



City of Grass Valley City Council Agenda Action Sheet

Title: Interim Options for Fire Resiliency and Vegetation Management

CEQA: Not a Project.

Recommendation: That Council 1) consider and provide direction to staff on using \$400,000 of general fund reserves to hire up to seven seasonal firefighters and allocated a police officer during the winter to operate our vegetation management program; 2) set dates for a public discussion/meeting on a potential Fire Resiliency, Vegetation Management, and Sales Tax; and 3) authorize the Finance Director to make any necessary budget transfers to implement any actions approved by City Council associated with this item.

Prepared by: Timothy M. Kiser, City Manager

Council Meeting Date: August 22, 2023

Date Prepared: August 17, 2023

Agenda: Administrative

Background Information: On July 25, 2023, City Council heard an item discussing Fire and Vegetation Management and the potential implementation of a sales tax to support these areas. Additionally, the meeting focused on addressing public safety risks that Grass Valley may face due to extreme weather events and wildfires. At the July 25th meeting, City Council decided to hold off on the November 2023 Election and look at the March 2024 election instead. As part of the discussion at the meeting, it was asked of City staff what could be done now.

During the Council Meeting, one of the crucial topics discussed was Fire Resiliency. Fire Resiliency involves initiatives to improve the city's ability to handle fire incidents effectively. Proposed measures discussed during the tax conversation included increasing firefighter staffing and adding another fully staffed fire engine company. These efforts aim to enhance efficiency in operations, allow for simultaneous engagement in essential tasks, and provide resilience, flexibility, and adaptability during critical events. These measures are necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of our community in the face of fire-related challenges. To address what could be done now concerning Fire Resiliency, the staff is proposing to add up to seven (7) seasonal firefighters to augment fire department staffing to the industry standard of 3 firefighters per fire engine for 6 months. Seasonal firefighters are an enhancement to the career staffing during which time they provide an invaluable service while providing the department an opportunity to assess future employment should an opening occur. These positions will ensure the Grass Valley Fire Department is prepared to provide for the quickly increasing current and future emergency service demands of the City and surrounding Nevada County areas we respond to regularly. Cooperative and coordinated emergency response has always been and will continue to be the focus of the City of

Grass Valley Fire Department as we plan for the current and future protection of the community.

The estimated fiscal impact of adding 7.0 seasonal firefighters is approximately \$400,000. Funding for these positions will be provided from the City's General Fund Reserve. These funds are currently available in reserves and fund balances and will be incorporated into the base budget of the FY 2023-24 Year Budget if approved by the City Council. Staff is proposing a one-time use of reserves to fund this critical need, but another funding source such as a Sale tax will be required to make additional staffing permanent.

The discussion of the July 25th City Council Meeting also focused on Vegetation Management, a critical aspect of protecting our City from the impact of wildland fires. This aspect encompasses various strategies, including hardening the areas surrounding critical infrastructure such as the hospital, schools, and water treatment plants. Moreover, it aims to safeguard the City and its residents by reducing fuel and vegetation loads throughout the City and its geographical sphere of influence. Staff suggestion for an interim/temporary step to start to address these issues would be to temporarily assign a Police Officer to operate the City's new masticator to clear vegetation and deal with illegal camping, amongst other vegetation management duties during the late fall/winter season. A police officer provides comprehensive capability to a cooperative team approach to vegetation management on private/public property. Since development started on the Wolf Creek Trail in 2016, GVPD officers have developed their capability to safely and compassionately confront and abate trespassing and unlawful camping on public and private lands. A police officer brings a unique "all in one" capability to this endeavor and with current staffing levels at the PD, the department is able to make a temporary assignment in furtherance of the City's mission to prove the efficacy of this program. Staff is proposing this as a temporary solution to get things started, long-term or more than a few months assignment, a new revenue source or additional staffing would be required.

Additionally, staff would like to set up dates and times for public meetings to discuss a potential fire tax.

Council Goals/Objectives: The execution of this action attempts to achieve Strategic Goal #5 - High Performance Government and Quality Service.

Fiscal Impact: The funding required for hiring seven seasonal firefighters would result in a fiscal impact of around \$400,000. In the short term, the GVPD has the ability to allocate an officer temporarily for the purpose of managing vegetation within their current budget.

Funds Available: Yes

Account #: General Fund Reserves

Reviewed by: Tim Kiser, City Manager

Attachments: None