



TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY

STAFF REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members of the Town Council

FROM: Jeremy Dennis, Town Manager
Melvin Gaines, Assistant Town Manager

DATE: January 26, 2023

RE: Annual Council/Committee and Commission Workshop

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Town Council and attending Commission and Committee members discuss potential priorities and council/committee communications

DISCUSSION

In this second annual Workshop, the Town Council has invited the Town's Commissions and Committees to provide a venue for a broad discussion on potential projects and initiatives for the next fiscal year. This meeting is also an opportunity to discuss how Council creates its fiscal year priorities, the role of the Council Liaison, and how the Council reviews Committee recommendations. This workshop is intended to be informal and interactive, and will inform the Council's priority setting process, to begin at the February 8, 2023 Council meeting, and the subsequent FY 2023-24 budget.

Below is the agenda for the workshop. Note that each committee will present their materials at the meeting; some committees prefer to make an oral presentation, or will have a power point. The Wildfire Preparedness Committee provided their materials in advance of publication of this report (Attachment 1).

Council/Commission/Committee Workshop

1. Intros
2. Why have a workshop?
3. Description of Council Priority process
4. Sharing of FY 2022-23 potential priorities (high level information sharing and discussion)
 - a. Committees
 - b. Commissions
 - c. Council

5. Next steps

- a. Council Priority Setting – February and March sessions
- b. Council Priority Setting – finalized March/April
- c. Committee 2022 annual reports – April/May
- d. Council Priorities shared with Committees
- e. Draft FY 2023-24 Budget - May

6. Adjourn workshop

ATTACHMENT

- 1. WPC materials

PORTOLA VALLEY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE**PROJECTS AND EXPENDITURES SUGGESTIONS FY 2023-24**

The Wildfire Preparedness Committee appreciates the opportunity to share its thoughts on possible funded projects and expenditures for FY 2023-24.

TARGETED PROGRAMS**Funding for part-time grant writer**

Grant writer to procure Federal and State funds for projects within Portola Valley.

Portola Valley could greatly benefit from either **hiring a part-time grant writer or collaborating with other sister cities to jointly hire a grant writer**. While our town staff has done a marvelous job identifying and applying for grants, they do not have the time to research the many grant opportunities that are currently being offered by State and Federal agencies. We recently had evidence of how important a professional grant writer could be to our town. Last year, CPAW grant writers were able to identify and apply for the California Wildfire Defense Grant, which has the potential of bringing in over \$900,000 in Federal funding to Portola Valley.

Funding for wildfire shelter in place

Provide residents in VHFZ a shelter in place location if evacuation routes are cut off.

Portola Valley might benefit from establishing **“wildfire shelter in place” locations in targeted, high fire risk areas**. We suggest that the Town Council **request that the WFPD assess whether this strategy would be appropriate for Portola Valley**. The WPC is aware of the critically important message that homeowners must evacuate immediately when receiving a wildfire evacuation alert. We recognize that early evacuation is the key to saving lives. However, we are also aware that in some areas of Portola Valley, under the worst of circumstances, evacuation may not be possible.

SEED MONEY FOR PILOT FIRE MITIGATION PROGRAM

Background: It is widely recognized that many residents in Portola Valley have not taken basic steps to create defensible space around their homes or taken measure to harden their homes from wildfire. This puts all residents at an increased risk. However, several new actions will focus homeowners on wildfire mitigation in 2023. In mid-April, per State requirements, insurance companies will begin to revise their fire insurance rates and renewals based on what measures residents have taken to create defensible space and their how much they have hardened their home against wildfire. In addition, the WFPD has recently updated fire codes which will increase enforcement measures and could result in fines and abatement of property that are out of compliance. While these measures will make Portola Valley safer from wildfire, they offer a financial and logistical challenge to our residents.

There are a myriad of different types of fire mitigation programs offered by towns throughout the United States. Is there a fire mitigation program, which targets private property, that would make Portola Valley safer? In addition,

would these programs be an effective use of tax dollars or have the potential of garnering Federal or State grants?

In October 2022, the Town Council requested the WPC Finance and Insurance Sub Committee to research this question. After six months of research, the WPC Finance and Insurance Sub Committee, consisting of Jennifer Hammer and Wanda Ginner, presented a 10 Year Fire mitigation proposal entitled *Fighting the Ember Storm Together*. The 10 year goals of the program were:

- Defensible space created on all private property in 10-YR
- Ember resistant vents and roofs are installed on all homes in 10-YR
- Residents are informed of how to defend against an ember storm in 10-YR
- Every parcel in town part of a Firewise community in 10-YR

The plan combined focused communication, wildfire preparedness tools and a funded program entitled *Empowering Our Firewise Communities*. The program discussion was put on hold **until the results of the California Wildfire Defense Grant is known and it can be determined if the proposed grant program will be implemented.** If the grant is approved, the town would receive:

- \$900,000 Federal funds to Portola Valley over 3 years
- The funds Create a fire mitigation grant program
 - Residents receive matching funds for defensible space work
 - 50% match with \$3,000 maximum
- Portola Valley required to provide \$225,000 toward program over 3 years

Whether or not the town receives the three-year funding from the California Wildfire Defense Grant, the **long range concern remains of which program to fund.** The matching fund created by the CWDG grant would be difficult to continue once State funding has stopped. This type of program has an extremely high annual price tag. Woodside funds a similar wildfire mitigation grant program and the cost has increased each year with the 2023 budget estimated to be well over \$400,000.² There is also some concern if the money spent on this type of program is the best use of tax dollars. There are many other types of fire mitigation programs for Portola Valley to choose from.

In Fall, the WPC Finance and Insurance Sub Committee will present a report to the Town Council encompassing their six month research effort which will include options for wildfire mitigation programs, funding potential, and implementation feasibility. At this time, the **Council may choose to implement a pilot program in Fall 2023.** The following cost-effective fire mitigation programs will be some of the many options detailed in the WPC Finance and Insurance Sub Committee report:

Grant for low-income households for fire mitigation

Wildfire mitigation can be costly and an undue burden to those struggling to make ends meet. A fund can be created, that can be used at the discretion of the town manager, to assist low-income households with certain wildfire mitigation work, such as creating defensible space, tree removal or installing ember resistant vents.

²"Town of Woodside 2021-2023 Budget Worksheet." *Town of Woodside*, https://www.woodsidetown.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/finance/page/32798/adopted_budget_2021-23.pdf.

Funding to encourage and support PV Firewise Communities

Firewise USA is a program created by the National Fire Protection Association to provide a collaborative framework to help neighbors get organized and take action to increase the ignition resistance of their homes and community. A Firewise community can be as few as 8 homes or as many as 2,500 homes. Each community has a Firewise Committee which organizes events and neighborhood fire mitigation activities, performs yearly inspections and reapplies for Firewise status on a yearly basis. **Firewise Committees can provide a vital communication conduit to the residents within their community** and can be used to disseminate information about wildfire prevention, wildfire evacuation safety, defensible space guidelines and home hardening information. These Firewise Committees can also be used to initiate multi-home projects within their community to create defensible space or to install home hardening measures, such as ember resistant vents.

Currently, Portola Valley has only one Firewise community. Portola Valley Ranch has a Firewise community which is managed by its HOA. Over two hundred homes in the Westridge neighborhood are currently forming a Firewise community. Firewise communities ensure residents pay less for insurance, make their neighbors safer from wildfire, and provide valuable communication conduits within their communities. We propose **two different funded programs** that would encourage and **support Firewise communities** within Portola Valley.

1. Grant program to empower Firewise communities

Provide a one-time, \$1,500 grant to residents in Firewise Communities.

This grant can be designed to be a low-overhead, cost effective program, incentivizing residents to join a Firewise community and participate in Firewise Communities. The grant would be submitted through the Fire Committee, which would bundle the grant on a bi-annual basis. The Wildfire Preparedness Committee could also review these grant bundles to offer another layer of oversight. By using the WPC and the Firewise Committee to assist with grant oversight, we can reduce the over-head cost of implementing the grant.

Cost: One-time grant of \$1,500 per parcel over a 10-year timeframe.

2. Stipend for Firewise committees

Offer Firewise Committees an annual reimbursement of up to \$10 per home.

Each Firewise community has a Firewise Committee which communicates vital wildfire preparedness information, organizes yearly wildfire preparedness inspections of the neighborhood, submits annual renewal application to Firewise, and organizes neighborhood events which focus on wildfire preparedness. These yearly events can be as simple as a coffee at a neighbor's house or a neighbor pot-luck dinner. There is always an educational component to these events and they are required by Firewise for renewal. Reimbursable cost might include:

- Costs for sending written information to residents.
- Event costs: light food and beverage.
- Give-away costs: Events and surveys are more successful if there is a small give away like a smoke detector. This small prize motivates people to attend meetings or fill out a home evaluation form.

Cost: A Firewise community with 200 homes could submit receipts totally \$2,000.[\$10 x 200] Given that PV has 1745 homes, the maximum cost, once the town has 100% Firewise participation, would be \$17,450 a year.