

Fire Prevention and Firewise Funding

On June 27, the Board *unanimously* adopted a budget that provides for:

- + **No defunding or reducing** of county support for Firewise from last year's adopted budget level (\$5.4 million); so,
- + **Continuing** the county's current support level; and
- + **Building in a 10% increase**, which is commensurate with the increase in our overall county budget from last year to this year.

What is a CWPP, and how did we get one?

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is a “road map” for fire prevention in a community. In 2019, Firewise and a team of consultants and fire professionals, working with community stakeholders, set out to build a countywide CWPP. (You can visit it [here](#).) Grants from CalFIRE and California Climate Investments funded the work. Using on-the-ground data like vegetation type, fire history, and fuel loads, the CWPP team-built models of fire hazard and risk. Based on those data and models, the team developed a prioritized list of projects to reduce wildfire risk. Those projects are diverse: they include fuel breaks, roadside clearing, and also homeowner education and support for defensible space work.

And an important note: besides serving as a road map to guide our prevention work, the CWPP is also necessary for funding purposes. Often, grants are only available to communities who have an approved CWPP.

Are we on track to accomplish the fire prevention work set out in the CWPP?

In 2021, the Board of Supervisors adopted the CWPP as a 5-year plan to work on fuel mitigation and risk reduction projects around the county. Firewise is working with local Fire Safe Councils (now 21 in the county!) to expand the CWPP to include more projects and a longer timeframe. We also know that we will need to return to the original projects and maintain them. Due to Firewise’s efforts, most of the work in the original CWPP has been completed ahead of schedule, so that now we can move forward on the expanded plan, and also start to tackle the critical work of ongoing maintenance.

What is Firewise's current funding from the county?

Over the last three years, Napa County has provided Firewise with \$14.9 million to support fuel mitigation work all over the county. That is an average of just under \$5 million a year. Last year's support was \$5.4 million. This year, the county has additionally provided \$700,000 in a contract with Firewise for a specific project - to clear winter storm debris (downed branches and trees) from roadsides in Angwin neighborhoods.

Firewise also has some previously-granted county funds on hand for CWPP projects that are "on deck" and simply awaiting final permitting and contract completion. These projects will get underway in the months ahead. The expanded funding from the county will allow Firewise operations to move forward at speed.

Besides its support for Firewise, what else is the County doing to increase wildfire preparedness?

Besides the funding for Firewise, the County is scaling up its wildfire preparedness efforts in two key ways. First, it is creating a Fire Administrator position, which will allow the County to better coordinate all the fire prevention efforts that are happening in the county. This position will also increase our ability to apply for grants (and, just as important, meet reporting requirements for those grants).

Second, the County is expanding the capacity of the Fire Marshal's team to provide better customer service and assist applicants in meeting new fire standards. This will be a direct benefit to our communities in becoming more fire-safe.

Third, the County recently updated the Safety Element in the General Plan, including designated evacuation routes, and is spending \$3.5 million to improve the roads along those designated routes.

Fourth, the County has just completed an extensive review of existing fire response services, and is now starting the process of implementing the recommendations. That includes partnering with our cities to improve service.

What can Firewise and the County do to find other funding sources?

Firewise has been active in seeking grants from other sources besides the county, and it has been quite successful in some of those applications. (I have provided several letters of support for these grant applications; it is an important way that local elected officials can help explain Napa County's compelling need for the work.)

The County and Firewise have worked together to apply for two large FEMA grant programs - one is the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program, and the other is a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). These grants have the potential to increase the scale of our fire prevention efforts, but they also require county dollars as a match, and they will also come with significant reporting and documentation requirements. (That's one reason why the county Fire Administrator role is valuable - that person can help both the County and Firewise to meet these requirements.)

Last year's Measure L, a proposed sales tax to provide \$10 million annually for fire prevention, did not pass - a setback in a time when we want to expand both our fire prevention and our fire response efforts. That means we will face challenges in properly funding both fire prevention and response work. As the County continues to find ways to improve fire services, we need to build on existing partnerships and work together in the search for a durable source of funding. I will be active on this front, and I welcome your input and support as we develop solutions.