



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

VACANT
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

MONICA MONTGOMERY STEPPE
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: March 11, 2025

03

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

OVERVIEW

Wildfires pose a significant and growing threat to the San Diego region, where the combination of dry conditions, high winds, and rugged terrain creates an ideal environment for fast-moving, destructive fires. Fire stations serve as emergency hubs for the deployment of equipment and first responders to emergency incidents. The devastating wildfires of 2003 and 2007 exposed vulnerabilities in existing infrastructure, leading to widespread reforms in building codes and wildfire mitigation strategies. In response, the County of San Diego (County) has taken significant steps to improve building standards and enhance wildfire resilience.

In 2008, the County established San Diego County Fire (County Fire) to provide coordination and leadership to unincorporated communities with volunteer fire companies and underfunded fire protection districts. Since that time, 20 agencies have consolidated into County Fire and are staffed with around-the-clock, paramedic fire engines through a cooperative agreement with CAL FIRE. However, most of the County's fire stations were built prior to 2008 when Chapter 7A of the building code was updated to require the use of fire-resistant materials and design.

The County was awarded \$1,239,300 under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program (DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program), to harden fire stations built prior to the fire code update. County Fire will have a 27.1% match requirement (\$460,700), bringing total revenue and project costs to \$1.7 million. This funding will support activities at approximately 12 County Fire stations with the goal of implementing the three most effective measures at reducing risk: defensible space, hardscaping within the surrounding five feet of a structure, and upgrading existing vents to ember resistant vents. The project improvements are expected to be completed within three years.

Today's request is for the Board of Supervisors to find that the proposed actions are not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act, adopt a Resolution authorizing County Fire to accept

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

\$1,239,300 in grants funds from the DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program, and authorize the Director of County Fire, or designee, to sign all grant-related documents. This is also a request to designate County Fire as an Administering Department under Board Policy F-40 and to waive Board Policy B-29 to meet the grant match requirement.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Find that the proposed actions are not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c)(3) and 15378(b)(4).
2. Authorize the acceptance of grant funds of \$1,239,300 from the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency Pre-Disaster Mitigation (DHS/FEMA PDM) Grant Program, subject to final award adjustments. Adopt a Resolution entitled DESIGNATION OF APPLICANT'S AGENT RESOLUTION FOR NON-STATE AGENCIES (OES-FPD-130).
3. Authorize the Director of San Diego County Fire, or designee, to sign all required grant documents and agreements, including any annual extensions, amendments, and/or revisions thereto that do not materially impact or alter the services or funding level.
4. In accordance with Board Policy F-40, Procuring Architectural, Engineering, and Related Professional Services, for the purposes of the DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program, designate County Fire as an Administering Department and approve and authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to procure any necessary as-needed professional services.
5. Waive Board Policy B-29 (Fees, Grants and Revenue Contracts - Department Responsibility for Cost Recovery), which requires full cost recovery for grants.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

More than 80 percent of the San Diego County Fire jurisdictional area qualifies as a disadvantaged unincorporated community, based on a San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) report. Furthermore, the Unequal Impacts of Wildfire Risk data dashboard, produced by Headwaters Economics, highlights the disproportional realities of wildfire. It puts San Diego County in a “very high” wildfire risk and provides the following statistics: 454,089 people over the age of 65; 317,924 people living with disabilities; 210,717 people who don’t speak English well; 62,012 households without a car; 59,259 families living in poverty, and 38,123 mobile homes. Because vulnerable populations bear an inequitable share of the risks and the consequences of wildfire, fire station hardening can have a positive impact on equity by ensuring that fire protection services are maintained across all communities. By focusing on equity through fire station hardening, emergency responders can better protect all residents, particularly those most at risk of being impacted by wildfire events.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today’s proposed action can positively impact sustainability by improving the resilience of emergency infrastructure, reducing environmental damage, and supporting long-term community stability in the face of increasing wildfire threats. Hardening fire stations makes them more

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

resistant to wildfires, ensuring that they remain operational during and after fire events. This resilience minimizes disruptions to emergency services, allowing for a more effective response to wildfires.

By protecting critical infrastructure, hardening reduces the need for costly rebuilding and reduces the environmental footprint of reconstruction efforts. Lastly, preventing wildfires helps avoid water pollution, preserves healthy vegetation, protects endangered wildlife, improves air quality, and minimizes greenhouse gas emissions.

FISCAL IMPACT

If approved, one-time costs and revenue of \$80,000 for today's proposed actions are included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan for San Diego County Fire (County Fire). An estimated costs and revenue of \$500,000 will be included in FY 2025-27 CAO Recommended Operation Plan for County Fire. The total grant award is \$1,239,300 for a period of three years. Remaining grant funds of \$816,480 and match requirement of \$303,520 will be included in future years Operational Plans for County Fire. There is a 27.1% match requirement for the grant bringing total revenue and project costs to \$1.7 million. The funding sources are property tax revenue from the San Diego Fire Protection District (\$460,700) and DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program (\$1,239,300). There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

On May 6, 2024, with three of the five advisory board members present, the Fire Advisory Board reviewed and voted unanimously to support the acceptance of the Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program funding.

BACKGROUND

Wildfires pose a significant and growing threat to the San Diego region, where the combination of dry conditions, high winds, and rugged terrain creates an ideal environment for fast-moving, destructive fires. Given the region's high risk for wildfires, it is essential that first responders are fully prepared and equipped to act swiftly and effectively when fires break out.

Fire stations are critical during emergencies like wildfires, serving as the command centers and logistical hubs for emergency response efforts. Without fully functional fire stations, response efforts would be delayed, coordination would suffer, and lives and property would be at greater risk. Maintaining and protecting these facilities is essential to safeguarding communities during wildfires.

Since the devastating Cedar Fire in 2003 and Witch Creek Fire in 2007, the County of San Diego (County) has made significant strides in improving building standards to enhance wildfire

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

resilience. Key improvements include the 2008 Chapter 7A updates, which require fire-resistant materials for new construction, such as non-combustible roofing, siding, and decking, as well as double-paned windows.

Also in 2008, the County established San Diego County Fire to provide coordination and leadership to unincorporated communities and since that time, 20 agencies have consolidated into County Fire and are staffed with around-the-clock, paramedic fire engines through a cooperative agreement with CAL FIRE. However, most of the County's fire stations were built prior to 2008 when Chapter 7A of the building code was updated to require the use of fire-resistant materials and design. County fire station hardening is not only important to serve as an example, but it is critical to ensuring these facilities are not threatened by wildfire.

On June 20, 2024, County Fire formally applied for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Grant Program, administered by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). On December 23, 2024, Cal OES sent County Fire a Notification of Subapplication Approval for an award of \$1,239,300 for the proposed project. County Fire will have a 27.1% match requirement of \$460,700, which brings total revenue and project costs to \$1.7 million.

Although this funding is not enough to fully harden every County Fire station, staff have performed vulnerability assessments of each fire station and have prioritized the funding based on the fire stations with the greatest risk. This funding is proposed to support 12 County Fire stations (see Attachment B) with the three most effective measures at reducing risk, which include:

- **Defensible Space:** A 100-foot buffer zone will be created between the structure and the surrounding vegetation by clearing away flammable materials like dry brush, dead trees, and debris while maintaining a managed landscape of fire-resistant plants and non-combustible materials. Defensible space helps slow or stop the spread of wildfire, providing firefighters with a safer area to defend the property, and increasing the chance of the station surviving a wildfire without direct firefighter intervention.
- **Hardscaping in the "Zone 0":** This refers to the immediate area within 0 to 5 feet around a structure, often called the "ember-resistant zone," which is designed to minimize the risk of fire spreading to the building. Hardscaping in Zone 0 involves using non-combustible materials such as gravel, concrete, stone, or pavers eliminate flammable vegetation and other combustible materials from this area. This work prevents embers from igniting anything near the station, such as plants, mulch, or wooden structures, which could then spread fire to the building itself.
- **Upgrade Existing Vents to Ember-Resistant Vents:** Installing an ember-resistant vent means upgrading or replacing standard ventilation systems with specially designed vents that prevent embers from entering the structure during a wildfire. This work significantly reduces ember intrusion, which is when they enter a building through regular attic, soffit,

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

or foundation vents and ignite combustible materials inside, leading to a fire within the structure.

This work is expected to increase resilience for over 40 communities and approximately 500,000 residents.

To maximize funding, County Fire and the Department of General Services will work together on these projects. County Fire, through the Department of Purchasing and Contracting, will lead competitive solicitations for the purchase of the supplies for the projects. County Fire staff and public agency partners will perform the defensible space and hardscaping in the Zone 0, and General Services facility operations staff will remove existing vents and replace and/or retrofit with the ember resistant vents.

Today's request is for the Board of Supervisors to find that the proposed actions are not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act, adopt a Resolution authorizing County Fire to accept \$1,239,300 in grants funds from the DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program, and to authorize the Director of County Fire, or designee, to execute all grant-related documents. This is also a request to designate County Fire as an Administering Department under Board Policy F-40 and to waive Board Policy B-29 to meet the grant match requirement.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review is required for projects that have the potential to cause a significant effect on the environment. Today's proposed actions involve acceptance of the DHS/FEMA PDM Grant Program funding to begin the Environmental Historical Preservation (EHP) Assessment. These actions are not subject to environmental review pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c)(3) because they are not a project as defined in Section 15378(b)(5) since they involve organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment. Upon completion of the EHP Assessment, County staff will review the project for CEQA and return to the Board if necessary.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support the Community and Sustainability Strategic Initiatives of the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan by strengthening the reliability of critical infrastructure and increasing the resilience of communities, while avoiding environmentally sensitive areas.

Respectfully submitted,

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION TO RECEIVE FUNDS UNDER THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY/FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY PRE-DISASTER MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM, AUTHORIZE THE SIGNATURE OF FUTURE GRANT DOCUMENTS AND MAKE CEQA FINDINGS (DISTRICTS: 1, 2 AND 5)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Strong", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Strong for

EBONY N. SHELTON
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

ATTACHMENT A – DESIGNATION OF APPLICANT'S AGENT RESOLUTION FOR NON-STATE AGENCIES (OES-FPD-130)

ATTACHMENT B – COUNTY STATIONS FOR HARDENING