

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
FROM: PAUL LOWENTHAL, ASSISTANT FIRE MARSHAL  
FIRE DEPARTMENT  
ADAM ABEL, ASSISTANT CITY ATTORNEY  
CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE ADDING CHAPTER 9-28 TO THE  
SANTA ROSA CITY CODE PERTAINING TO FUELS MITIGATION  
PILE BURNING

AGENDA ACTION: INTRODUCTION OF ORDINANCE

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Fire Department that Council adopt an Ordinance adding Chapter 9-28 to the Santa Rosa City Code pertaining to Fuels Mitigation Pile Burning to allow private landowners to obtain a permit from the Fire Department to perform pile burning to reduce wildfire hazards to accomplish a combination of fire protection and resource management goals.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing the vegetative fuel load is a critical part of the City's efforts to mitigate wildfire danger. By focusing on thinning and/or removing low-lying vegetation, including those that can carry fire to taller tree canopies - called ladder fuels - from lands and in some areas close to private residences, this can create a more fire-resistant habitat. The reduction in vegetative fuel load will modify fire behavior in an effort to reduce environmental damage and aid in suppressing wildfires. Benefits from fuels mitigation pile burning include: preventing loss of lives, reducing fire suppression costs, reducing private property losses and protecting natural resources from devastating wildfire.

This chapter allows private landowners with parcels of five (5) acres or more in size and located in the City's Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Area to obtain a permit from the Fire Department to perform pile burning to reduce wildfire fuel hazards to accomplish a combination of fire protection and resource management goals. Similarly, private landowners on smaller parcels both in and outside of the Wildland-Urban Interface Fire Area may apply for a permit, however these will only be permitted on a case by case basis as determined by the Fire Chief.

## BACKGROUND

On December 8, 2018, the City initiated the development of a Wildfire Annex to the existing Local Hazard Mitigation Plan (LHMP) and created the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) in compliance with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. On August 25, 2020, the City Council approved the CWPP, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Wildfire Annex, by resolution. An objective of the CWPP is to treat vegetation to reduce the wildfire hazard locally. The treatment of vegetation within the Wildland Urban Interface can reduce the risk of loss and damage from wildfire. The greatest responsibility for the protection of improvements in the community rests not with the City but with the individual property owner through the development of adequate defensible space. For their part, the City and open space management associations have completed and maintain vegetation treatments within their respective jurisdictions. Maintenance of existing treatments and the design and implementation of additional treatments will further reduce the risk of unwanted consequences of wildfire. An action identified in the CWPP to mitigate this threat is to establish permitting protocols for the use of prescribed fire pile burning which this ordinance would achieve.

## PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

Not Applicable

## ANALYSIS

The LHMP was updated with the Wildfire Annex to specifically assess and respond to the City's vulnerability to wildfires. The CWPP, in compliance with the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, was approved by the City Council on August 25, 2020.

As outlined in the CWPP, fuel treatments typically fall into four treatment categories – mechanical, manual, prescribed fire (pile burning), and biological. The fuel treatment strategy for the City may involve all of these treatment types with the use of pile burning being the most complex mechanism.

Pile burning under appropriate weather conditions can rapidly eliminate fuel after manual or mechanical treatment activities. Pile burning is a cost-effective way to address the elimination of hazardous fuel but requires permitting from air regulators and the Fire Department. The risks associated with pile burning can be mitigated through the permitting process.

There are 9,482 parcels in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). 962 of those parcels are undeveloped. 32 parcels in the WUI are over five (5) acres in size.

## FISCAL IMPACT

Approval of this action does not have a fiscal impact on the General Fund.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15269(c) in that the proposed Ordinance would allow for specific actions to prevent or mitigate an emergency.

## BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable

## NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

## ATTACHMENTS

- Ordinance

## CONTACT

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