



PUBLIC SAFETY COMMISSION

May 1, 2017

CodeNEXT Advisory Group
c/o Ashley S. Greenstein
CodeNEXT Team
City of Austin Planning & Zoning Department
505 Barton Springs Rd.
Austin, Texas 78704

Via email ashley.greenstein@austintexas.gov

Re: Wildland Urban Interface safety measures included in CodeNEXT

Dear Ms. Greenstein,

The Public Safety Commission reviewed and discussed the draft CodeNEXT at our February 6, 2017 and May 1, 2017 meetings. We received briefings from Austin Fire Department Assistant Chief Richard Davis, Austin Fire Department Wildfire Division Manager Justice Jones, and Austin Fire Association President Bob Nicks. *We strongly urge that CodeNEXT include a wildfire risk overlay map.*

During the 2011 Labor Day wildfires, approximately 7,000 acres burned and 57 homes were destroyed in Travis County. In Bastrop County, the wildfires caused the largest per-capita loss in the nation's history with wildfire consuming 34,000 acres and 1,700 homes. These events—in addition to the fact that Austin was rated the third most at-risk residential area in the nation for wildfire related structure losses—impelled the Austin City Council to adopt resolution 20160512-016 to address the increased risk of Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fires in and around Austin.

Council's resolution directed the City Manager to:

Evaluate the Wildland Urban Interface Code and explore its applicability as a potential mechanism for protecting life, property, and natural resources from the catastrophic effects of wildfire. Report back to Council within 90 days a plan and timeline for Wildland Urban Interface Code adoption. Also, include wildland urban interface risk reduction as a high priority within CodeNEXT and Imagine Austin ongoing project planning.

CodeNEXT should specify the areas within Austin where the Wildland Urban Interface Code would apply, once it is adopted. These high-risk areas would be designated on a WUI risk overlay map. This WUI risk overlay map should be included within CodeNEXT.

(over)



For these reasons, the Public Safety Commission recommends that CodeNEXT include a wildfire risk overlay map. Thank you for your work on this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Webber".

Rebecca Webber
Public Safety Commission Chair

Enclosures:
Council resolution
AFD timeline

RESOLUTION NO. 20160512-016

WHEREAS, on Labor Day 2011, nine major wildfires, including Steiner Ranch, Spicewood, Leander, Pflugerville as well as the Bastrop Complex fire, raged across central Texas burning 47,000 areas and destroying more than 1800 homes, thus ushering increased awareness of the extreme wildfire risk in and around the City of Austin; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin has been rated the 3rd most at-risk residential areas in the nation for wildfire related structure losses in the 2013 Corelogic Wildfire Hazard Risk Report; and

WHEREAS, the Austin Fire Department Wildfire Division was established in 2012 to reduce the risk of wildfire destruction through fuel mitigation and effective wildfire response though enhanced firefighter training; and

WHEREAS, the use of prescribed fire in high risk Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI) areas can be an effective tool for reducing fuels in the most environmental way and provide Fire fighters with important training opportunities; and

WHEREAS, the absolute safest methods of command and control of prescribed fire applications must be employed to ensure zero fire escapes; and

WHEREAS, all Prescribed fires conducted within the City of Austin require AFD permitting and on site AFD resources to ensure all Prescribed fires are coordinated with safety as the highest priority; and

WHEREAS, recent wildfire risk analysis from the Austin Fire Department Wildfire Division indicates 27% of Austin's structures, or over 246,400 structures are at risk from radiant heat and ember exposure; and

WHEREAS, in March 2014, the City Council unanimously approved the adoption of the City's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), a product of extensive stakeholder involvement that provides actionable recommendations to enhance Austin's resiliency to the impacts of wildfire; and

WHEREAS, major stakeholders included Austin Water Utility, Austin Fire, COA Watershed Protection, COA Homeland Security, at least 5 surrounding ESD's, various Travis County Departments, City of Lakeway and Texas A&M Forestry Service; and

WHEREAS, the adopted CWPP is only a starting point in reducing wildfire risk and the CWPP identifies many activities yet to be accomplished to actually realize substantive wildfire risk reduction; and

WHEREAS, one major item the CWPP recommends is the development of Local CWPP's in high risk areas of the City; and

WHEREAS, these Local CWPP's may number in the hundreds, given this enormous scope of work, meaningful performance measures should be created to quantify progress and identify constraints that impede progress; and

WHEREAS, the CWPP recommends that Austin address wildfire risk through appropriately codified planning and regulatory measures that both complement existing land use and development principles, and maximize wildfire resiliency; and

WHEREAS, the International Code Council's WUI Code has been shown to be an effective mechanism for reducing wildfire risk when adopted as a component of comprehensive community wildfire planning; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of a WUI Code has been recommended twice in the last several years by the Public Safety Commission, on June 3rd 2013 and most recently on March 7th 2016; and

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

The City Council establishes the goal of zero wildland fire related fatalities, promote the development of wildland fire defensible strategies, and support incorporation of these strategies within the City's existing regulatory framework to ensure communities and ecosystems are resilient to extreme fire behavior.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

Direct the City Manager, to evaluate the Wildland Urban Interface Code and explore its applicability as a potential mechanism for protecting life, property, and natural resources from the catastrophic effects of wildfire. Report back to Council within 90 days a plan and timeline for Wildland Urban Interface Code adoption. Also, include wildland urban interface risk reduction as a high priority within CodeNEXT and Imagine Austin ongoing project planning.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

The City Manager is directed to ensure that all high risk wildfire urban interface (WUI) areas within the City of Austin be assessed for the need for Local Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP). Where the need of a Local a CWPP is established, the City Manager is directed to plan and implement these CWPP's. The Local CWPP's will include a fuel mitigation plan for fuels both inside and outside the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ), an emergency wildfire urban interface (WUI) response pre-plan, and a citizen emergency WUI evacuation plan. The City Manager is directed to ensure city departments participate in implementing the recommendations in the City of Austin CWPP, and support implementing local level CWPP.

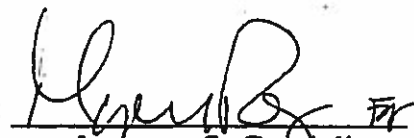
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

Direct the City Manager to provide a progress report every six months to the Public Safety Committee for the following important components of a comprehensive WUI risk reduction plan:

- Number of local CWPP's **completed and implemented** in high risk wildfire urban interface areas.
- Number of Local CWPP's **started** in high risk wildfire urban interface areas **but not completed**. Show percent of progress toward completion for each major plan component.
- Percent of high risk wildfire urban interface areas in which **identification of potential local CWPP planning areas is still ongoing**.
- Number of public presentations and home assessments provided.
- For high risk wildfire urban interface areas, provide the number of fuel mitigation activities, location of activities (identify local CWPP where applicable), type of fuel mitigation activities (mechanical or prescribed fire) and size of areas mitigated.
- Number of wildfire training contact hours by City Employees including AFD firefighters and number of employees receiving training. Break down by classroom hours, hands-on training hours conducted.

ADOPTED: May 12, 2016

ATTEST:


Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk



TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Rhoda Mae Kerr, Austin Fire Chief

DATE: November 10, 2016

SUBJECT: Plan and Timeline for Wildland Urban Interface Code Adoption

Per your resolution number 20160512-016 regarding planning for wildfire safety, I am pleased to report to you a plan and timeline for adopting regulations based on the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code (IWUIC). The Austin Fire Department (AFD) Wildfire staff have evaluated this technical code and have concluded that many of the practices suggested in the IWUIC would be applicable to Austin. The IWUIC, like the International Fire Code, is updated every three years. The next edition, 2018, is expected to be released in May of 2017.

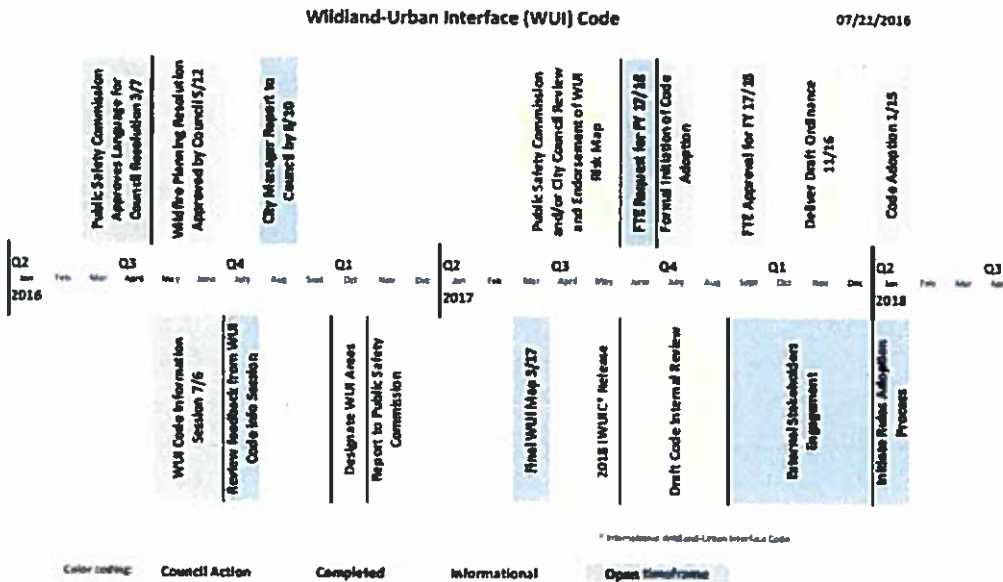
In order to be in sync with the IWUIC regular release of updates my plan is to have AFD staff begin internal review in June of 2017 and subsequently ask you to initiate the formal process for code adoption in July of 2017 with a target adoption date of January 2018. A complete timeline diagram is provided on page two.

AFD's evaluation included literature review, consultations with wildfire experts, meeting with internal interest groups, and outreach to experts from the International Code Council and representatives from other communities that have adopted wildfire safety regulations. In this effort AFD staff determined that while Austin's wildland-urban interface is somewhat unique in vegetation types and development patterns it is similar in that it shares many of the same risks as other communities and regions in terms of structure ignition potential and need for safe and orderly emergency response and evacuation or shelter in place when necessary. Information obtained through this research, contacts, and local experience indicates adoption of certain accepted practices for wildfire safety can dramatically improve public safety in identified risk areas.

Any new wildfire safety regulations will be based on identified risk for individual land parcels. This risk assessment is currently being refined with plans to have it finalized by March of 2017, well ahead of the proposed time frame for review.

Staff anticipates continued coordination with numerous internal stakeholder groups such as Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Public Works, Austin Energy's Green Building program, the Austin Travis County Wildfire Coalition, and the Austin Public Lands Management group. External stakeholders are being identified and will be engaged once the formal code adoption process is initiated. Thank you for your continued support of this important public safety initiative.

Timeline for Adoption of Wildfire Safety Regulations



CC: Elaine Hart, Interim City Manager
 Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
 Tom Dodds, AFD Chief of Staff
 Public Safety Commission