

Town of Los Gatos
Finance Commission Meeting – March 13, 2023

March 15, 2023

Dear Finance Commission Members,

On Monday evening, I outlined wildfire initiatives that need to be addressed in the coming fiscal year and other longer-term funding requirements.

Fiscal Year 23/24

The top priority remains roadside fuel reduction. The program that has been implemented to address vegetation on 31 miles of Los Gatos roadway in the high fire zone is now in its third year. In Fiscal Years 20/21 & 21/22, the Town funded Capital projects totaling \$1 million that allowed around 10 miles of roadway to be completed. In Fiscal Year (FY) 22/23, \$700,000 from Build Back Better will be applied to this effort. We need to keep-up the funding effort and commit another \$500,000 for roadside fuel reduction in FY 23/24 and follow suit in FYs 24/25 and 25/26.

Once a first pass is made, the process needs to be repeated. We need to move to a 6-year trim cycle. While funding requirements will be far less than the first pass, roadside fuel reduction is on-going requirement.

In addition, the Town needs to fund a weed abatement program for the same roadways. Two weed abatement passes are needed annually – a total of 62 miles. The Town needs to take this action to reduce fire risk along the roadways and ensure compliance with weed abatement requirements. An estimate for annual weed abatement is \$300,000-\$500,000 (\$5,000-\$8,000/mile).

Addressing Longer-Term Needs

As we think longer-term, piecemeal funding is a painfully slow process to make LG more wildfire resistant. We have had success with grants and should continue pursuing but we cannot depend upon grants as the primary source. In the longer term, we need to think about a Public Safety parcel tax – yes, wildfire preparation and prevention included. Other capital requirements include:

1. An Enhanced Communication System: a network of Loudspeakers allowing for voice commands across the hillside needs to be implemented. A proposal was received in 2022 with a quoted cost around \$1.5 million for a turnkey system.

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2. Evacuation Route Road Width: we must meet the State requirement for 20 feet of clear road width. Needed roadway improvements including widening or periodic turnouts could total into the millions.
3. Eucalyptus Removal Program: we should aggressively take action to remove non-native Eucalyptus trees throughout the Town on public and private property.
4. Water Supply Reinforcement: San Jose Water Service mains need to be extended in some hillside locations.

Los Gatos has paid attention to the threat of wildfire and taken positive steps forward. We need to accelerate our efforts. This can only be accomplished through a long-term planning effort that includes funding. From a wildfire standpoint, the Town is almost in a constant state of emergency whether we admit it or not. We need to take steps now to match our actions with the ongoing threat.

I am happy to answer any questions and of course serve in any capacity that will move our planning and funding efforts forward quickly.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Stump", written in a cursive, stylized script.

Rob Stump