

RESOLUTION NO. 20140213-047

WHEREAS, severe drought conditions in Travis County, and the surrounding areas, have prompted city leaders and first responders across the region to focus on the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in hopes of preventing widespread damage and mitigating fire risk; and

WHEREAS, Council Resolution 20120823-070 directed that a study regarding the technology developed by FireWatch America be conducted to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of use by the City of Austin to assist in the detection and suppression of fires in the WUI; and

WHEREAS, the resulting City of Austin (COA) study found that the system would be able to provide tower-based automatic reliable early recognition of forest fire, automatic recognition of smoke clouds by day and night, local online data processing, small band radio or cable transmission of alerts to the central office, and fast supervision of an area of more than 70,000 hectares; and

WHEREAS, the COA study also found that infrared fire detection systems can provide automated detection and the GPS location of a fire, and can be combined with meteorological data sensors for improved fire progress forecasting; and

WHEREAS, the COA study states that, "It appears that the detection and prevention of a major fire guarantee the return on investment. There would be a

percentage of savings on operational cost compared to conventional methods of drive by detection”; and

WHEREAS, challenges identified by the COA study included securing lease agreements with owners of selected towers, validating the cost and capabilities of the system, and the need to include neighboring jurisdictions; and

WHEREAS, FireWatch is deployed in thirteen countries, protects more than twelve million acres worldwide, and has been used successfully to detect smoke for seventeen years; and

WHEREAS, FireWatch has additional benefits including monitoring and helping plan the response to a fire, keeping an eye out for flare ups in prescribed-burn areas and maintaining a forensic record of fire events; and

WHEREAS, the FireWatch system can provide alerts within six minutes during the day and twelve minutes at night; and

WHEREAS, FireWatch accurately locates fires through triangulation from two or more towers; and

WHEREAS, fire season can start as early as spring depending on weather conditions; and

WHEREAS, working with Travis County and other partners could reduce the cost to the City and expand the service area of the system; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Fire Department is a leading innovator in addressing the danger to homes in the WUI, and installing an early-wildfire-detection network around Austin would be a further innovative step in protecting homes in the WUI; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

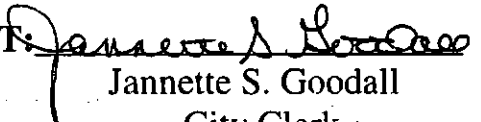
The Council directs the City Manager to:

- Negotiate an interlocal agreement with Travis County to potentially share the costs of the early fire detection system;
- Work with other entities that may be potential partners in this program including, but not limited to, Travis County Emergency Service Districts, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas A&M Forest Service, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Pedernales Electric Cooperative and other local governments;
- Negotiate with FireWatch Texas and explore the owning and leasing options available;
- Develop recommendations regarding the scope of the system;
- Determine the feasibility of using existing towers owned by the City of Austin, Travis County, and Austin Community College for installation of smoke sensors and make recommendations for location options for new towers;

- Explore funding options including, but not limited to the Budget Stabilization Reserve Fund and General Fund revenue;
- Present recommendations to the Public Safety Commission at their meeting on April 7, 2014; and
- Bring an item for Council consideration no later than April 10, 2014 with recommendations including the scale of the program, funding options, and a plan for implementation.

ADOPTED: February 13, 2014

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk