

August 6, 2019 Zoning and Platting Commission

Item D1: WUI Code Presentation by Mark Baker

Council: Are the Structure Building codes and building materials taken into consideration?

Mark Baker: Residential code has covered materials; WUI code focuses on structures close to Wildland fuels.

Council: Are there distance requirements for maintenance of private properties included in WUI Code?

Mark Baker: No. Best management practices for Balcones Canyonlands will be encouraged.

Council: What is construction based on? The Rating of a fire wall?

Mark Baker: The WUI Code is concerned with the exterior walls, windows, doors, roofs within 50 feet of the WUI. Beyond that we are concerned with the protection from embers.

Chief Limon: Residences are a concern, but the residents are our utmost concern.

Council: This information is an asset to all other types of planning. We need to apply this to transportation. We need resiliency in a holistic manner.

Chief Limon: the Wildfire Coalition does try to take this information and apply it to many situations.

Mark Baker: the Office of Sustainability is our partner. We have used a tool with Headwaters Economics for smoke and Wildfire. Code Next and the subdivision team looked line by line at the WUI Code to make communities more resilient and to get Wildfire safety a priority for the whole city.

Chief Limon: We need to collaborate with many partners about our problems, which include extreme drought, heat, flooding, and wildfire.

Council: Speak about maps and wildfire projects.

Mark Baker: We analyze risk and hazard zones to identify our goals and areas for fuels projects. We have an agreement with PARD to do fuel mitigation on PARD lands. We reported on our fuels projects at a previous meeting. We have a map for forward facing projects also.

Chief Limon: PARD and City Utilities work with us for land management plans.

Vice Chair Dunkin: This is a big item. I remember in 1988 a fire in Aspen Hills in Austin made 100 people homeless and cost a million dollars in damage. The fire trucks could not access the fire because of the grade. There was a lot of press about it at the time. Construction in the hill country needs to be aware of fire concerns. Southeast Austin is vulnerable.

Chief Limon: Austin citizens are becoming more aware of Wildfire risks. The WUI affects all of Austin.

Mark Baker: We recommend community planning assistance for Wildfire for areas of high risk.

Council: We have lots of work to do in East Austin with grass fires.

Chief Limon: We are having community meetings in East Austin.

Council: There are gaps in Austin where there are not enough fire stations.

Chief Vocke: 5 Stations are being built, and we are planning 4 stations. We want to put a station on 360. We are working to close the gaps. It is expensive and the city is growing fast.

Council: We recognize that. I have a small green belt behind my house. Are properties with little green belts being considered too?

Chief Limon: Send me the information, and I will have my program coordinator look at it.

Council: My neighborhood is aware; I am concerned about others who have mini green belts in their neighborhood.

Chief Vocke: Outreach and education are needed to reach our goals.

Council: There are challenges with the WUI code and how it affects other code. This code needs to compliment other code. We need to determine which code trumps other code, and take into account state legislation, regulations on building materials, and other issues.

Council: Are you working on recommendations for evacuation in subdivisions with high risk?

Chief Vocke: There is land code for number of exits required. WUI areas will be requiring 2 areas of access to main roads. The fire code will require new neighborhoods to stick to the code and get creative with solutions with developers.

Council: The Fire wise program is great. I live in North West Hills and had my home assessed. We need to build more fire resistant homes. I am cleaning my gutters and encourage everyone to get their house assessed. On your map - what is the red area south of 290?

Mark Baker: The Shoal Creek Greenbelt area is there. We have tried to make the map meaningful.

Council: We want to see the code rewrite and the land development code re-mapping. Up zoning-We need to let people know when we cannot add more housing in a high risk zone.

Chief Vocke: I do not know what this piece of land requires with land development codes.

Council: Why roof only a portion of a house with fire resistant roofing?

Chief Vocke: Most roofs will be class A fire resistant. We need to let people have options to lower the cost; they most need to fire proof a roof close to the WUI side of a house. We are trying to be consistent and simple for the code application.

Council: In newly constructed areas roofs will need to be class A for only part of a roof.

Chief Vocke: The side of a house facing a greenbelt or WUI will need to have fire rated doors and windows and roofing; the side facing away does not need to have these requirements.

Council: Do we need different requirements depending on the width of the greenbelt adjacent to the structure?

Chief Vocke: The WUI Code addresses structures and property and defensible space next to the Greenbelts. The greenbelts themselves are not addressed by the WUI Code.

Council: Are the risks higher for narrow or wide greenbelts?

Chief Vocke: WUI Code addresses the edge of the greenbelts and the structures next to the greenbelt. The WUI Code is a model code: House Bill 2439 is model codes. House Bill 3167 has a timeline for approving site plans; we will need staff to evaluate plans according to WUI Code meet the timelines so that plans are not automatically approved.

Council: We will need information on vegetation, defensible space, and Best management practices.

Chief Vocke This will be a challenge. AFD inspectors, Code compliance, and the Fire Marshalls office will need to be involved.

Council: What will the site plan approval process be? AFD will review the plans first, right? Code compliance will not be involved.

Chief Vocke: AFD does not review site plans; we review with structures over a certain number of feet. We do not know what the process will be.

Council: There are lots of areas of high risk on the maps. The question is: where do we put high density in Austin? We need this information with cases. We need advice with development in high risk areas. I need help and input from you. Have you reviewed impact of recommendations with the equity office? They should provide input.

Mark Baker: No, but we have looked at the affordability statement.

Council: Resources are in issue. Risk is high. We need sufficient resources to fight fires. What resources will you need in the future?

Chief Vocke: We need more stations. We have an automatic aid agreement with surrounding counties to help both ways. We work together to get quick services.

Council: Some of the highest areas of risk are in the low income communities. How will the low income part of the community to mitigation and be at less risk overtime?

Chief Vocke: Community Outreach addresses that. We have not pulled numbers for that. We go structure by structure and will consider this.

Council: Go to those areas and work with them.

Chief Limon: Community Outreach goes to do outreach there. The fuel on the west side of Austin burns more higher and hotter. That makes more risk.

Mark Baker: There is a Wildfire vulnerability tool we use to take into account income levels. We use this information when we plan projects.

Chief Limon: Evacuation is a big topic in the county. Please join Warn Central Texas. Leave if there is an emergency. Do not wait to be told. Smokey the Bears birthday is Sat. You are all invited to his party at the nature and Science center.

Council: Our retirement communities pose unique challenges-what do we need to be aware of?

Chief Vocke: They do have additional requirements.

Council: The educational piece- in what languages will it be available?

Chief Limon: English and Spanish

Council: Willland and wildfire seem to be used interchangeably- are there any differences in these terms?

Chief Vocke: They are the same.

Council: Areas labeled as high risk are identified as areas for opportunities for affordable housing. We need this information to make decisions.

Chief Vocke: We are running out of developable land. The less desirable land is not as safe.

Council: The map shows Camp Mabry and a cemetery as safer- but we cannot build low income housing there.

Chief Vocke: The Willland Division was made in 2012. Since then we have not made any code. We would like to talk more about it.