



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: Fire
Department No.: 031
For Agenda Of: February 7, 2023
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Time: 45 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Mark Hartwig, Fire Chief / Fire Warden, 805-681-5500
Director(s)
Contact Info: Rob Hazard, Fire Marshal, 805-681-5554
SUBJECT: Adoption of the Gaviota Coast Community Wildfire Protection Plan

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: Risk Management

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Consider and adopt, by directing the Chair to sign, the Gaviota Coast Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Attachment A); and
- b) Determine that the above action is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), because pursuant to section 15378(b)(5) the recommended action consists of organizational, administrative, or fiscal activities of government that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

Today the Board will be asked to adopt the Gaviota Coast Community Wildfire Protection Plan (GC CWPP) that will identify and prioritize high fire hazard risks and recommend best practices to eliminate or mitigate the risks and structural ignitability. We will also be asking the Board to determine that adopting the GC CWPP is not the approval of a project subject to environmental review under CEQA since it does not:

- Commit any signing party or anyone to carrying out, funding, or issuing a permit for any specific project;
- Require implementation of any of the recommendations in the GC CWPP; or

- Remove any permit requirement, environmental review requirement, or other legal requirement applicable to hazardous fuel reduction activities on either private lands or public lands.

In 2016, the Board adopted the Gaviota Coast Community Plan, which at Action LU-10 states that “The County shall encourage and support the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans for at risk communities of the Gaviota Coast Plan Areas in compliance with the Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development Process for Santa Barbara County, adopted on August 2, 2011.”

CWPPs are nationally recognized tools for local residents to identify and prioritize fire hazard reduction strategies and prepare local residents for wildland fires. For hazardous fuel reduction projects on non-Federal land, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 provides a Federal funding priority for communities that have adopted a CWPP or have taken other proactive measures to encourage willing property owners to reduce fire risk on private property. The Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council applied for a California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant in 2019 to fund the development of a Gaviota Coast CWPP. Grant funding was awarded to the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council in March 2020, and a consultant was selected (Dudek) to assist with plan development. In November 2022, the Development Team consisting of local plan area residents, Santa Barbara County Fire staff, Fire Safe Council staff, and the Dudek project team completed their final draft of the GC CWPP.

The GC CWPP will help to increase awareness of the possible ecological consequences of wildland fuel management practices so that individual fuel reduction projects avoid or minimize harm to the environment where feasible.

The GC CWPP makes clear that any necessary environmental review required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) shall be completed prior to the commencement of any recommended hazardous fuel reduction, treatment of structural ignitability, or anything required by the GC CWPP, as applicable.

Background:

Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs)

The CWPP aims to identify fire hazard reduction strategies that are in balance with sustainable ecological management and fiscal resources and to enhance fire preparedness for local residents. Fire hazard reduction strategies include identifying and prioritizing areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments, recommending current best practices as to the types and methods of fuel treatments, and recommending measures to reduce structure ignitability.

In 2004, the California Fire Safe Council published a guidance document titled, *Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan*, and in 2008 published a Community Guide that identifies how to implement the statutory minimum requirements for a CWPP:

- **Collaboration** – Local, state, and federal agencies and other interested parties must collaboratively develop a CWPP;
- **Prioritized Fuel Reduction** – A CWPP must identify and prioritize areas for hazardous fuel reduction treatments and recommend types and methods of treatments that will protect communities and infrastructure; and
- **Treatment of Structural Ignitability** – A CWPP must recommend measures that property owners can take to reduce the ignitability of structures.

On August 2, 2011, the Board adopted a policy document titled, *Recommended Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development Process for Santa Barbara County* (Attachment C), which identifies eight steps and identifies specific localized stakeholders and considerations. The eight steps are:

- Convene the CWPP Development Team
- Development Team reaches out to Federal and State agencies
- Development Team engages interested parties
- Establish a base map and boundary area for the CWPP
- Develop a community risk assessment
- Recommend hazard reduction priorities and measures to reduce structure ignitability
- Develop draft plan
- Finalize and submit CWPP draft

The Board’s policy identifies two groups of individuals to facilitate CWPPs. The CWPP Working Group is made up of County staff from the CEO, Fire, Planning and Development, and other interested departments. The second group, the Development Team, is charged with drafting the CWPP. The staff report for the 2011 Board policy states:

“The local community priorities are established through the process of developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan. CWPPs are developed through a collaborative process that identifies and assesses fire risks and identifies and recommends best practices for eliminating or mitigating fire risks and structural ignitability. . . CWPPs may help to increase awareness of the possible ecological consequences of wildland fuel management practices so that individual fuel reduction projects avoid or minimize harm to the environment where feasible.

Implementation of any recommended “best practice” or recommended hazardous fuel reduction within a particular CWPP might be modified, or not implemented at all, depending on a number of factors, including: environmental review, permit actions, and the availability of funding. Within any particular CWPP, County could make clear that any necessary environmental review required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and/or National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) shall be completed prior to commencement of any recommended hazardous fuel reduction.”

Gaviota Coast CWPP: Development Process and Content Elements

Community area residents formed an initial steering committee in November 2017 to explore options for developing a CWPP for the Gaviota Coast. The Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council applied for a California Climate Investments Fire Prevention Grant in 2019 to fund the development of a CWPP for the Gaviota Coast. Grant funding was awarded to the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council in March of 2020, and a consultant was selected (Dudek) to assist with plan development. A project kick-off meeting, including the CWPP Steering Committee, the County Working Group, and the consultant, was held on November 6, 2020. The Gaviota Coast CWPP Development Team, comprised of local community members, agency representatives, Fire Safe Council staff, and the consultant project team, was formed in February 2021.

On September 28, 2021, the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council hosted a community workshop to kick off the planning process. Slightly over 50 individuals attended. At the meeting, individuals were provided with an overview of CWPPs and were asked to consider joining the CWPP Development Team.

Between February 2021 and June 2022, the Development Team and the consultant worked on collecting fire risk data and other information. In August 2022 the first of several early drafts of the CWPP was produced. The Development Team conducted numerous focused community meetings to engage residents in the plan development. The Development Team also met with both agency and non-governmental organizations stakeholders for feedback and to ensure a balanced approach to the plan strategies.

The latest publicly released draft version of the CWPP is from September 2022. At this time, the County Working Group has determined that the Development Team has completed all of the steps in the County's Development Process policy. A review by the Planning and Development Department representative on the Working Group determined that since the draft CWPP is structured as an informative document rather than a commitment to the draft CWPP's recommendations, that approval of the CWPP would not be a project subject to CEQA review.

A Public Meeting was held on September 20, 2022, to present the final draft and elicit feedback and comment. The Final Draft CG CWPP as presented today to the Board, has considered all comments and feedback to date and contains several recent edits and additions based on that input.

CEQA Compliance:

The development of this CWPP is exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5). The CWPP is an educational and visioning document that describes broad fire hazard mitigation strategies that could potentially improve fire protection within the plan area. Adopting this CWPP is an organizational and administrative activity that will not involve any commitment to any specific project, which may result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no fiscal and facilities impacts.

Staffing Impacts:

There are no staffing impacts.

Special Instructions:

Upon Board approval and execution, the Clerk is asked to please return a copy of the minute order and a duplicate original executed signature page (page 127) from the Gaviota Coast CWPP document (Attachment A) to the Fire Department, attention: Robert Hazard.

Attachments:

- A. Gaviota Coast Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- B. CEQA Notice of Exemption
- C. Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development Process for Santa Barbara County adopted by the Board of Supervisors on August 2, 2011
- D. PowerPoint Presentation

Authored by:

Rob Hazard, Fire Marshal

cc:

Mark A. Hartwig, Fire Chief/Fire Warden

Lisa Plowman, Director, Planning and Development

John Owens, Fire Chief, San Luis Obispo Unit-Cal Fire

Chris Stubbs, Forest Supervisor, Los Padres National Forest