August 13, 2019

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

SUBJECT: Update regarding launch of Marin Wildfire Prevention Initiative

RECOMMENDATION: Receive Report and provide policy direction

BACKGROUND: The deadliest and most destructive wildfires in our state’s history have occurred in recent years, and Marin’s wildlands and lush vegetation leave us particularly vulnerable. We know that fire does not respect jurisdictional boundaries and that we need immediate action and sustained commitment to better protect our community. Given the changing climate and increased risk of wildfires, we have been partnering with FireSafe Marin, fire agencies and cities and towns in Marin to develop a countywide Wildfire Prevention program and authority to coordinate and oversee the ongoing programs to make our community safer and better prepared.

With 19 local fire agencies and no single agency responsible for coordinating wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts, we have been working on a new approach with partners around the county. The purpose of today’s report is to update your Board on these countywide efforts and to launch our effort to provide informational briefings to all public agencies with fire responsibilities.

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority— New Marin Joint Powers Authority

Consistent with our “Community Wildfire Protection Plan,” the “Lessons Learned from North Bay Fire Siege” report, and this year’s “Marin Civil Grand Jury Report on Wildfire Preparedness,” we recognize the importance of a countywide, multi-agency approach to better protect our residents.

A countywide coalition that includes the cooperation of all Marin fire and city/town agencies has proposed a new joint powers agreement (JPA) and funding measure that would raise approximately $20 million per year dedicated to local wildfire prevention. The JPA agreement would consist of these local fire agencies, our cities and towns, and the County. The mission of the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority would be to fund and oversee the following programs:

- Wildfire detection and evacuation
- Vegetation management and fuel reduction
- Defensible space evaluations
- Public education and neighborhood preparedness
- Local-specific wildfire prevention efforts

An 11-member Board of Directors would provide governance, with two elected from each of five proposed zones. These five areas would include the Ross Valley, San Rafael, West Marin, Novato, and Southern Marin – as well as 1 area representing small districts. An Operations/Budget Committee of 11 would be comprised of agency staff
from the member agencies from the five proposed zones. Finally, an Advisory Committee of technical staff would help provide advice and help inform the annual workplan and budget.

March 2020 Revenue Measure
A proposed new revenue measure to be considered by countywide voters in March of 2020 would ensure thousands of wildfire defensible space evaluations per year to educate property owners across Marin to keep all Marin residents safe. Overall, an estimated $20 million annual funding plan would include:

- 60% to core functions such as vegetation management, wildfire detection, evacuation improvements, grants, and public education
- 20% for annual defensible space evaluations
- 20% for local-specific wildfire prevention efforts

Importantly, all funds would stay local and would be protected from any taking by the State. Funds must be used for wildfire prevention and cannot be diverted. Independent oversight and annual audits would be required. Finally, the new revenue source would help Marin qualify for state and federal grants that otherwise will go to other communities around the state.

Next Steps
A revenue measure approved by Marin voters will provide improvements to alert and warning systems, evacuation planning, and protect critical infrastructure - including emergency communications, schools, police and fire facilities - to remain functioning in a disaster. With longer and hotter fire seasons, Marin needs to be proactive to reduce vulnerably to wildfires.

Over the next six weeks, staff will provide informational presentations to fire district boards and city councils. We will return to your board in mid-September to report on any modifications to the plan and begin our effort to request that each fire district board, and city/town council responsible for fire suppression adopt a resolution to join the new JPA and request the county to put a Marin Wildfire Prevention Initiative on the March 2020 ballot.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Hymel
County Administrator

Jason Weber
Fire Chief