

To: Public Leaders, current and future
From: Safer Orinda
Date: November 2, 2022
Subject: Orinda Wildfire Prevention Plan

As most of you know, I have been engaged in the discussion of wildfire prevention since the inception of Measure R. Like others, I should have been engaged for the past 31 years, since the Oakland Hills Firestorm, but like many, if not all, I assumed someone else was taking care of it. And since 2008, when I started focusing on the operations and finances of our fire department (MOFD), I was aware that nothing was being done there about wildfire prevention (there were no programs being funded), but I guess, like everyone else (except for people like John Radke), I assumed nothing was being done because there was nothing that could be done other than be prepared to fight a wildfire if one occurred and be ready to flee. Suppression was the only answer and evacuation was every man for himself (have your go-bags packed).

This assumption, that nothing could be done, should have been knocked loose nine years ago when MOFD and ConFire were discussing combining MOFD Station 43 with ConFire Station 16 which was projected to save each district \$1 million a year in operating costs. At an MOFD meeting discussing the joint venture, Chief Randy Bradley, who had credentials in wildland/urban fire risk, stated that the most effective use of the savings would be fire prevention, not additional fire suppression. He did not go into what could be done. But the proposal for consolidation was scrapped by the County Supervisors, the \$1 million was not made available, MOFD fell into financial distress, Bradley resigned, and any “discussion” of wildfire prevention ended before it started.

It was not until Chief Winnacker arrived at the beginning of 2018, three months after the first of the many disastrous northern California fires (the Tubbs Fire in Santa Rosa), that MOFD started getting serious about wildfire prevention. However, at the end of 2018 a new majority took control of the MOFD board; endorsed, supported and controlled by the employees’ union; and their priority was employee compensation, not additional services to the community such as wildfire prevention. MOFD started the chipper program in 2019 but shuts it down in the summer, saying that it cannot afford both the chipper and weed inspection (now expanded into code enforcement inspection). The chipper program is now augmented by the chipper that Orinda funds with Measure R money, but MOFD still shuts down its chipper program in the summer, leaving only Orinda’s.

Winnacker also started developing MOFD’s CWPP (Community Wildfire Prevention Plan). At first the CWPP was just a “plan to develop a plan”. When Chief Winnacker made his video presentation to Orinda (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy33DcIyA7Y>), January 23, 2021, two months after we voted for Measure R, the only modeling done to date was by John Radke for the North Orinda fire break.

But more modeling was done by MOFD with a \$1.4 million in grant funding from the Moore Foundation for the work. (<https://www.philanthropy.com/article/living-with-fire-donors-want-to-focus-on-reducing-risk-not-on-disaster>) This grant has not been reflected in any MOFD budget nor audited financials but it shows how expensive this sort of modeling is. By the time the final CWPP (<https://www.mofd.org/home/showpublisheddocument/1679/637729154729030000>) was adopted (April 21, 2021), a 5-acre grid map of fire risk had been created (page 73 of the CWPP). (The map in the CWPP is low definition. A much higher definition map can be found at https://www.saferorinda.info/files/ugd/d79791_6a8262a717414b57a9624bebf43a0ce.pdf). This is the current state of MOFD modeling and unless a new board starts spending money on fire prevention

or unless Winnacker can find more grant money, that model will not be updated as vegetation decreases or increases.

The CWPP has two elements:

- 1) Creating a fire code that will reduce the risk of wildfire through the use of vegetation mitigation.
- 2) Enforcing that code, requiring property owners to do all of the mitigation work, not only on their own properties but on any public right of way (public land) adjacent to their properties.

The only funding MOFD provides is for inspection, chipper service for part of the year, and recently a one-time \$500,000 home hardening grant.

Other wildfire prevention efforts Winnacker has accomplished include the North Orinda Shaded Fuel Break and the Tunnel Fuel Break west of Orinda and into Moraga. Again, MOFD has put none of its own money into these projects; they were funded by state grants. The North Orinda grant actually produced a \$450,000 profit for the district which the board transferred to the general funds to help pay for the compensation increases granted the employees. The Tunnel project is also budgeted with a \$360,000 profit.

Will MOFD's CWPP will work if:

- A) It requires property owners to do all of the work?
- B) The only "incentive" (other than self-preservation) is the threat of "legal" action by the government?
- C) The only way the government knows if the code has been enforced is to send out inspectors to see if it has? But all the inspectors can see is what they can see from the street and most of the vegetation in Orinda is in back yards, beyond the vision of the inspectors.

I say this plan will not work to the degree necessary to prevent a catastrophic, wind-fueled wildfire, at least not in the near future. It may work after twenty years but we may not have twenty years.

This is not saying that the CWPP is worthless. It will do a lot of good. A lot of people are joining Firewise groups and entire neighborhoods are becoming code compliant. But not enough. You hear the frustration from both Chief Winnacker and Melanie Light from Firewise with regards lack of compliance.

But Orinda has the chance to forge a parallel path to the one charted by MOFD which would be symbiotic to MOFD's plan. And it has a huge element that (apparently) MOFD does not have, money to fund fuel mitigation. The residents said they wanted a wildfire prevention program; the city "sold" them one; and the voters approved it. Last year it generated \$3.7 million for fire prevention. Money that, so far, has been used mostly for road maintenance.

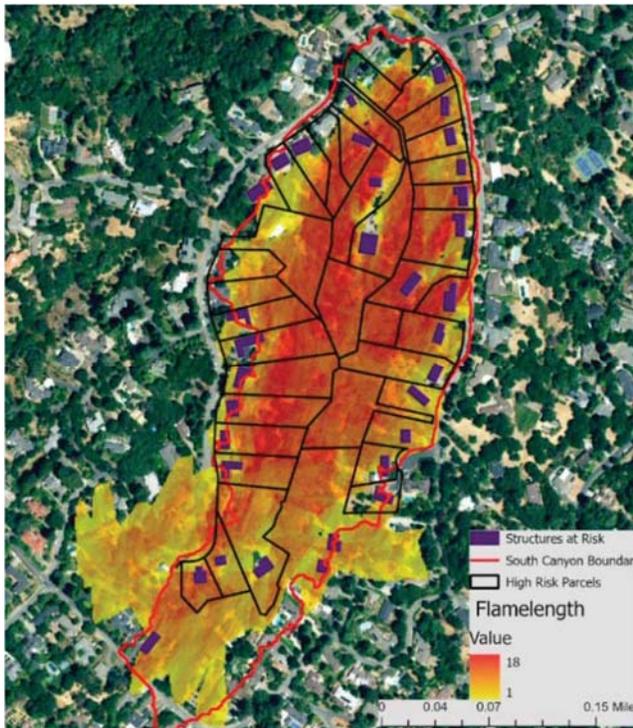
What is needed, which MOFD's CWPP does not provide (in addition to funding for fuel mitigation), is:

- 1) Higher definition maps of where the most dangerous fuel sources are, and
- 2) Ongoing monitoring of where fuel is being successfully mitigated or is growing back.

The CCRM plan provides both of these elements.

Compare the map in the CCRM proposal of fifty homes on Scenic Dr and Estates Dr. to the same area in the CWPP. And the CCRM 3D visualization of the neighborhood. Which images might make

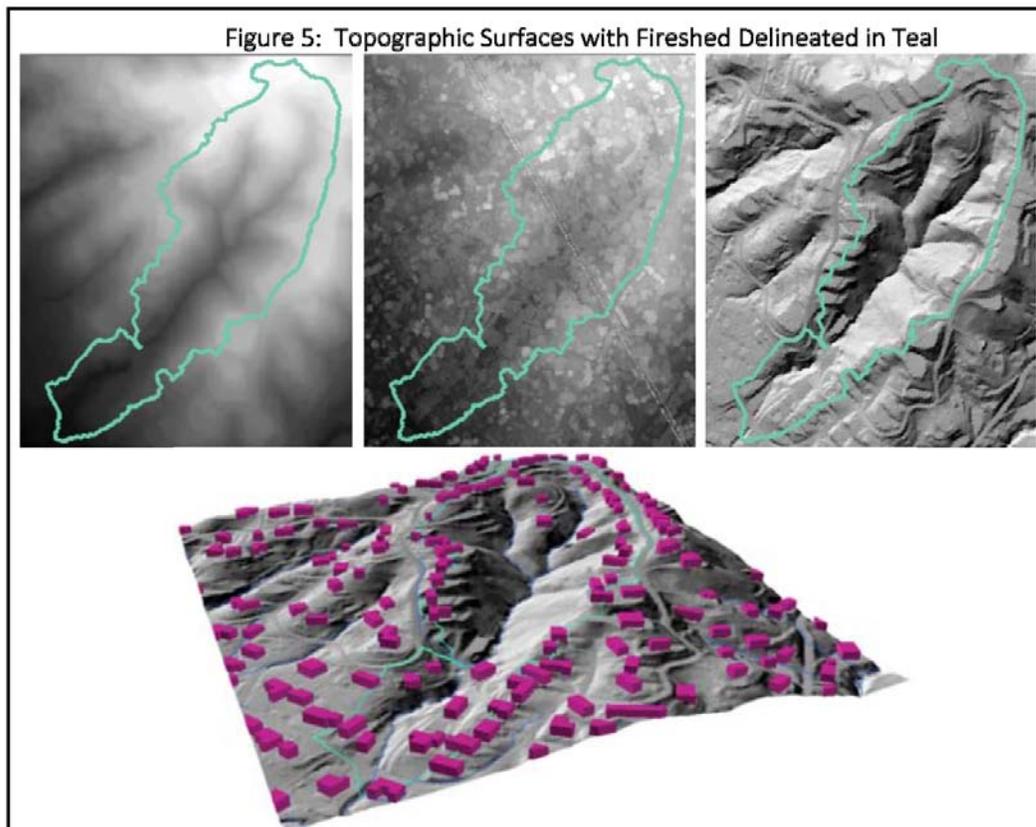
property owners more likely to act to clean up their properties? CCRM shows this as a very high-risk neighborhood. From the CWPP “perspective”, it is not.



CCRM Map



CWPP Map



These *firesheds* define a new neighborhood where properties in the *fireshed* have a common goal to reduce the *fire intensity*, *rate of spread* and *flame lengths* to reduce the risk of an uncontrollable firestorm.

The CCRM map identifies this neighborhood with fifty homes as very high risk that the CWPP shows as something they will get to later. How many other “islands of risk” are there in Orinda that would respond to the focused, higher definition mapping, provided by the CCRM plan?

The City appears to believe that the CCRM proposal is only worth \$150,000 spread over two years (\$10 per year per household) and not the full \$600,000. Yet the residents are paying \$40 A MONTH each for what they thought was a wildfire prevention tax. Those 50 homes shown above, home to over 100 souls, with a market value in excess of \$100 million, probably believe it is worth an additional \$2.50 a month for two years to better identify the risk so that the remaining \$37.50 of Measure R (monthly per household) revenue could be used to help pay for focused mitigation. Without the kind of guidance the CCRM plan would provide, we would be shooting in the dark for any vegetation mitigation funding. (Note: There are 240 “red” (very high risk) 5-acre squares in the Orinda portion of the CWPP map; 1,200 acres total. The high-risk Estates/Scenic fireshed identified by CCRM was not identified as high risk by the CWPP analysis. Not only does the CWPP map “focus” on too much area, it does not focus on areas that are truly high risk. There is no way the CWPP map can be used to identify areas that Orinda’s Measure R funds need to focus on for vegetation mitigation.)

And over time, we would need the type of monitoring the CCRM plan would provide to maintain a safe environment. We can either pay for it now at bargain basement rates (MOFD’s CWPP map cost \$1.4 million to produce), or pay through the nose later, or just not have the ability to monitor our vegetation fire risk in the future and revert back to existing conditions.

It would be great to get the \$450,000 grant, allowing an additional \$450,000 of fuel mitigation. But Orinda needs to commit to the CCRM plan today. It is not pure research. It is not the same as MOFD’s CWPP (which is good but not good enough). Orindans are giving you \$3.7 million a year to spend on fire prevention. Without something like the CCRM plan you have no way to focus the spending (so you will spend the Measure R money on infrastructure, as you have). You need to re-evaluate your decision of October 11.

Orinda’s residents / voters / taxpayers deserve better. 25 years ago, the Orinda City Council urged them to form an independent agency, outside of the control of the City, to provide fire protection and emergency medical services, claiming that this would insure that Orinda’s tax dollar would be used exclusively for services to Orinda. Today, four million Orinda tax dollars are being used annually to subsidize services in Moraga; not maximizing service to Orinda. And nothing is being done about this either by our MOFD elected representatives nor our Orinda City Council elected representatives. Because of this, we are not using those four million dollars on the wildfire prevention program that Orindans told the City was their top priority.

So, the City Council told the residents / voters / taxpayers that if they taxed themselves another three million dollars a year, the City would provide a wildfire prevention program. Two years later, one million of those new tax dollars has been spent on or allocated to wildfire prevention while \$2.4 million has been allocated to road maintenance (which would have been \$3.6 million if staff had had its way). And now a group of wildfire prevention experts, which the City has had two years to employ but has not, proposes a plan to organize a wildfire prevention program and the City Council balks because it is \$450,000 too expensive. The residents / voters / taxpayers are providing that money. \$10,000 a day for wildfire prevention. But the City is spending it on road maintenance. We have given you that \$450,000 ten times over (to date). Spend it on what you said you were going to.

When is the “bait and switch” going to end? When are you going to provide the services you promised that our tax dollars would be spent on?