1 North San Antonio Road
Los Altos, California 94022-3087

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: June 13, 2023

TO: City Council

FROM: City of Los Altos Executive Team

SUBJECT: CITY OF LOS ALTOS MARCH 14, 2023 STORM RESPONSE REPORT

Response Details

The City of Los Altos experienced an extreme weather event on Tuesday, March 14, 2023. The impact of the heavy wind event caused a major power disruption city wide due to downed trees and power lines.

On March 14, 2023, the City of Los Altos was subjected to an unusual and unprecedented severe wind weather event. In anticipation of the event, City staff took an "all hands-on deck" approach in order to properly address the impacts of the storm.

On the day of the weather event, during the operational period of 10 am (the approximate start of the storm) through 11:59 pm, the City of Los Altos had the following personnel on duty to assist in the storm response:

Department	Staff Members	Normal Hours	Overtime Hours	Total Hours
City Manager's Office	7	42	9	51
Police Department (Sworn, Dispatch, Records, Traffic)	19	156	32	188

Parks & Recreation	11	66	35	101
Public Works	4	11	0	11
Sewer Services	4	20	10	30
Total	45	295	86	381

During the period of 8 am to 5 pm, the Police Records division received 187 storm related calls, almost four times the daily average of 40 calls. During the operational period of Tuesday, March 14th from 12:01 am through 11:59 pm, Police Dispatch received 362 phone calls (transferred and 911 calls), of which 204 were storm related calls for service (the daily average of phone calls into dispatch is 69).

The nature of the calls included traffic collisions, downed trees blocking roadways, trees on power lines, live wires down and trees on vehicles. The extent of the downed trees blocking roadways was extensive and affected many city streets and thoroughfares.

Early on during the wind event, power was disrupted citywide affecting land line and cell phone service as well. PG&E provided online updates regarding the outages and possible restoration timelines; however, it became increasingly difficult for Police personnel to contact PG&E representatives for real time updates as the storm progressed.

Maintenance Services personnel were only able to communicate via radio with each other and with police dispatch to coordinate responses.

Some residents were able to connect with Wi-Fi at Woodland Library and later outside the Police building, however, cell phone service was down for an extended period.

Traffic signals did not have back up power and were out citywide. Police and Fire personnel did not have adequate staffing to man the array of intersections where traffic signals were inoperable, while also responding to incoming emergency calls for service. As a result, cones, flares and eventually pop up stop signs were deployed by Police, Fire, Public Works, and Parks staff.

The Police building lost power and the backup generator failed to switch on initially. Maintenance Services personnel responded to the Police building to assist with the generator. The 911 system has a limited back up power source and it was within minutes of failing. In the event of catastrophic power failure, the 911 system would have been diverted to a neighboring police agency. This was avoided due to Maintenance Services personnel temporarily fixing the generator issue.

While responding to a downed tree on a vehicle call, a police vehicle occupied by a police officer and three police trainees was hit by a falling tree. The officer was able to safely maneuver away from the tree and avoided serious injury. The police vehicle suffered minor damage.

Police personnel responded to two calls of trees on top of vehicles along Foothill Expressway, requiring one individual to be transported to the hospital via ambulance.

In addition, Police personnel responded to one call of a tree falling at Oak elementary school. A child suffered a minor facial laceration in that incident. The parents took custody of the child, who did not require medical attention.

Maintenance Services used all available heavy equipment to clear roadways affected by downed trees and other debris. One piece of equipment was briefly disabled when a tree branch punctured an oil hose. The hose was repaired the following day. In total, Maintenance Services personnel responded to 93 calls for service.

Power was out at the Blue Oak Lane pump station. The pump station had to be monitored around the clock. The following day, March 15, 2023, Peninsula Pump Repair responded to fix a defective relay switch. Power still had not been restored in the area, causing the pumps to work solely on generator power.

Development Services initially red tagged ten homes but after further inspection they were downgraded to yellow (restricted access) due to tree intrusions.

The City Manager's Office fielded calls from concerned residents. The City Communications team sent alerts and information to residents days before the actual storm event to include messaging on the City Manager's weekly update newsletter. Messaging by the communications team via social media and Nixle alerts continued through Friday, March 17, 2023.

The City of Los Altos' response to the storm extended past Tuesday, March 14th, 2023. During the period of March 15th through March 17th, 2023, the day power was restored, city staff continued to respond to storm related incidents to include but not limited to the following:

- Police personnel continued to receive storm related calls for service regarding fallen trees, downed live power lines and inoperable traffic signals.
- Calls were received regarding residents ignoring signs and barricades and accessing dangerous areas.
- Maintenance Services continued to respond to storm related issues and clean up around the city.
- Sewer services discovered sewer and storm drain manhole covers along Berry Ave had been mistakenly paved over by a contractor, rendering them inaccessible.

- The Blue Oak pump station lost generator power necessitating the system to be vacuumed out with a Vac-Con truck. It was later discovered that the generator had run out of fuel, causing it to shut down.

Power was not restored city wide until Friday, March 17th, 2023.

Additionally, city staff reached out to PG&E on the storm-related outages and received the following information:

> *"In the South Bay & Central Coast region, PG&E had more than 1,500 coworkers and contractors managing restoration efforts for the 15 storms that occurred between New Years 2023 and March 2023.*
>
> *Following outages in your community, our team conducted detailed, multi-outage reviews to assess common outage causes and find ways to reduce the impact on customer's homes and their businesses.*
>
> *Through this review process, we identified ways to improve reliability. In 2022, our team took the following actions to improve reliability in Los Altos:*
> - *Tightening wire spans*
> - *Adjusting equipment to resist high winds*
> - *Strategized to reduce inspection and reactivation times*
> - *Adding sensors on lines"*

Total City Property Damage

Below is the listing of all itemized property damage caused by this storm incident. The City has applied for FEMA reimbursement for these damages through Santa Clara County and are awaiting their response. FEMA conducted a site assessment inspection in April 2023 to confirm the damage.

Damage	**Address**	**Estimated Dollar Loss**
Police Cruiser Dodge Charger Vehicle Repair	1 N San Antonio Road	$270.79
Council Chambers Audio/Visual Equipment Replacement	1 N San Antonio Road	$2,000-$3,000
Maintenance Service Center Rear Gate Repair	707 Fremont Avenue	$15,000-$18,000
Blach Gym Roof Repair	1120 Covington Road	$6,000-$8,000
Youth Center Roof Repair	1 N San Antonio Road	$400
McKenzie Park Tennis Court Fence Replacement	707 Fremont Avenue	$20,000-$27,000
Total		$53,727.29

Lessons Learned

- The City Emergency Operations Plan should be updated, including:
    - Communications protocol, including a kickoff meeting at the beginning of the emergency event that includes all emergency response leads
    - Cellular, landline/Ring Central, and home phone numbers for all EOC staff
    - Debris Management Plan
        - Residents did not know who was responsible for post-event debris on their properties. Some residents left debris on the curb for over a month
- Los Altos' poor cellular phone reception made it difficult to communicate with staff
- Some key maintenance equipment is outdated and not reliable, including:
    - Generators (e.g., during the January storm event, the MSC/EOC generator failed)
    - Backhoe
    - Loader
- All City traffic signals went dark during the multi-day outage and makeshift STOP signs had to be assembled and mobilized at every intersection in Los Altos
- Each building has a different generator system so ensuring that staff understands how they all function

Action Steps

- Set up group messaging platform for executive team for more immediate communication (Completed)
- Update the City Emergency Operations Plan and distribute to all staff (In Progress)
- Train or re-train all staff on their roles and responsibilities in EOC response
- Re-establish the use of the Motorola Radio System until cellular communications is more reliable in Los Altos
- Upgrade and replace equipment that is needed during typical emergency events as feasible
- Install battery backup systems on City traffic signals as feasible