



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 10670)

Report Type: Study Session

Meeting Date: 1/21/2020

Summary Title: Review of Utilities Wildfire Mitigation Plan

Title: Presentation and Review of the Utilities Wildfire Mitigation Plan

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Utilities

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends, pursuant to a 2019 state law related to electric utilities and wildfires, that Council take the following action:

1. Receive a report on the Utilities Wildfire Mitigation Plan, which the City will use to minimize the risk of overhead electric lines causing wildfires.

DISCUSSION

In 2019, a new law¹ mandated that electric publicly owned utilities prepare a wildfire mitigation plan. The new law requires the wildfire mitigation plan incorporate specified information and procedures, as deemed necessary by the electric utility. The mitigation plan must be reviewed by an independent evaluator and presented to Council at a public hearing before January 2020 and updated annually.

The attached mitigation plan is a collaborative effort between Utilities, Fire, Public Works – Urban Forestry, Open Space, and Office of Emergency Services departments. Each department performs a critical role in preventing wildfires from occurring and communicating information to the public and outside agencies. Per the new law, the Mitigation Plan concentrates primarily on wildfires associated with overhead electric utility infrastructure but many of the activities overlap with general procedures for each department. The Plan outlines:

- Departmental Roles and Responsibilities
- Completed Fire Mitigation Tasks
- Ongoing Fire Prevention Activities
- Proposed Activities
- Response to Fires

¹ [Public Utilities Code 8387](#), modified by SB 901 (Dodd).

- Community Outreach
- Metrics to Measure Success of the Plan

The law mandates that electric utilities “contract with a qualified independent evaluator with experience in assessing the safe operation of electrical infrastructure to review and assess the comprehensiveness of its wildfire mitigation plan.”² In compliance with the new law, this plan was reviewed by an independent evaluator, Navigant Consulting, Inc. (Navigant), in October 2019; and the plan was modified based on Navigant’s evaluation and resubmitted for final review. The Plan was found by Navigant to be comprehensive and meets regulatory objectives. The Plan and Navigant’s report are attached to this staff report. A representative from Navigant will provide a presentation at the meeting to discuss their evaluation process.

RESOURCE IMPACT

The Utilities Wildfire Mitigation Plan does not have any immediate resource impact. Ongoing and proposed activities listed in the plan are and will be approved annually through the Capital and Operating Budget process.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Wildfire Mitigation Plan and process for independent evaluation was discussed at the September 4, 2019 Utilities Advisory Commission (UAC) meeting³. An excerpt of the minutes from the UAC meeting is attached.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Council’s receipt of this report is not a project requiring California Environmental Quality Act review, because it is an administrative governmental activity which will not cause a direct or indirect physical change in the environment.

Attachments are presented as links to conserve paper:

- Attachment A: Utilities Wildfire Mitigation Plan
- Attachment B: CPAU Wildfire Management Plan Independent Evaluation
- Attachment C: Excerpt of 09-04-19 UAC Minutes
- Attachment D: CPAU - Wildfire Mitigation Plan Presentation
- Attachment E: Navigant - Presentation CPAU WMP Independent Evaluation

² [Public Utilities Code, section 8387 \(c\)](#)

³ <http://cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/73184>