



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: November 5, 2013

Prepared By/Phone Number: Danny Hobby/854-4416

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Danny Hobby

Commissioners Court Sponsor: County Judge Samuel T. Biscoe

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

RECEIVE PRESENTATION REGARDING TRAVIS COUNTY WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVES.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

On March 3, 2012, a presentation was given during a scheduled Work Session with the Commissioners Court regarding certain initiatives pertaining to preparedness for wildfires in Travis County. It is now time to update the Court regarding these initiatives and other steps taken in this important endeavor to prepare for wildfires in our county.

Attached is a written summary and status of the initiatives since the last presentation to Court in 2012. A power point slide presentation will be provided by various departmental staff when the agenda item is called up.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staffs from Emergency Services, Transportation and Natural Resources, Health and Human Services, and other guests will be presenting during this agenda item. There is no action needed by the Court for this agenda item.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

This provides a good opportunity for both the Court and the general public to understand the work underway by local agencies to prepare and protect our residents, our communities, and our properties from the devastation that can result from wildfires in our county.

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

There is no fiscal impact for this agenda item.

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

N/A

Travis County Wildfire Initiatives

November 2013

Since the 2011 wildfires, we have made significant progress in wildfire readiness in Travis County. The last time we updated the Court about this topic was March 8, 2012, and this document is intended to provide project highlights in regard to our efforts in this area.

Joint Wildfire Task Force (JWTF)

Following the 2011 wildfires, Austin and Travis County created a Joint Wildfire Task Force that includes multiple agencies working together to help communities reduce the risk of wildfire, prepare for it if it occurs, respond to wildfire in a joint effort and recover from wildfire. Through enhanced communication among its members and with the public, the Task Force strives to empower residents as partners in keeping our cities and county safe from wildfire.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

The regional Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Austin and Travis County has been drafted by consultants and reviewed by members of the Joint Wildfire Task Force (JWTF). The plan is in final stages, scheduled for completion by the end of 2013.

Features of the CWPP include:

- Risk assessment and wildfire modeling by Dr. Joseph White & team, Baylor University Spatial Ecology Laboratory
- Best management practices for mitigating wildfire in Central Texas
- Template and toolkit for community-level CWPP development

Travis County and the City of Austin agreed to split the \$200,000 costs 50/50, using funds from Travis County Emergency Services, Travis County TNR, the Austin Fire Department and the City of Austin Wildlands Conservation Division.

Fuels Reduction and Mitigation Projects

Joint Wildfire Task Force (JWTF) members, including ESD4, ESD6, COA Water Utility, Lakeway, Travis County Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), Steiner Ranch, the AFD Wildlands Division and others have conducted projects to reduce fuel loads and mitigate wildfire. These projects include manual fuels removal and prescribed burns.

FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant for Wildfire

Travis County submitted a grant application to the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) in March 2012, requesting FEMA funds to implement fuel reduction projects on the boundaries of county-owned BCP lands. FEMA authorized the project to move forward in late August with \$200,775 in funding. The county matched with \$66,925 for a total project cost of \$267,700. An Environmental Analysis is currently being prepared, and FEMA approval must be obtained before the project can be implemented.

Home Ignition Zone Training

Members of the JWTF partnered with the Texas A&M Forest Service to provide a Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) Training for Landscapers as part of the Grow Green Training Series-2/16/2013 at the Wildflower Center.

“On Call” Wildfire Video Series

Travis County Media Services, along with assistance from the Emergency Services Public Information Officer (PIO), produced a video series about the 2011 wildfires in Central Texas and four essential steps to combating wildfires. The series features interviews with first-responders, discussions of the 2011 wildfires, and the importance of controlling future fires. It highlights how homeowners and communities can prepare for, and better respond to, wildfire. The “On Call” Wildfire Videos aired on TCTV-17 in August/September 2013 and air during burn bans. They are posted for viewing at Travis County’s Wildfire Preparedness page: www.co.travis.tx.us/wildfire.

Ready, Set, Go! Brochure

Members of the JWTF developed a *Ready, Set, Go!* brochure, customized for Central Texas. Ready, Set, Go! advises homeowners on ways to reduce risks and prevent losses of life and property from wildfire. Travis County printed 10,000 copies in February 2012 and distributed them to fire stations and JWTF partnering agencies for dissemination to the public.

“Wildfire Ready Austin” Press Conference

On April 6, 2012, Austin and Travis County officials launched the “Wildfire Ready Austin” campaign at ACC Pinnacle to bring awareness to steps the public can take to lessen the risks of becoming wildfire victims. In addition, the joint press conference promoted Wildfire Awareness Month.

Summit Spotlitged Wildfires

Elected officials, first responders and staff attended Austin’s Second Annual Capital Area Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Summit at the Palmer Events Center on February 17, 2012. Attendees discussed lessons learned during the Labor Day fires. The city and county announced the launch of the *Ready, Set, Go!* brochure, a guide to wildfire preparation that is available online.

Emergency Services Department *Response and Preparedness*

Travis County Sheriff’s Office (TCSO)/Emergency Services PIO Partnership

In 2012, the TCSO approved a new job description for their PIO position, making the position a Public Information Officer Senior – Public Safety. The county also approved a new position in Emergency Services, a Public Information Officer – Public Safety position supervised by the TCSO Senior PIO. The TCSO Senior PIO and Emergency Services PIO serve as backup to one another as needed.

The Emergency Services PIO performs public information duties for *STAR Flight*, Fire Marshal's Office, Office of Emergency Management, Wireless Communications, Medical Examiner's Office and TCSO. The PIO also provides public information consultation to Emergency Services Districts, Small Cities and Villages, TNR Natural Resources & Environmental Quality, TNR Parks and EMS when requested by the Emergency Services Executive Manager.

The Emergency Services PIO works on a variety of wildfire-related initiatives, such as serving on the Joint Wildfire Task Force and managing media relations for *STAR Flight* SF4 (the fire-fighting helicopter) and multi-agency wildfire training events. The PIO also works to educate the public about the CWPP, burn bans, emergency notification, Emergency Services activities and other topics through social media, press releases, events, video, brochures and media interviews.

The First Responder agencies within Travis County will use, under their current incident command structure, their staffing for a PIO representative during events. These assigned personnel will coordinate with CTECC, the CRC contact and our PIOs during events.

Additional Duties Assigned to *STAR Flight* Program Director

Court approval has been completed to assign additional emergency medical duties to the *STAR Flight* Program Director. A salary adjustment was recommended for these additional duties. The duties will include serving as the liaison with the Emergency Services Districts, the Small Cities and Villages, the City of Austin EMS Department, and the Office of the Medical Director. Also, the *STAR Flight* Medical Director was moved from the City of Austin to Travis County in the last budget cycle, and will now fall under this assignment and directly answer to the *STAR Flight* Program Director.

STAR Flight has added resources and tools to enhance their fire response capabilities. Pumpkins (portable water tanks), an added hoist for the third aircraft, iPads for mapping, photographs and coordinates use, and a firefighting helicopter, which is described below.

***STAR Flight* Helicopter for Fire Fighting**

Travis County *STAR Flight's* aircraft fleet now includes a UH-1H (Huey) helicopter, SF4, which is specially equipped for fighting wildfires, a first for the program and for local and regional flight programs across Texas. The aircraft provides three times the load-hauling capacity of *STAR Flight's* other helicopters, increased safety for fighting wildfires and enhanced capabilities.

Unlike *STAR Flight's* other aircraft (EC-145s), SF4 will not transport patients. Instead, it is reserved for fire fighting and response to regional disasters, as a part of homeland security and in support of Travis County Parks' projects, such as controlled burns in green belts and preserves.

Facebook and Twitter for Emergency Services

The Emergency Services PIO maintains and updates Facebook pages for Emergency Services and *STAR Flight* and a Twitter account for all Emergency Services departments. These social media pages provide updated information to emergency services providers, support agencies, state and federal agencies in emergency services, elected officials, citizen groups, the media and the public. They provide access to government information and services while providing a forum for public feedback.

Emergency Management personnel provide assistance with these pages. During large-scale events, volunteer staffing will be established for Facebook and Twitter. ES PIO and the Office of Emergency Management will identify and train volunteers for this purpose.

Wildfire Preparedness Website

The Travis County Wildfire Preparedness webpage, www.co.travis.tx.us/wildfire, is a one-stop-shop for Travis County wildfire information. It includes a wildfire preparedness checklist, the *Ready, Set, Go!* brochure and links to additional wildfire information resources, including www.firewise.org/.

Communication Lines Established

A media line (TV, radio, newspapers) into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is in place for emergency events. A Joint Information Center (JIC) line is in place for response-agency PIOs to notify EOC contacts during events. Citizens will be encouraged to sign up for the "Citizen Observer" website (www.citizenobserver.com), which provides direct access to emergency information during major events. Citizens will continue to be encouraged to register their cell phones for reverse 9-1-1, the Emergency Notification System (ENS), by going to the CAPCOG website and signing up free of charge.

Emergency Services Contacts

Danny Hobby, County Executive, Emergency Services; (o) (512) 854-4416; (c) (512) 538-7003; danny.hobby@co.travis.tx.us

Lisa Block, Emergency PIO, (o) (512) 854-7954; (c) (512) 762-7180; (p) (512) 935-0010; lisa.block@co.travis.tx.us

Casey Ping, *STAR Flight* Program Manager, (o) (512) 854-6460; (c) (512) 970-5906; casey.ping@co.travis.tx.us

Pete Baldwin, Emergency Management Coordinator, (o) (512) 974-0472; (c) (512) 633-8202; (p) (512) 802-1472; pete.baldwin@co.travis.tx.us

Stacy Moore-Guajardo, Assistant Emergency Management Coordinator, (o) (512) 974-0473; (c) (512) 633-8204; (p) (512) 802-1473; stacy.moore@co.travis.tx.us

Shantelle Dunn, Emergency Planner, (o) (512) 974-0474; (c) (512) 968-7653; (p) (512) 802-1474, Shantelle.dunn@co.travis.tx.us

Preston Doege, Hazardous Materials Coordinator, (o) (512) 974-0476; (c) (512) 522-7570; (p) (512) 802-1475; preston.doege@co.travis.tx.us

Hershel Lee, Travis County Fire Marshal, (o) (512) 854-4621; (c) (512) 970-8507; Hershel.lee@co.travis.tx.us

Transportation and Natural Resources

Planning and Mitigation, Support for Response and Recovery

TNR Planning and Mitigation

- 1) Distribute educational brochures at county buildings through permitting counter.
Contact: Permits Program Manager, Stacey Scheffel, (512) 854-7565,
stacey.scheffel@co.travis.tx.us
- 2) Seek grants for hazard mitigation projects, manage mitigation projects, supervise development of and updates to Travis County Hazard Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
Contact: Environmental Quality (EQ) Project Manager, Melinda Mallia, (512) 854-4460, melinda.mallia@co.travis.tx.us
- 3) Include nationally accepted prevention and mitigation principals in subdivision design standards, Develop Public-Private emergency prevention, protection, and response initiatives. Assist property owners with improving road access for emergency responders and evacuation routes into and out of subdivisions; creating defensible space around structures and implementing fuel reduction programs.
Contact: Division Director Development Services Anna Bowlin, (512) 854-7561, anna.bowlin@co.travis.tx.us
- 4) Provide GIS mapping support showing high risk areas for flood and fire events
Contact: GIS Program Manager, David Shore, (512) 854-7591,
David.Shore@co.travis.tx.us
- 5) Update recovery plans for post-disaster waste management; identify and obtain rights to sites for staging large quantities of debris after disasters; develop plans for recycling or disposal of debris from wildfire or fuel reduction projects byproducts.
Contact: Division Director Natural Resources and Environmental Quality, Jon White, (512) 854-7212, Jon.White@co.travis.tx.us

TNR Support for Emergency Responders

The scope of TNR's response role is determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the magnitude of disasters, level of need, or specific direction from the Commissioners Court.

- Responses to requests for fire-fighting support from EOC Commander. TNR assesses need and capabilities to mobilize at event sites. TNR Road & Bridge Teams provide heavy equipment and operators to construct fire breaks, provide fuel, and generally support wildland fire suppression crews.
- Field checks for county road safety throughout the event; close roads or eliminate hazardous conditions when possible.
- Responses to reports of county road safety issues raised by the public or TCSO.

TNR Contact Information for Emergency Response Support

- 1) Working Hours, TNR Dispatch, (512) 854-9433
- 2) After-hours Response Team (ART), (512) 974-0845 (TCSO Dispatch)
TNR Road & Bridge Teams provide wildland fire support via use of heavy equipment to construct fire breaks, fuel and equipment support
- 3) On-Call Supervisor, After Hours, (512) 974-0845 (TCSO Dispatch)
TNR Road & Bridge Supervisors can direct multiple ART members and resources required by the type of event.
- 4) David Hunter, TNR Road & Bridge Right-of-Way Section Manager, (512) 844-5494 Directs resources from Right-of-Way programs as required by the type of event during working hours (7:00 am to 3:30 pm M-F).
David.Hunter@co.travis.tx.us
- 5) Eddie Jones, Road & Bridge Roadway Section Manager, (512) 848-7626
Directs resources from Roadway programs as required by the type of event during working hours (7:00 am to 3:30 pm M-F). Eddie.Jones@co.travis.tx.us
- 6) Don Ward, Assistant Public Works Director, Road & Bridge, (512) 854-9317.
Directs resources as required by the type of event. Don.Ward@co.travis.tx.us

TNR Recovery Role in Wildfire

- 1) Remove debris from county rights-of-way using county forces or Job Order Contracts.

Contact: Working Hours, TNR Dispatch, (512) 854-9433

Contact: TNR On-Call Supervisor, After Hours, (512) 974-0845 (TCSO Dispatch)

Coordinate in the field with FEMA to document fire damage in the floodplain. Complete damage assessments. Coordinate with Travis County Emergency Services on reports to document need for fire-related disaster declarations. Conduct windshield surveys of residential and commercial damage to assist EM with disaster documentation. Process permit applications for redevelopment or repair. Establish streamlined permitting process, including permit fee waivers, if approved by Court. Contact: Permit/OSSF Program Manager and Floodplain Administrator, Stacey Scheffel, (512) 854-7565, Stacey.Scheffel@co.travis.tx.us

- 2) Coordinate with recovery groups and the Commissioners Court to clarify public policy and establish protocols for debris removal from private properties.
Contact: Natural Resources and Environmental Quality Division Director, Jon White, (512) 854-7212, Jon.White@co.travis.tx.us
Contact: Permit/OSSF Program Manager and Floodplain Administrator, Stacey Scheffel, (512) 854-7565, Stacey.Scheffel@co.travis.tx.us
- 3) Coordinate with Travis County Emergency Services and Permit/OSSF Program Manager/Floodplain Administrator to document requests for financial assistance offered by state or federal agencies. Develop hazard mitigation projects. Prepare Notices of Interest and grant applications for financial assistance from TDEM and FEMA.
Contact: Environmental Project Manager, Melinda Mallia, (512) 854-4460, Melinda.Mallia@co.travis.tx.us
- 4) Consult on issues relating to compliance with the Endangered Species Act, the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), and county-wide natural resource protection. For events affecting endangered species or the BCP (e.g. fires, floods, etc.) may need to become involved early, while the event is ongoing.
Contact: Natural Resources (NR) Program Manager, Wendy Connally, (512) 854-7214, Wendy.Connally@co.travis.tx.us
- 5) Solid waste management, cleanup and recycling. Identify hazardous wastes to be cleaned up. Support Emergency Management in handling of hazardous wastes. Support Road and Bridge staff in correct handling of solid and hazardous waste in debris. Identify and secure approval from TCEQ for Temporary Debris Management Sites. Obtain chipping services, hauling services, and hazardous materials disposal services.
Contact: NREQ Division Director, Jon White (512) 854-7212, Jon.White@co.travis.tx.us
Contact: EQ Program Manager, Thomas Weber, (512) 854-4629, thomas.weber@co.travis.tx.us
Contact: EQ Project Manager, Keith Coburn, (512) 656-6700 keith.coburn@co.travis.tx.us
Contact: Environmental Specialist, Shaun Auckland, (512) 854-4496, Shaun.Auckland@co.travis.tx.us
- 6) Assess water quality and other environmental quality issues as they arise. Provide guidance to communities for reducing impacts upon water quality.
Contact: Environmental Quality Program Manager, Thomas Weber, (512) 854-4629, thomas.weber@co.travis.tx.us
Contact: EQ Project Manager, Dave Fowler, (512) 854-7590, dave.fowler@co.travis.tx.us

Health and Human Services and Veterans Service – (512) 854-4100

Health and Human Services and Veterans Service provides a wide continuum of services to individuals and families in need in Travis County. Emergency response is catered toward the needs of the affected population with direction of the Commissioners Court and in conjunction with partners that may include the City of Austin, FEMA, Red Cross and area non-profits.

Programs to support recovery may include emergency food, rental and utility assistance, mental health services, and indigent burial. The department can generally provide or facilitate access to clothing items and other needed supplies in an emergency situation at the direction of the Travis County Commissioners Court.

The After Hours Recovery and Assistance Contact for Health and Human Services and Veterans Service is Sherri E. Fleming, County Executive, at (512) 694-3198 (cell) and-or sherri.fleming@co.travis.tx.us.

HHS/VS Department Recovery Activities may include:

1. Emergency food and food vouchers
2. Emergency clothing and clothing drive coordination
3. Trained Shelter Managers
4. Social Workers for short term personal crisis management
5. Limited access to overnight or very short term hotel/housing vouchers
6. Coordination with the City of Austin Health department for management of health hazards
7. Coordination with the City of Austin for management of domesticated animals
8. Coordination with Travis County AgriLife Extension for large animal sheltering
9. Coordination of Crisis Mental Health Services with Austin-Travis County Integral Care
10. Other services as required and in coordination with Travis County Emergency Management

Key Department contacts include:

Deborah Britton, Director, Community Services Division, (512) 854-4109.

Deborah.Britton@co.travis.tx.us Provides access to senior citizen volunteers through the Coming of Age program and American Sign Language interpreting services for persons who are deaf and-or hard of hearing.

Laura Peveto, Project Support, Office of Childrens Services, (512) 854-7874.

Provides access to mental health supports for children and families.

Blanca Tapia Leahy, Director, Research and Planning Division, (512) 854-4274

Blanca.Leahy@co.travis.tx.us Provides planning support for community problem solving. The division also has significant local data resources.

Jim Lehrman, Director, Family Support Services Division, (512) 854-9879.

Jim.Lehrman@co.travis.tx.us Provides access to emergency food, utility and rental assistance. Social Work services are also available for short term services planning.

Olie L. Pope, Director, Veterans Service, (512) 854-4136.

OlieL.Pope@co.travis.tx.us Provides access, assistance and advocacy for Veterans seeking benefits from the Veterans Administration and other services tailored to former military service personnel.

Dolores Sandman, County Director, Travis County AgriLife Extension, (512) 854-9605

Dolores.Sandman@co.travis.tx.us provides a wide variety of services and supports for local residents which includes, but is not limited to, agriculture and farming, pest control, wildlife management, drought management, nutrition and financial literacy. Also provides access to a variety of subject matter experts through the Texas A&M University system.