

# **Wildfire Prevention Commission**

## **Year One Report to the Oakland City Council**

**May 21, 2026**

### **Executive Summary**

Measure MM establishes a parcel tax on properties in the Wildfire Prevention Zone (WPZ). The WPZ is set by the OFD and mapped roughly to the properties in Oakland's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. The Wildfire Prevention Commission (WPC) is tasked (Appendix 1) with oversight of Measure MM funds and broadly with oversight of Oakland's efforts dealing with wildfire risks in the wildfire zone, in particular by reducing fuel load so that fires can be contained before they become urban conflagrations as illustrated in the October 1991 Tunnel Fire and avoided in the July 2024 Keller Fire.

WPC held seven meetings from September 2025 - May 2026. Through these meetings WPC had dialogue with Council Members, the Oakland Fire Department, the Emergency Services Management Division, the Oakland Public Works Department, and members of the public (Appendix 2). Year one has been spent listening and learning from an array of agencies and members of the public.

We highlight seven recommendations that we are confident will help the City optimize the use of MM funding, reduce wildfire risks, improve the effective implementation of the approved Vegetation Management Plan, and assist WPC in doing its job over the coming years.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

#### **1. Provide Better, More Detailed Information**

WPC needs more timely, granular, and complete information in several categories, including on vegetation management activities; timing and amounts of Measure MM funding receipts; Measure MM expenditures including overtime; historical budget information; and richer description of properties in the wildfire zone.

#### **2. Expedite Hiring the Measure MM Supervisory Position**

WPC strongly recommends that the City act immediately to permanently fill the "Parks Supervisor - Measure MM" position. This need was established by Council in June 2025 and has been a priority for WPC since our first meeting in September 2025.

#### **3. Enhance Compliance with Fire Safety Rules for Developed Residential Parcels**

OFD's inspections of developed residential parcels work reasonably well, however there is opportunity to increase public safety by focusing more attention on outcomes. Use technical means such as drones to allow inspections to see all of a parcel, not just the view from the street. Establish a mechanism where public observations of non-compliance can trigger a re-inspection. Establish a commitment to outcomes (not just inspections) by, when necessary, hiring

contractors to do the work should a property owner refuse to follow the rules. Rapidly follow the state's leadership to establish strong Zone Zero regulations.

4. Inventory and Examine All Properties in the WPZ

There is opportunity to enhance wildfire safety by systematically looking at all properties in the WPZ, not just developed residential parcels. WPC recommends an inventory and examination of, undeveloped private parcels (which can be overgrown; some are sizable), city-owned land with leaseholders (who might not be undertaking commitments to mitigate wildfire risk), private commercial parcels with open land (who might have unsatisfied wildfire-related permit obligations), parcels managed by other public agencies; and parcels managed by PG&E.

5. Enhance Identification, Hardening, and Operation of Wildfire Evacuation Routes

Collaborate with other agencies to systematically learn from past fires and establish best practices for the identification of wildfire evacuation routes, for “hardening” evacuation routes by reducing fuel loads and increasing traffic capacity especially on red flag days. The operation of evacuation routes needs to insure smooth traffic flow and minimize congestion at predictable “choke points”. These are major challenges faced by many jurisdictions, not just Oakland.

6. Honor Endangered Species Commitments in the WPZ

The VMP and associated Environmental Impact Report commit the city to honor certain endangered species; the new Measure MM Supervisor (see Recommendation 2 above) should be accountable for these commitments

7. Ensure Fire Hydrant Accessibility

For many years, a number of fire hydrants in the WPZ have not been appropriately accessible by firefighters due to vegetative overgrowth, accumulation of debris, and landslides. There does not seem to be clarity on who is responsible for maintaining access. A responsible entity with accountability for ensuring access should be identified.

More details on the recommendations and the reasons for them can be found in the body of the report below.

## Activities/Function

WPC's charter is broad and requires that WPC understand large amounts of information from numerous sources, including Council Members, the Public, the Oakland Fire Department, the Emergency Services Management Division, and the Oakland Public Works Department. Measure MM defines the information that the city staff is to provide to WPC, including its annual informational report on measures taken under the Vegetation Management Plan (VMP) as is already required by the VMP; identification of additional resource needs, and any pertinent issues identified and addressed during VMP implementation. There is also a requirement to prepare and deliver an annual independent audit.

WPC convened seven times during year one (August 27, 2025, November 20, 2025, January 15, 2026, February 19, 2026, March 26, 2026, April 16 2026, and May 21, 2026). The commissioners and city staff who contributed to WPC's efforts are indicated in Appendix 2.

## Recommendations

Based on our activities this year, WPC has recommendations in seven topic areas detailed below.

### 1. Provide Better, More Detailed Information

WPC requires a strong, holistic sense of the activities being undertaken by the various city departments involved in spending public funds for wildfire-related activities. Much information has been received from city staff. This information has helped to orientate the history and scope of wildfire-related efforts, understand the city's internal structure, ongoing efforts and aspirations, as well as to build relationships and lines of communication.

However, to date the information provided by the City has in too many cases been inadequate to understand, much less evaluate, what is being done, and even what is the available funding. Therefore, we are at a loss to provide clear recommendations on the annual expenditure plan, how money is being spent, where money is being spent, etc. WPC needs significantly more transparency and clarity on which funds are being spent on which activities and in which locations, so that we can better understand and evaluate the annual budget and implementation plan for MM and the Vegetation Management Plan. WPC notes that city staff recognize that there are deficiencies in activity reporting and are working to rectify that. It is important that a way be found to provide useful, relevant, timely information.

WPC lacks an understanding of the City's budgetary accounting, policies and procedures. WPC recognizes that our request to have finance staff meet with us in April was not practicable due that being a time of peak workload.

## Recommendations

City administration will provide WPC details on the following:

- The specific activities, at the level of parcels and road segments, including visual mapping, of vegetation management activity funded or performed by the City. This should include who did the work, at what expense, and the extent that overtime was used. We note that budgetary information by administrative department is not sufficient, nor are high-level aggregate metrics such as "total parcels treated".
- Timing of Measure MM money received and when.

- How Measure MM money has been spent, including overtime.
- Historical budget information to allow WPC to confirm that Measure MM funding is additional monies and not replacing ongoing general fund spending.
- Richer description of properties in the WPZ, including the number and size of parcels on the land types identified in section 4 (Other Parcels).
- Additional information needs are indicated in subsequent sections.

The City Finance Department will

- meet with WPC on a quarterly basis to explain and discuss budgeting, accounting, timing, and other aspects of the City's policies and procedures.

## **2. Expedite Hiring the Measure MM Supervisory Position**

The City's ability to effectively deploy Measure MM funding and WPC's ability to execute on its responsibilities have been delayed by the absence of a key hire. As informed by city staff, Measure MM expenditures and the accountability for those expenditures will rest with a full-time staff member who, after 9 months, has yet to be hired. As of April 2026, a 90 day interim Acting Parks Supervisor II for Measure MM was named. While we applaud the temporary appointment, the idea of a rotating staff member over the coming months is far from ideal in terms of consistency and accountability. WPC looks forward to a permanent assignment so that knowledge of the Vegetation Management Plan and Measure MM can be assured.

### **Recommendation**

- WPC urges that the City expedite the hiring process for the permanent position of Parks Supervisor - Measure MM. It is important to fill this position before the acting Parks Supervisor's term concludes on June 30, 2026. This must be treated as a priority since Measure MM needs to enter its second year with clear leadership and accountability firmly in place.

## **3. Enhance Compliance with Fire Safety Rules for Developed Residential Parcels**

Fire does not respect property lines, and overgrown parcels can pose a threat to nearby structures and properties. Therefore property owners must be held responsible for vegetation management. To move towards this goal, Oakland has performed defensible space inspections since the 1991 Tunnel Fire. Current practice is that the first inspections are conducted by firefighters, usually by the firefighters from the closest station, who seek to educate as well as to inspect. When there is a problem with an inspection, there exists a re-inspection process accompanied by a fee.

Currently, inspections are based on what is visible from public rights of way, limiting an inspector's ability to form a complete, accurate assessment. Thus, "compliance with safety rules" is limited to what the inspectors can see from the street.

In situations where a parcel remains out of compliance after a re-inspection, it is not clear that adequate measures are in place to ensure that the necessary management work is undertaken. In addition, there do not seem to be adequate procedures in place for residents to flag properties that have passed inspection but have visible deficiencies. We note that OFD

recognizes that ensuring compliance with vegetation management safety rules is an ongoing process.

There is growing awareness among firefighters that “Zone Zero” (actions to prevent a “blizzard” of burning embers from being able to ignite a structure) is an essential tool to delay the spread of a major fire, thereby allowing firefighters precious time to marshal mutual-aid resources to defeat the fire before it turns into an uncontrollable conflagration. The state of California has not yet promulgated its regulations in this regard, and Oakland is waiting for the state. WPC is pleased to report that OFD and the Emergency Service Management Division are poised to start public education and inspections once regulations are established.

## Recommendations

- The City and Fire Department explore the uses of technical means such drones and other technologies to inspect all portions of parcels. This would be an appropriate use of Measure MM funds.
- The City and Fire Department should establish and publicize a reliable, effective mechanism to trigger re-inspection based on observations of non-compliance by the public.
- The City and Fire Department should explore mechanisms for ensuring that parcel owners maintain their property for fire safety, including intrusive measures like those established in Moraga where the city can hire contractors to do the work and if necessary, place a lien on the property for reimbursement.
- Once the state finalizes the Zone Zero regulations, Oakland should promptly establish Zone Zero regulations that are as strong or stronger than the state regulations.

## 4. Inventory and Examine All Properties in the WPZ

All properties in the WPZ should be managed with accountability for vegetation management. According to the VMP, The WPZ is 11,890 acres. Measure MM funding is reserved to city-owned land, which comprises 419 parcels of 1,924 acres and 308 miles of roadway, leaving  $11,890 - 1,924 = 9,966$  acres of land in the WPZ that is not city-owned.

WPC has become aware of different types of properties, necessitating different attention and accountability mechanisms for vegetation management. While residential properties within WPZ are inspected annually, other property types may receive limited or no inspections, leading to gaps in identifying and mitigating risks, and/or ensuring that legacy management requirements are being met. These other property types include: undeveloped private parcels; city-owned land with leaseholders; private commercial parcels with open land; parcels managed by other public agencies; and parcels managed by PG&E. We provide a set of recommendations for all property types, followed by our reasoning for each.

## Recommendations

Establish an inventory (location and size) of:

- A. Undeveloped private parcels in the WPZ.
  - Identify parcels not receiving adequate management, and explore stronger accountability mechanisms.
- B. City-owned land with leaseholders in the WPZ.
  - Identify any wildfire-related expectations of the lessors, and evaluate compliance.

- C. Private commercial parcels with open land in the WPZ.
  - Identify any permit expectations, and evaluate compliance.
- D. Parcels managed by other public agencies in the WPZ.
  - Determine whether they are receiving appropriate inspections.
  - Identify and evaluate their wildfire prevention practices, and determine whether they might be encouraged or required to improve.
- E. Parcels managed by PG&E in the WPZ.
  - Determine whether they are receiving appropriate inspections.
  - Evaluate PG&E wildfire-management activities in light of the City's priorities, and possible synergies.

### **Undeveloped Private Parcels**

Some private parcels are undeveloped. These include small neighborhood lots, agglomerations of multiple adjacent lots, and large, multi-acre parcels on the order of 100 acres. Some of these parcels have not been adequately managed, which may cause them to be corridors for fire and impose risks to nearby residential parcels. Therefore, undeveloped private parcels merit specific attention and improved accountability. In particular, it has been suggested that some owners prefer to pay any penalties rather than perform appropriate management, which is obviously unacceptable.

### **City-Owned Land with Leaseholders**

Public comments suggest that there exist parcels of City-owned land that have been leased to other entities, where the terms of the lease might require the lessor to undertake wildfire-related management activities, yet it is not clear that compliance is being undertaken or evaluated. It is suggested that these lands might include the Chabot Space and Science Center, the Oakland Zoo, the Montclair Golf Course, and perhaps others. We do not possess verified information in this regard, but these statements from the public have face-validity and merit investigation.

To the extent that leaseholders have not been undertaking mandated wildfire-related management activities, it would be inappropriate to devote limited City funds or Measure MM funds to such city-owned properties. By ending any non-compliance, the resultant actions would in some sense represent new resources to help reduce wildfire risk in the WPZ.

### **Private Commercial Parcels with Open Land**

Public comments suggest that there exist private commercial parcels with open land in the WPZ that have conditional use permits requiring them to undertake wildfire-related management activities but that compliance might be inadequate. These entities may include Sunrise Assisted Living, a tennis club, and perhaps others. WPC emphasizes that we do not possess verified information in this regard, but these observations have face-validity and merit investigation.

By ending any non-compliance, the resultant actions would in some sense represent new resources to help reduce wildfire risk in the WPZ.

### **Parcels Managed by Other Public Agencies**

There are properties in the WPZ that are managed by public agencies other than the City of Oakland, including Caltrans, Oakland Unified School District, Peralta Community College District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, and East Bay Regional Parks District. WPC has no understanding of the management of these lands.

### **Parcels Managed by PG&E**

PG&E has sizable land holdings and is clearly undertaking significant vegetation management activities in the vicinity of their assets. It's not clear how their actions interact with the needs of the City of Oakland, or whether there might be synergistic opportunities.

## **5. Enhance Identification, Hardening, and Operation of Wildfire Evacuation Routes**

During a catastrophic wildland-urban fire, evacuation routes are likely to experience congestion that can cause injury and loss of life to citizens, firefighters, and police officers, as was seen in the Oakland Firestorm of 1991, and more recently in the Camp Fire (Paradise) of 2018, and many others. In recent years, Oakland has made significant strides in evacuation planning and management that are showing benefits. However, there remain many opportunities to improve wildfire evacuation route *Identification*, pre-incident *Hardening*, and during-incident *Operation*.

The issues are complex and multi-layered. City staff have worked hard to learn lessons from prior fires, but the reality is that these questions exceed the capacity of any city or its staff to adequately sort out. Oakland, and every jurisdiction facing wildfire risk, would benefit from the development of “best practices” created by external experts on all aspects of wildfire evacuation.

Questions to be addressed include the following.

- How can wildland-urban fire evacuation routes best be Identified? How can the particular needs of catastrophic wildfire evacuation route identification be untangled from more general evacuation route identification, in environments like California where downslope winds are probably the primary risk factor?
- How can evacuation routes effectively be Hardened ahead of time? How to think about vegetation management where the goal is not to slow the spread of fire (which is the motivation for defensible space and zone-zero) but instead is to keep evacuees alive by preventing severe heating of vehicles on the route? How to immunize against evacuation route blockages from falling trees and tree limbs, which can sometimes be at considerable distance from the roadway? How to think about and establish policies to increase traffic capacity on red flag days by design, implementation, and education related to parking, road-striping, road-widening, and other policies? How to educate the public to make good decisions? All of this in the context of lengthy road distances abutted by many parcels with many owners.
- How can evacuation routes be efficiently Operated during a fire to ensure smooth traffic flows out of the danger zone? And support rapid ingress of firefighting apparatus into the danger zone? This will require understanding of vehicle routing to maximize traffic flow; establishment of procedures for traffic light controls; provision of temporary signage and traffic channelizing devices; and generation of trained traffic control personnel.

There are many questions, and the list above is certainly incomplete. The challenge is substantial. However, the prize is large.

## Recommendation

- Seek to create a multi-agency process and funding to develop Urban-Wildfire Evacuation Route Best Practices. WPC established a subcommittee to engage with this issue and informally hold discussions with experts on City staff and in other agencies.

## 6. Honor Endangered Species Commitments in the WPZ

There are two documents that guide the implementation of the VMP, the VMP itself, and the VMP's Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (available [here](#)). Together, these documents commit the City to be respectful of certain rare plants and animals. Relevant language can be found in Section 10 and Appendix B of the VMP, and in the EIR which provides a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) in Appendix A (pg. 609-695). The MMRP describes 18 specific measures to protect sensitive plants, wildlife and the communities they might inhabit.

Members of the public have voiced credible concern regarding possible lapses in implementation of these measures, for example in relation to a number of sensitive plants including the rare and special Presidio Clarkia flower. Public commentators have offered to work with the City to identify where specific sensitive species currently exist in an effort to help streamline and focus the required pre-implementation surveys, flagging, etc.

The VMP and public commentators highlight the Oakland Wildland Stewards (OWLS), an informal confederation of parks volunteers who work to improve ecosystems and map sensitive species, and who have expertise in deploying less-flammable native plants to displace highly flammable invasive plants such as French broom, black acacia, blue-gum eucalyptus, etc. Section 11.2 of the VMP indicates the City should coordinate vegetation management activities with the OWLS.

It is evident that the person hired to oversee the VMP and Measure MM implementation (see Recommendation 2, above) should be able to support the commitments identified above.

## Recommendations

- Ensure that the new Measure MM Supervisor (see Recommendation 2 above) is accountable for the city's commitments to rare species in the VMP and MMRP, including engagement with OWLS.
- Work with OWLS and other interested parties to identify specific opportunities and external funding to implement multiple benefit fuel reduction projects that result in both mitigating fire risk and improving local ecosystems.

## 7. Ensure Fire Hydrant Accessibility

It came to WPC's attention that for years a number of fire hydrants in the WPZ have been difficult to physically access due to reasons including vegetative overgrowth, accumulation of debris, and landslides, and that there does not seem to be clarity on who is responsible for maintaining access. At the February 19, 2026 WPC Meeting, Commissioner Foley, representing OFD in his role as Assistant Chief of Field Operations, informed WPC that OFD will "explore" taking responsibility for ensuring access to hydrants in the WPZ.



## Recommendation

- A responsible entity with accountability for ensuring access should be identified. The 2026-27 WPC should add fire hydrant accessibility to its agenda, with the expectation of a report from the OFD on its explorations in this regard.

## Appendix 1: WPC Structure & Founding Documents

### Creation of Commission

The Wildfire Prevention Commission (WPC) was formed by City Council upon the second reading of Ordinance 13486 C.M.S. on June 3, 2025. WPC is governed by Oakland Municipal Code Chapter 2.48.

### Commissioners

City Council confirmed the appointments of all seven Commissioners on July 15, 2025 via adoption of Ordinance 90808 C.M.S. Commissioners of WPC and their length of appointment are as follows:

- Helen Bulwik (2025-2026)
- Rhonda Drakeford (2025-28)
- Chris Foley (2025-2027)
- Tom Grossman, Chair (2025-2028)
- Dan Robertson (2025-2028)
- James Robins (2025-2027)
- Elizabeth Stage (2025-2027)

### Meetings

WPC meetings are open to the public and to public comment, in-person and via Zoom.

WPC met seven times during its first year as a commission. Meetings were held on August 27, 2025; November 20, 2025; January 15, 2026; February 19, 2026; March 26, 2026 April 16, 2026; and May 21, 2026.

Meetings were recorded except when there were technical difficulties. Links to the recording can be found on WPC webpage, <https://www.oaklandca.gov/Government/Boards-Commissions/Wildfire-Prevention-Commission>.

### Wildfire Prevention Financing Act of 2024 (Measure MM)

Measure MM was approved by voters at the election held on November 5, 2024. It is expected to generate \$2.67 million in its first year.

From the City Attorney's Summary of Measure MM

“a special tax for twenty (20) years on parcels within the “Wildfire Prevention Zone,” for the purposes of vegetation management, evacuation route protection, and other wildfire prevention measures in the Wildfire Prevention Zone.”

From Measure MM Section 2

“The specific purpose of the special tax imposed under this ordinance is to reduce the risk of wildfire in the City of Oakland and the resulting impact on life and property by funding the implementation of wildfire prevention plans adopted by the City Council in the City's Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ).”

o The Wildfire Prevention Zone

- The boundaries are Highway 580 at San Leandro going east in the hills, Highway 580 at MacArthur Blvd to Piedmont and going up to the hills, Highway 13 to the Berkeley border at Ashby.
- The Special Tax has been levied on 27,000 private properties in the Zone. Annual proceeds are \$2.7 million.

#### Charter of the Wildfire Prevention Commission (Oakland Municipal Code 2.48.020)

It shall be the duty and function of the Wildfire Prevention Commission to:

- A. Advise on the implementation of a comprehensive Vegetation Management Plan (VMP).
- B. Review the annual operational use of the special tax proceeds in reducing wildfire risk
- C. Make advisory recommendations to the City Council regarding the use of funds including policy recommendations to further wildfire prevention efforts
- D. Study best practices from other jurisdictions, participate in regional wildfire prevention forums, and support outreach and public education efforts in the Wildfire Prevention Zone and Citywide
- E. Receive informational reports from City staff on annual expenditures and on measures taken under the Vegetation Management Plan.

#### Executive Summary of the Vegetation Management Plan

“This Vegetation Management Plan (VMP or Plan) describes the actions that the Oakland Fire Department (OFD) will continue to take over the 10-year Plan timeframe to reduce fire hazard on 1,924 acres of City-owned land and along 308 miles of roadway in the City of Oakland’s designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (VHFHSZ). The VMP has been developed to meet its stated goals of reducing wildfire hazard on City-owned land and along critical access/egress routes, reducing the likelihood of ignitions and extreme fire behavior to enhance public and firefighter safety, avoiding or minimizing impacts to natural resources, and contributing to regional efforts to reduce wildfire hazard in the Oakland Hills.

“The Oakland Hills present a complex wildfire environment that presents a significant risk to public and firefighter safety and the built and natural environment. This area is one of the highest risk areas in the country for devastating wildland urban interface (WUI) fires and is the location of one of the state’s most destructive historic wildfires, the 1991 Tunnel Fire. Lessons learned from this and more recent, devastating wildfires in Northern California highlight the importance of managing vegetation to reduce wildfire hazard.

“Development of this Plan included a detailed assessment of wildfire hazard, which was used to identify and map areas with high ignition potential or where extreme wildfire behavior would be expected, given current terrain and fuel conditions. Plan development also included coordination with OFD personnel and significant public and stakeholder outreach to better understand current vegetation management activities in the Plan Area. Vegetation treatment projects were then identified and prioritized based on proximity to Plan Area structures, roads, ridgelines, and park access gates, where fire behavior is anticipated to be extreme (high flame lengths and/or crown fires), and where continuation of the City’s goat grazing program would effectively maintain lower fuel

loads. Identified priority projects total 1,366 acres within the Plan Area's 1,924 total acres. This Plan also prioritizes vegetation management along 31 miles of primary access/egress routes in the Plan Area and removal of hazard trees on City-owned properties where [they] could strike adjacent roads if they fell.

"This Plan also outlines measurable vegetation treatment standards, by dominant vegetation type, and identifies a range of vegetation management tools that can be utilized by OFD, or its contractors, to reach these treatment standards. As vegetation is dynamic in nature, this Plan outlines an adaptive field assessment and work plan development process to be implemented by OFD annually, which accounts for the variability in vegetation condition project site conditions over time."

## **Appendix 2: People Supporting WPC's Mission**

WPC is grateful to the many people who engaged with WPC. These include the following.

### **City Council Members**

City Council Members who spoke with the commission include:

- Ken Houston
- Janani Ramachandran
- Zac Unger

### **City Staff Liaison**

WPC has been ably supported by Daniel L. Hamilton, Chief Resilience Officer, with assistance from Nick Kordes, Energy Program Manager.

### **City Staff Presenters**

City staff who presented to WPC from August 2025 through April 2026 include:

- Damon Covington, Chief, Oakland Fire Department
- Javan Smith, Assistant Fire Marshal, Oakland Fire Department
- Michael Hunt, Chief of Staff, Oakland Fire Department
- Jessica Fiel, Emergency Services Manager, Oakland Fire Department
- Kristin Hathaway, Deputy Director, Oakland Public Works
- Clinton Pugh, Parks and Tree Services Manager, Oakland Public Works
- Kevin Charles, Acting Parks Supervisor II, Oakland Public Works

### **Public Comments**

Many members of the public spoke to the commission. Many of their comments have influenced WPC's recommendations.