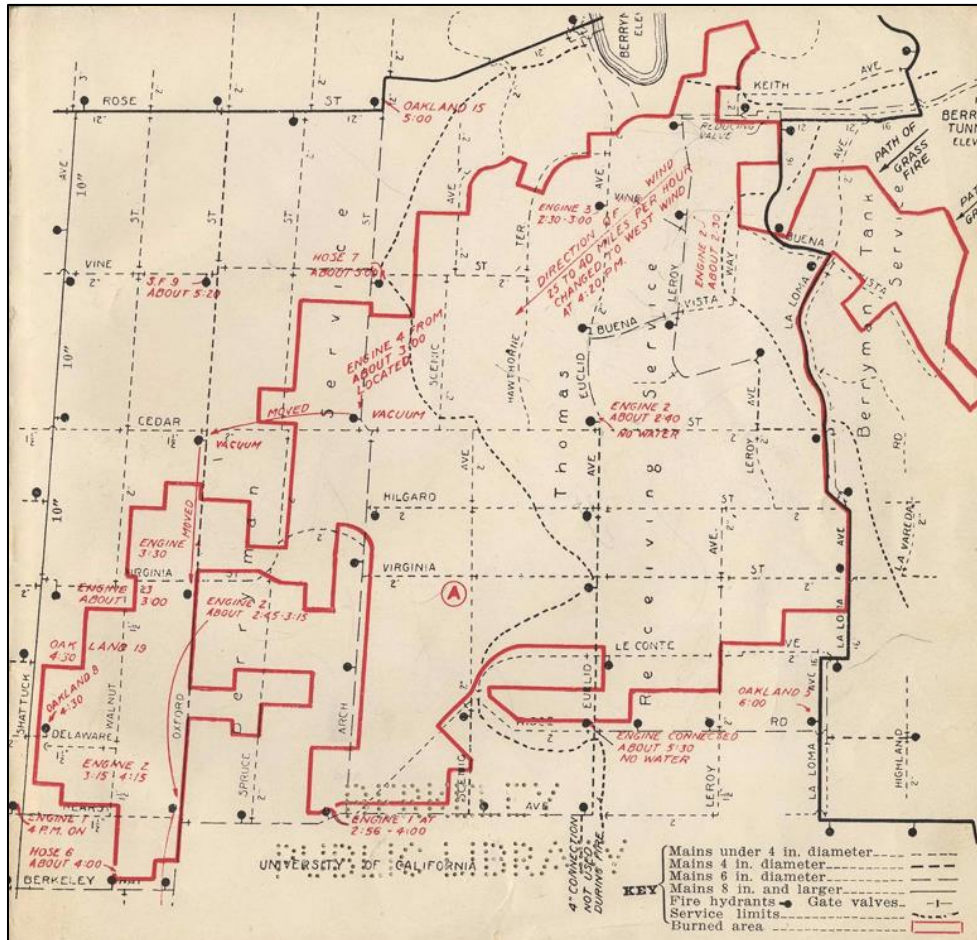


Figure 1: Map of 1923 Berkeley Fire, Berkeley Public Library

Since the passage of Measure FF in 2020, the Fire Department (Department) has been developing plans to make Berkeley more resistant to wildfire, thus increasing the City's overall resiliency. The Department is launching several new initiatives branded "*Fire Safe Berkeley*."

Fire Safe Berkeley is a holistic program encompassing the elements defined in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). As the initial CWPP process is concluding and wildfire season is approaching, this memorandum is intended to help Council engage with constituents by providing a summary of priorities and what residents can expect to see from the Department in 2023. More information will be shared with Council as programs and projects near implementation, please do share updates with your constituents.

### **Program Element 1: Community Wildfire Protection Plan**

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Action Plan is in final draft form. The Action Plan will guide the work necessary to make Berkeley more resistant to and resilient from the effects of wildfire. The Department has already initiated work on several goals outlined in the Action Plan.

The Action Plan, which is attached, is also posted on the [City of Berkeley CWPP Hub](#). We anticipate that the full CWPP will be taken to the Disaster and Fire Safety Commission in April 2023 and Council in May 2023. Department staff welcomes any comments and feedback.

### **Program Element 2: Enhanced Chipping Program**

The Chipper Program was previously managed by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Waterfront (PRW). It has been moved under Fire Safe Berkeley and re-branded as the *Berkeley Chipper Day* program. The Department expanded service to the entire city, [created a self-schedule appointment website](#), contracted with a dedicated program manager to oversee operations, onboarded full-time experienced chipping crews and expanded the season to 22 weeks starting April 17. Chipper Day provides curbside chipping and disposal of material. The approximately 8,500 households within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone have already received the annual direct mail announcement of the program (attached). A mailer announcing the new City-Wide chipper program will be sent to all households in the City in the coming weeks.

### **Program Element 3: Public Education & Outreach**

The Department anticipates a January 2024 adoption of the new Defensible Space Zone 0 requirements by the California State Board of Forestry. This law will apply to all properties in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (Fig 2 next page, or [map here](#)), and represents a new science-backed five (5) foot ignition resistant perimeter around structures. The Department's 2023 public education campaign goal is to help residents understand the critical nature of making defensible space and home hardening improvements to their properties.

The campaign will occur primarily through individual interactions with residents in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. In-person interaction will be supplemented by digital engagement, direct mail, yard signs, flyers, and banners.

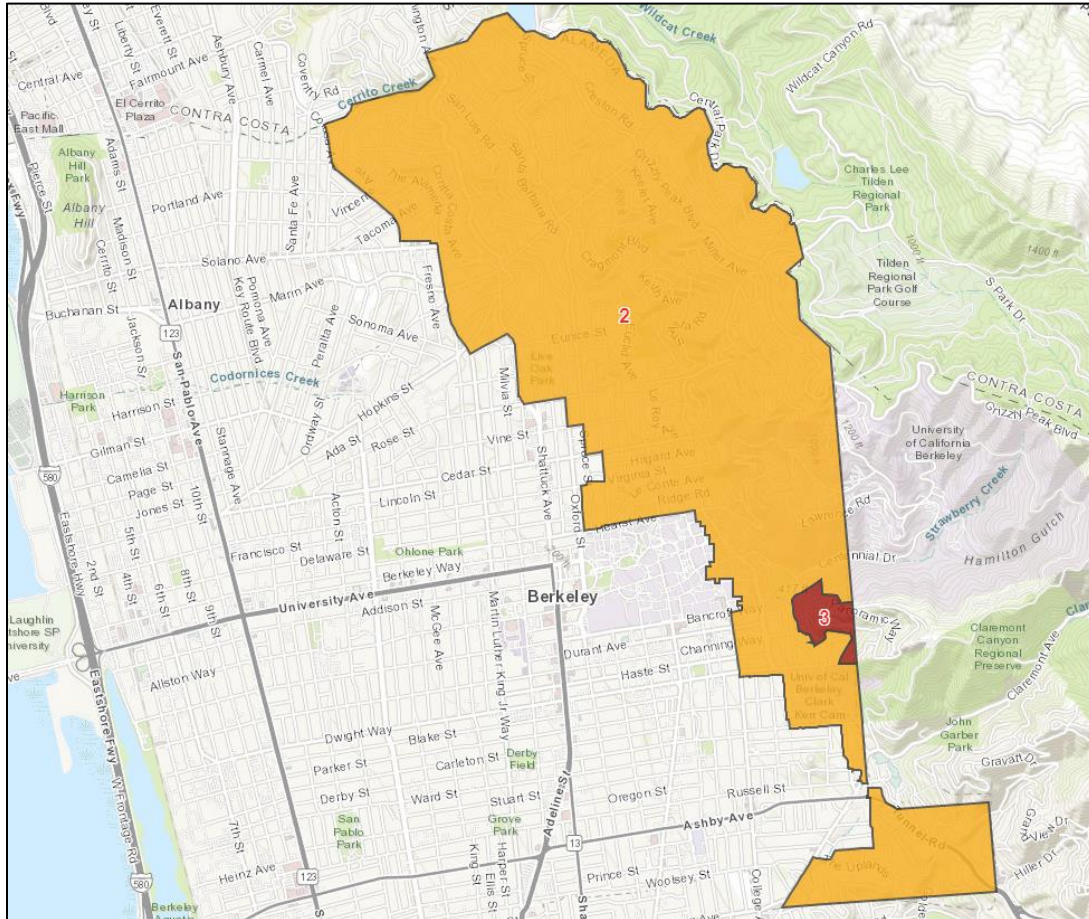


Figure 2: Very High Fire Danger Severity Zones 2 & 3

#### **Program Element 4: Fuels Management Project Development & Increased Effort to Secure Grant Funding**

Department Staff are working collaboratively with other City of Berkeley departments and neighboring agencies to develop fuel management projects in the region and throughout the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

The Department applied for two grants in March 2023:

- 1) \$4.5 million to focus on a Resident Assistance Program (See Program Element 5) for qualified property owners in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone; and
- 2) \$1.5 million for a collaborative opportunity with the Hills Emergency Forum and five additional agencies to conduct vegetation management projects in the vicinity of Grizzly Peak Blvd. and other evacuation routes.

If Department is not awarded \$4.5 million for the Resident Assistance Program, staff is prepared to launch a small pilot program that will target specific residents with direct invitations to participate based on their location in the and the strategic importance of improving defensible space on their property.

### **Program Element 5: Resident Assistant Programs**

The Department is developing a pilot Vegetation Resident Assistance Program that will focus on vegetation management projects that are statutorily required by the state ([Zone 0, 1, and 2](#)). Eligible property owners will be invited to apply for a one-time grant to help bring their property into compliance, then on-going maintenance of vegetation is the responsibility of the property owner. Eligibility will be determined by the location of property and the strategic importance of completing this work to the overall inhibition of fire spread into the community.

The pilot Home Hardening Resident Assistant Program will provide support to residents to make improvements to their home's structure that will help protect it from ember storms that travel ahead of a wildfire and are the primary cause of structure ignition. The Department is planning to provide a limited amount of fire-rated wire mesh to residents for installation on gutters and behind vents that lead to attic spaces – both high risk ignition areas of a home during a wildfire.

#### **Attachments:**

- Draft Action Plan from the Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- Direct mail announcement of Chipper program

cc: LaTanya Bellow, Deputy City Manager  
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