

Public Safety Committee (PSC) Meeting Transcript – 10/5/2026

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[1:59:44 PM]

And we have a quorum present. Vice chair Laine, council member duchen and myself. Checking for public communication.

[2:01:54 PM]

>> There are no speakers.

[2:01:55 PM]

>> No speakers today. So I thank you, sir. So item one, the first action item will be to approve minutes for the public safety committee meeting of August 3rd, 2026. I will accept the motion and a second. Without objection, the meetings are. The meeting minutes are approved. The second item will be to approve the corrected minutes for the public safety committee meeting on October 14th, 2024, September 22nd, 2025 and the special called meeting March 31st, 2025. I will accept a motion and a second. Without objection, the minutes are approved. The committee will now take up item three, a briefing on emergency response to the April 13th, 2025, northwest Austin house explosion incident in the greater hills neighborhood. We have director Reddick and chief volk, chief Luckritz and chief Davis. I didn't see chief Davis in here, but we got the rest of the party. So we can we can.

[2:02:55 PM]

Soldier on, soldier on. Excuse me. Thank you. Thank you for being with us. Also. Thank you all for all your work this past week. Greatly. Greatly appreciated.

[2:03:07 PM]

>> Thank you sir.

[2:03:08 PM]

>> Chief Davis, I did not see you over there. And I do not have my glasses on.

[2:03:13 PM]

>> That's okay. I just wanted to let you know that this does not include the Austin police department as this was in Travis county.

[2:03:19 PM]

>> Thank you, ma'am.

[2:03:20 PM]

>> Thanks, chief. Again, Jim Reddick, the director of Austin emergency management here with chief vocke and chief Luckritz to present on an incident that occurred just a couple of weeks into my time here with the city. So this is one of my introductory incidents, which really kind of opened my eyes to some of the complexities involved with the city versus county versus esd's and the like. And so there were several observations, and I'm certainly happy to report that there have been significant improvements since then. Is this is this the thank you. Okay, so back on April 14th, 2025, in the morning hours, there was a two story home that for which there was an explosion. And it was pretty wide ranging. So not only the devastation that you see in the previous picture, but other over other homes

and residences were impacted as well. There were injuries with that. Chief Luckritz will speak to and some of the damage assessment opportunities that we that we took advantage of to, to glean the true breadth of the disaster afterwards. And the cause was propane gas, which we did not know necessarily at the time. So obviously, the first responders did what they did and they did it well. So I'd like to turn the next slide over to chief vocke, followed by ems chief chief Luckritz on their response.

[2:04:50 PM]

>> Good afternoon everyone. Tom vocke, interim fire chief on this incident, AFD had members on scene within six minutes and a full complement on scene within ten minutes. The call was initially dispatched as a structure fire and we had to adjust the call type. But one thing that having initially dispatched is a structure fire does is give us plenty of resources on scene. Firefighters at the nearby stations actually heard the explosion and were getting dressed and responding prior to the call being dispatched. Dispatch was obviously given multiple addresses over a mile area, and so there was some confusion on, you know, where the address was, but from from some of the stations from two of our stations, they could actually see the smoke plume and knew what general direction they were going. And prior to arrival, they were able to sort out the address that they were looking at. So one of the things that we did very quickly is we added special operations resources, including a special operations battalion chief, hazmat and rescue unit, as well as bringing the shoring and search and rescue equipment as well. The first victim was found very quickly. It did take some time to expand the search and assess the damage of the entire area. Focus originally was on the main house. AFD conducted air monitoring and it was determined that additional.

[2:06:08 PM]

Really. One of the things they wanted to do quickly was determine if there was additional explosion hazards in the area, and they were quickly able to determine that there was not additional explosion hazards in the area. There were several small fires that they extinguished at the same time. They were removing patients conducting search and rescue. There was more than a dozen response units from AFD, along with the additional support and command vehicles that go along with that as well. Fire also requested additional Travis county ems resources early on as they imagined and envisioned. There were multiple patients based on the debris field that they were seeing. Additional AFD search and rescue was coordinated with austin-travis county ems and law enforcement, which in this case was mostly Travis county sheriff's office. Eventually, a search dog was requested through our connection with our structural collapse team and use our provider search dog for us to do a final search of the area to make sure that we had found everyone in the area. And though it was determined early on where the fire, though it wasn't determined early on where the final investigation of this scene would be handled.

[2:07:13 PM]

Eventually it was determined it would be Travis county fire marshal's office that would do the investigation because it was an esd for. There wasn't a lot of confusion early on in who who was running the incident. Our our members got there quickly, established, you know, the proper command sequence and were able to quickly handle all of the small fires that popped up, as well as making sure that all the patients were quickly cared for.

[2:07:49 PM]

>> Austin-travis county ems also responded to this incident in support of the Austin Austin fire department. In total, there were seven patients that were treated on scene. Four of those were transported. One of those was critical. Three individuals refused care, mostly blast injuries, fractures, and a few other things. One thing to note, it did. As the chief mentioned, this was an area with a lot of debris, roads, debris in the roads and elsewhere. And so it did take us some time to be able to access all of the area as we work with the fire department in order to to clear that debris while we were there. In the subsequent time after we treated the initial patients, we remained on scene to support the Austin fire department, not just in the search and rescue, but also in the care of the firefighters and others that were operating in some dangerous situations with those unstable buildings and whatnot. We also worked to assist with the reunification of families. A total of 16 units responded five medic units, which are ambulances. We had five district commanders or supervisors that responded.

[2:08:48 PM]

Those individuals were able to quickly establish a unified can with the Austin fire department to Travis county sheriff's office. APD was also on scene, as well as Williamson county sheriff, Williamson county sheriff. We saw on the scene, I myself was there. So I do have firsthand knowledge of of the the things that occurred on that scene. In addition to one of our assistant chiefs, we did participate in a media briefing, and that consists of what we have. Thank you.

[2:09:13 PM]

>> Thank you chiefs. And so and then mass care, because every incident. The number one priority is life safety. American red cross was on scene. They came out and they checked on other folks to see if they had any unmet needs, if there were any sheltering needs, whatever it was, they were out there to try to ascertain exactly what those those needs were. And I believe our public health department as well, and the central Texas shelter team was on placed on alert in case there were significant numbers for for congregate sheltering. So to, to kind of piggyback on what the chief said, and this is really an excellent

lesson and the incident command system. All of those assets that the chiefs had mentioned were very well organized. There was unity of effort, shared situational awareness. And that one team, one fight. So while there may be different uniforms, different logos, it's really one team. And then there's the emergency operations center that's in support of the incident, whether it's in a virtual capacity or physically out of seatac. In this case, it was more virtual. We were able to collaborate with the red cross, with the Texas division of emergency management, Travis county, Williamson county, and then he and you can see that these were all the agencies and the logos back as they were in April of 2025. We worked with Austin resource recovery from a debris standpoint, Austin water from a permitting standpoint, Austin energy, in case there were any residences that were needed to be disconnected or hooked up. And then again, public health from an unmet need perspective. And again, this being me, within a few weeks of coming on board, Richard Mchale and Shea roalson and Stuart Riley and Adrian Sturup, they were all fantastic and engaging in the conversations, determining how they were able to help and really contributing whatever they could, resources or otherwise. It was really a fantastic team effort to to make sure that we are very much in support of those folks who are on the scene and meeting the needs of the of the residents in the area. So the observations one, of course, is that the first responders did what they do and they do it really well. So again, it didn't matter if it was an esd, whether it was in a city or Travis county, the mou S are in place that they will respond.

[2:11:38 PM]

And again, life safety being the number one priority, followed by property protection and then environment. That's that's for every incident. Now, there was confusion about the location and who owned the incident, at least from the emergency operations standpoint. So as you can see from the map, it was very close between district six and district ten. Some of the technology on which we relied were telling us it was in one council district versus the other. And we just didn't really have a mechanism in place to, to really streamline the communication from the emergency operations center to the city manager's office, to the council members and the like. And and again, I'll take the hit for that. And that's something that we certainly worked on afterwards. And a year and a half later, we are in a much, much better place. So that that clear line of communication is, is really locked down. We have a policy on that, and it's being used pretty much for every incident.

[2:12:38 PM]

And one of the things that we're trying to alleviate is multiple text groups. So making sure that we have a teams channel, or if it is a text group, and we've been working with vocke as our emergency response platform to figure out what is the best tool for that incident to share information. Before, during and after. And of course, residents confusion if there was another explosion possibility and do they have to evacuate and those types of things. I think we're in a much better place to communicate internally, sharing information, but also with our residents as well. So obviously, one of the things that have happened since then is our city logo that actually reflects that we're one team now, which doesn't sound

like a lot, but but to me, that's a big deal because it does reinforce the one team, one fight, not just within our city proper, but we are one team with Travis county and Williamson counties, and we work really well with them. And council member Laine, I'll attribute that to you. When we met early on, when we both came on board about the same time and and the concerns that you had that we weren't necessarily working really well with those other counties. And, and we're doing so much better now. Our emergency operation plan is inclusive of those partnerships.

[2:13:59 PM]

And you'll learn more about that in the next presentation about alerts and notifications. We are very well aware of the map with the districts, with the other counties. And we also work with the other counties through capcoa. We have our regional emergency management group. We work together for uasi homeland security grant funding. And again, we're all tapping into vocke. And so that's going to be one more opportunity for us to, to, to really share information. While documenting the incident, internal notification processes, we've locked that down. And acm Batista has put out the order that Austin emergency management should be made aware of an incident. And that way it'll be he and me making sure that there is communication between emergency operations center and city hall, and then from the city manager's office to city council. If there is an eoc activation, there will be a council liaison to reach out to you to answer any questions or relay information from our joint information system. We also have, from an internal coordination standpoint, a quick response team. So that's one of the things that emergency management brings to the table. Added value to the incident is that coordination support. So we can send out a blast message using everbridge to set up a teams channel, a meeting by which we can all just get on the same page, have a very distinct and quick briefing of what it is, what's going on, what are our priorities for this operational period, and then continue to build up the team as the incident evolves. And then there's the public alerting and public information by which we're able to use ipaws, which is the integrated public alert and warning system, which involves wireless emergency alerts. So those those amber alert type of messages on your phone, along with Warren, central texas.org. And we convey all of our messages in 14 different languages at Austin, texas.gov/alerts.

[2:16:04 PM]

Chairman, if it's if it's if you're amenable, I'd like to conclude our presentation here because the next one is on the alerts and warnings improvements. So may I ask if there's any questions from the home explosion incident colleagues?

[2:16:23 PM]

>> Thank you. So, director, I had no idea that you were only a couple weeks on the job at that point. You handled the call quite well and it was a long one. And, you know, also grateful to the information that was shared with me by chief Luckritz on the scene. When I made my way over there for the media briefing, and also glad to have gotten to know our other chiefs better in the interim. I do agree that a lot of improvements have been made since that time, and I'm very grateful for them. I think this is actually a situation in which our briefing can include a lot of pats on the back, because there has been a lot of meaningful improvement, and even before that improvement occurred, the actual saving of life and property went off without a hitch. So very much appreciative of all of that. And so with that, I do have a few questions and some of them are asked, keeping in mind that we have the next upcoming presentation. So when we're thinking about communicating with the surrounding area, we heard that 911 calls came in from as far as a mile away. I am I appreciated the summary information that's in here about repairs. I'm aware of repairs that required hiring someone to correct them as much as a quarter mile away. As the crow flies. And I'm also aware, in addition to the homes of one school that had significant damage, windows blown out and another one that had damage that at least needed to be assessed but was more minor.

[2:17:57 PM]

And so certainly in the surrounding area, that's a big enough impact that people would be wondering, what do I do? Where did this happen? I know I was, as you all heard at the time. And so I'm wondering, like with the benefit of hindsight, who would we be wanting to communicate with in the immediate aftermath of this explosion?

[2:18:25 PM]

>> Thank you for the question, ma'am. I would say that we would be in a position emergency management. We could we could facilitate those conversations. There's not a lot that we would be able to offer except one through that sequence of delivery. Certainly during a non-disaster declared disaster, if you will. There's the sequence of delivery is one insurance, you know, always going to insurance first. And insurance is intended to make you whole. And then the rest of it would be going with the nonprofits first and working your way up through the faith community and things like that. So if folks are underinsured, there might be an opportunity through our Austin resilience network to bring some of those partners together who could assist folks with some of those repairs.

[2:19:08 PM]

>> That is useful information. Thank you. And then I also want to kind of clarify, because I realize now that I wasn't clear my question. So the explosion happens. It's heard all over this all over the metro area.

Those who are closest, the ones who are calling 911 because they think it's right next to them, don't know where it happened. And, you know, we've got a street that was eventually cordoned off. We've got I know there were some knocking on doors that happened to clear that street. Who would we want to be communicating with to, for example, shelter in place?

[2:19:44 PM]

>> Sure. Well, so it they shouldn't have to ask, right? I think in our messaging, we should be deliberate in the messaging that we send out. And we've all been trained now on a on a proper template. This is coming from the city. This is the incident. This is the location of the incident. And then whatever protective actions to take following that, because that's a life safety issue. Following that would be Warren central Texas messages. As the incident develops where we would be able to send more information. That's not life, life safety, but but certainly informs throughout the incident.

[2:20:17 PM]

>> Okay, I'm going to save some related questions for the next presentation. After that goes. Okay. I was there any communication with Round Rock ISD, which is the school district that had the schools that were in the area.

[2:20:31 PM]

>> Not from my department, but possibly through the Texas division of emergency management. And I will find out. I find out about that.

[2:20:40 PM]

>> Okay. And then, you know, the follow up question is going to be, if it were to happen again in the same place, would that have been that communication with Round Rock ISD have been built into the processes? And of course, del valle ISD and Round Rock ISD are the second and third largest, depending on how you count them after aid. And then there are, as you know, at this point, probably painfully, a number of other ISD's with, you know, a much smaller footprint. But those two are pretty big. Yes, ma'am. And so I'm interested in understanding in maybe in follow up, maybe now depending on what you choose, but what's the plan for moving to the point where we have those processes in place for those two school districts?

[2:21:23 PM]

>> Sure. Well, I mean, we so the those two different counties, Hays and Williamson, are part of our plan now. And so anytime we're going to do any operations and if this happened again in the exact location, I would be on the phone with their emergency manager for that county and making sure that, you know, all the partners are in place. So the relationships are in place, the trust is in place, and we're in a much better place in terms of our plans as well. So Round Rock ISD would certainly be included.

[2:21:51 PM]

>> Okay, so Wilco would elevate Round Rock ISD because I know you've got some coordination going with aid.

[2:21:59 PM]

>> Sure. So yes. Right. I mean, because because it is in their county, however, our residents are in their county as well. So I would be working directly with Bruce Clemens, the emergency manager up there, and then making sure that I, a Round Rock ISD is part of the conversations and incorporated into the response.

[2:22:19 PM]

>> It's also in Travis county, though. That's the thing.

[2:22:21 PM]

>> Yes, ma'am.

[2:22:22 PM]

>> Yes, it's in both. Yeah. Okay. Great. I'm wondering, I mean, there were a lot of questions in the in the community from the moment that people were communicating with each other about what caused the explosion and, and should what should I be checking on my house? If anything, I know the ultimate, you know, thank you for sharing that. The ultimate conclusion was propane explosion. The whole street is served by propane or really. And I don't think that had been figured out at the point of the media briefing. I'm I'm wondering, like one, how did we determine that there's no additional explosion hazard in the area? And then also, I don't know if any of you will know. And it's very acceptable if you don't because it's outside of emergency. But how are we ultimately getting information to the community if there is something, for example, inspect your propane type of messaging that would go out on the street.

[2:23:21 PM]

>> So with as far as the the actual monitoring of the scene, we have gas monitors and we monitored the scene that day to, to verify that there was an additional propane hazard. So that's one of the primary things we would do with any type of explosion. So as far as you know, typically in the city of Austin proper, we ask for propane installations. We require inspections on installation requires inspections on piping. The county does not have all the same regulations. So there are some differences. And so I don't want to speak for what their requirements are, but ours are pretty stringent in the city.

[2:23:59 PM]

>> You just answered a couple of embedded questions. So I appreciate that. Let's see. I'm just flipping through to see if we've already covered these. I'm wondering about, you know, at the scene, chief Luckritz shared with me that the Travis county fire marshal was the lead had been identified at that point. And I see in the presentation references to Travis county sheriff. And I'm wondering if you can help me understand, is it actually fire marshal? Is it both? What.

[2:24:27 PM]

>> So both were on scene, so the the actual sheriff's office would help with scene safety and all the things, road closures and even searching and notification door to door. But the Travis county fire marshal's office, because it's an esd for is responsible for the investigation of the scene.

[2:24:44 PM]

>> Thank you. I learned a lot trial by fire while this was all going on, and I still am. I appreciate that. Almost finished with my questions. So I think I'm one the only. I love the improvements. I love the last two slides. Thank you. This was a great presentation. I love the work that's been done since this happened. I wonder if there is on the last slide when we're talking about internal notification process agency to Austin emergency management and city manager's office and then cmo to counsel. Actually reading that over. I don't have a question about that after all, anymore. So thank you. The rest of mine will come with the next presentation.

[2:25:31 PM]

>> Thank you ma'am.

[2:25:35 PM]

>> Thank you all for the update. I just have 1 or 2 questions about just to build on vice chair lane's questions about the origin of what happened here. Is there anything else further than just propane you can share with us about what went awry this day?

[2:25:51 PM]

>> No, we know it was a they verified it was a propane leak. We didn't we have not received a final copy of the report yet. We have requested it. So I'm glad to pass that on to you. All.

[2:26:02 PM]

>> That would be.

[2:26:03 PM]

>> I'll be just a final.

[2:26:04 PM]

>> Report for her line of questions. I think that would be helpful to understand if there are any actions, follow up actions that we would recommend that sound like this is a potentially a place. As you mentioned a moment ago, city county has different standards for inspections, and that might be something that we might then want to have a conversation with our commissioners about. If there are if they have the appetite and authority to maybe take additional action than based on some of the obviously depends on the nature of the leak and what happened. But if there are things that we can do to strengthen some standards, I wonder if certain things can be preventable in the future.

[2:26:42 PM]

>> Absolutely. Once we get that information, I'd be glad to share it with you all.

[2:26:46 PM]

>> Okay, I'll look for that. Thank you, thank you.

[2:26:49 PM]

>> Thank you all very much, colleagues. Next we have the the committee will take up item number five, a briefing on wildfire prevention and mitigation strategies utilized by the city. And for that, we welcome chief vocke.

[2:27:01 PM]

>> Chair, are we going to do the warnings and alerts item first?

[2:27:05 PM]

>> Oh excuse me. Yes, we'll take up. I'm just jumping jumping items here. The committee will not take up item number four, a briefing on improvements to warning notifications and alerts for residents during active emergencies. And thank you, director Reddick.

[2:27:20 PM]

>> Thank you sir. So honestly this is one of the things that is has a lot of my focus because I don't feel like we can alert folks quickly enough during times of disasters and the national standards, as we've seen it, through the core capabilities and the target capabilities really has, you know, from the time of awareness of an incident to turning it around and getting it out to the community is somewhere of an hour. And I think we all know that that's not quick enough. Maybe for large scale disasters that are coming our way, that might be sufficient, but for an active threat, for flash flood warnings and the like, that that is not quickly enough. So we have again warned central Texas, which is an opt in system, and we have access now to I-pass, the integrated public alert and warning system. And and I'd like to stop really quickly just to recognize the hard work of Sarah Henry, David Wiechman and Scott Hawks Hawkins, who from Austin management, emergency management got us to where we are now through the training, through coordination with FEMA and all the things that needed to take place to allow us to have the authority and the ability to send out these messages. So I pause, is also the emergency alert system, the scroll that you see on the TV.

[2:28:44 PM]

It's also what we hear rehearsed on the radio, and it's also the wireless emergency alert. Like I said before, it's kind of like the, the amber alert, the, the unique tone and vibration that allows us to send messages out regardless of subscription. There is no subscription requirement. But the challenge that we have is that a lot of folks opt out of the system. And, and if I could just plead with the community not to do that, because, as I said before, if we can't contact you, we can't alert you. So whether it is an urgent life safety event, and that's the only time that we would use ipaws if you opted out, you won't get those, those critical messages. Other platforms, of course, are social media. I know our first responder agencies use social media to share information throughout an event. We do media briefings quite often, press releases and the like. So I would just say the ipaws is just one tool. So is warn central Texas, and we're going to use a combination to make sure folks are informed before, throughout and after an incident. So previously we did not have that capabilities while counties did. So the fact that we're able to do it makes us, our community a lot more resilient because they know they're going to receive critical information. And again, working with hays and Travis and Williamson counties, we have been building partnerships to where we're able to send messages on each other's behalf.

[2:30:16 PM]

If for some reason our system goes down or we're not available, we can contact hays or Travis and Williamson. They can send it, or likewise, they can contact us and we will get the message out for them.

So we've really been working together in the training and also in the building of templates and getting our messages where they need to be with, with a sustained process by which we can get them on, on each other. And that's just a graphic that shows our residents in all three counties. So through those partnerships, I just mentioned the mou that are in progress with Williamson, hays and Travis counties and them as well. Texas division of emergency management is also able to send messages and already have. The system that we use is everbridge. And that's the same backbone technology that we use for Warren, central Texas. And building on the lessons learned from a previous incident, we've been partnering with aid to ensure that we're deconflicting messages, that we're using the right verbiage to get the the result that we need without causing fear and panic and APD and Austin ISD's pd continued to meet regularly on a variety of topics, but this being one of them as well, we've been conducting ipaws training for the region. So again, kudos to APD as well as ems and fire and our dispatchers who are often in the in the position to send out the message the quickest.

[2:31:53 PM]

And we continue to make sure that the leadership all the way through is aware of the technology, the templates that are in place, and what triggers are in place to make sure that those messages get out. In July, we hosted ipos, training by FEMA. They came in and all the dispatch supervisors were trained. Also, capcoa hosted an alerts and warning workshop where the industry experts being doctor Jeanette Sutton and Eddie bertola or Eddie bartola, they came. And again, they are. They are the experts that FEMA uses in terms of developing their messages. So it was really a pleasure to have them here twice, in fact, where our templates were really improved and got to where they needed to be. And then Austin ISD hosted us, as well as APD in a tabletop exercise, again intended to get messaging out through a variety of injects. And then testing and life safety. So we sent our very first alert authority message.

[2:32:53 PM]

David Wiegmann did. And wait, I beg your pardon? In January, our first ipaws alert went out on behalf of Travis county, and that was done by David Wiegmann. We participated in the statewide warning test that was directed by vdm, but we also do tests on a monthly basis. Not a lot of folks know that because it is in a test environment and not going out to the community. And I actually have some thoughts on that in the future, I'd like to bring before the committee in terms of doing tests that do reach the wide audience of of Austin, just to get more folks familiar with and give us the opportunity to see who may not be getting those messages, but so we tested on a weekly basis or I'm sorry, on monthly basis. And we spread that out throughout the team. So folks are they get more experience and exposure by sending out those, those tests. Again, like I mentioned before, there are character limits and we have templates for both. And our messages will always say who it's coming from. So it'll always say city of Austin, what the warning is, or whatever the issue is, followed by whatever the protective action is. And like I said before, we will only use these for life safety alerts. Next, we're transitioning from this being a new program to maintenance and ongoing training. This will be a part of our training and exercise plan,

our three year training and exercise plan, so we will incorporate it into a lot of our exercises. We'll continue to test and conduct outreach and education. Again, we tell people all the time, please sign up for Warren, central.texas.org. And please do not opt out of ipaws and public safety alerts because again, that is how we're going to be able to get you information throughout. One of the things that that that has improved with, with our ability to send out ipaws is that again, not being reliant on, on prescription or subscriptions is that we are able to reach all the guests and visitors that are here, as well as the deaf and hard of hearing. They are able to get the alerts on their phones if they enter that area of alert. And so I think we're better off as a resilient community because of that. And with that, Mr. Chair, I'll turn it over for any questions.

[2:35:14 PM]

>> Colleagues.

[2:35:17 PM]

>> Then I do. We were just talking about who would go first. Sure. Go ahead. Okay. So the first question is a month or two ago, there was a shooting in DC and there was a radius alert. Is that the I the APD sent out? Is that the iPad system?

[2:35:36 PM]

>> Yes, ma'am.

[2:35:37 PM]

>> Okay. I'm gonna have to flip through my pages again, just like I did last time. Give me a second. Okay, so I'm looking at slide eight, which is the iPads training for 911 dispatch. And I, I'm wondering about when the. Well, a couple of different things. One, the types, if they're there, I, I certainly could imagine and other reasons for avoiding the area besides major car crash or police activity, house explosion being an example. How does that get addressed?

[2:36:29 PM]

>> Well, yes. Thank you. Thank you for the question. I will say that the limited time that we've had that technology, we've had some incidents that have really challenged our plans to make sure that they are effective and what types of of verbiage that we use. So I think since then we're even in a better place to, to determine not only what messages should say, but to also deconflict. The, the shooting incident was an interesting one because it wasn't localized to one area, it kept changing. And, and so trying to make sure that.

[2:37:01 PM]

>> That's a different shooting.

[2:37:02 PM]

>> I'm sorry.

[2:37:03 PM]

>> That's a different shooting.

[2:37:04 PM]

>> Oh, sorry. But yeah, but.

[2:37:06 PM]

>> It's still interesting example. Yeah.

[2:37:08 PM]

>> So the, I mean, and some of the key points that folks should understand is that when we send an ipaa message, it's, it's, it goes to the area based on cell towers. So there will always be bleed over way

beyond what it is that we're trying to, to, to do geographically. And, and for that, I'll just say that if we're going to air, we're going to on the side of overcommunicating, but also giving folks the location to where they can get more specific information based on that particular incident.

[2:37:38 PM]

>> Okay. So I'm looking at the who requests and who sends column and major crash was shut down. It could be a P, D, a, F, D or ems. And that's the only category in which fire or ems either requests or sends. And I still am wondering, I mean, what if there's a fire that is big enough? What if there's a wildfire? I'm just wondering why we're not seeing a F D have any other.

[2:38:14 PM]

>> I think that's I think that will be changed because fire and their staff have been trained on, on that. And so yes, it makes sense. We don't need to add another layer of bureaucracy to get those types of alerts out. So I think we can expect a change there.

[2:38:28 PM]

>> Okay, great. And then I've been long concerned about wildfire evacuation plans and how we would do staggered evacuation alerts to the community, especially on places like 620. I know the council member duchen shares that concern. So I think we'll just look for the updates that come in the next year.

[2:38:50 PM]

>> But certainly within before that. Yes.

[2:38:53 PM]

>> Okay. Well, you, sir, you got a lot done over that over the last year and a half for sure before we got our update. So I know you'll be working on it, whether it takes a while to get to our committee or not.

But I'll look forward to learning more about that when you're ready. And I think, why don't I pass it to you, Marc, and I'll see if I have any other questions. I might have, like one.

[2:39:13 PM]

>> Council member.

[2:39:14 PM]

>> Duchen thank you, chair. Thank you for the updates. Director. One thing I'm curious about, you know, everything and I appreciate all of the progress you all have made as as others have said, one thing I'm curious about is are you aware of other jurisdictions that also rely on like physical signage to get alerts out? Is there a way to leverage? I'm thinking of a couple of examples here. We've obviously got physical signs on some of our major freeways. We have these kiosks now that are being deployed around town. Is that something you all are investigating, or do you think has any merit for getting visibility on alerts out for people that may need to see it as opposed to, you know, get it on their phones?

[2:40:04 PM]

>> Yes, sir. No. Very, very interested in that. And again, I pause being just one tool, whether they're billboards, electric billboards or any other type of video boards, whether it's with a school or a house of worship, I mean, it's building those partnerships and, and really relaying to them the need to use every, every, every tool to get a word out.

[2:40:24 PM]

>> So if I understand you, there's not really anything like that in place. This is something that you might be invested.

[2:40:29 PM]

>> There's some and certainly through transportation, public works and some of their vendors, we've been working with them. And it's that request has been made before to get signage up. So it's, it's a matter of codifying that and making sure it's in our plan.

[2:40:43 PM]

>> Okay. I would be curious, just going forward, if you can share with me or with us some details about how that work is going in case, and maybe this is a broader conversation outside of the alert systems. And I realized maybe some of this is out of scope for today's briefing, but can you share with me what sort of other channels you're looking at or exploring to get notice out to people about emergency alerts or information they need to understand that's vital for public safety?

[2:41:11 PM]

>> Sure. Well, so our outreach team has pop ups all the time. We have various outreach events, but to your point, it's it's hard to reach people on a regular day like today, right? When there's so many competing priorities and disaster preparedness isn't one of them. So trying to do what we can to meet people where they are and coming up with strategies to do that, whether it's working with other departments who already have folks coming to the table for for whatever the need is, if we're able to partner with them and maybe use 5 or 10 minutes of the time that they have just to speak on the alerts and warnings myself, and then we answer questions and then leave, or we drop off pamphlets to whatever the organization is. I know the partner organizations within our Austin resilience network also, they're force multipliers and put mileage on our materials. So really trying to use every avenue because we know that a lot of folks who attend the events, they have obviously the resources and the time to do that. And there's just so many others that don't.

[2:42:11 PM]

So again, trying to trying to help those who have limited options is something that I'm very committed to doing.

[2:42:18 PM]

>> Yeah. I mean, part of my concern just lies in a couple of things that even we've experienced, which is, you know, depending on the nature of a, of a event, there might be an outage and people might not

have power to get something on their phones. Right. So I'm just trying to think about more broadly, the work you guys are doing to try and be as comprehensive as possible to address whether there edge cases or whether there are people that may, for whatever reason, not have or afford cell phones. What are the other tools in our toolbox we can be thinking of? Are you guys already working towards to try and get. Sir? Go ahead.

[2:42:55 PM]

>> Sure. Well, I said one of them is, is weather alert radios. And that's something that we do pass out at no cost to the residents while supplies last. And so that's again battery operated. It shouldn't matter if they have a power outage or not. That's just one more way that we get the message out. And and I should have said this before in terms of flash flooding, those types of incidents are so fast moving. I would hope people take advantage of the national weather service alerts when those go out, because that is that is the warning. We can't do anything faster than the weather service is. So when when those those messages go out, I really hope people will listen. And we'll continue to emphasize those messages.

[2:43:40 PM]

>> I appreciate that, and that maybe is piggybacks on the last question I've got, which is, you know, we try and encourage people to sign up for warrants to texas.com, but what other alerts you just mentioned that the national weather service, what other alerts should we be trying to encourage constituents to subscribe to it?

[2:44:03 PM]

>> I mean, obviously within their own county, whether it's hays county or or Williamson county, they all have their alert systems, right? So wherever they live, you would work. You would want them to sign up for their their respective alerts, because we do want to be cognizant of and sir, I believe you mentioned this in the past, alert fatigue. We don't want folks to get so many messages that it just becomes white noise, or they just choose to turn it off. So again, if if wherever they live, wherever they work, I would, I would hope that they would register for those alerts and then not opt out of, of the public safety alerts. And I pause.

[2:44:38 PM]

>> Okay, I appreciate that. That's all I've got. Thank you chair.

[2:44:42 PM]

>> I just want to thank you again for the work you've done in the last year and a half, and I look forward to any updates that come in the next year, but I know you'll be doing it whether we get a briefing immediately or not.

[2:44:54 PM]

>> So thank you, ma'am. It'll be sooner than a year from now, I guarantee you that.

[2:44:58 PM]

>> Thank you. Thank you, director colleagues. Next. Now we will take up item number five, which will be a briefing on wildfire prevention and mitigation strategies that are utilized by the city. And welcome, chief vocke.

[2:45:18 PM]

>> Good afternoon. Again, I'm joined here with chief David Skowron, who is the lead on our wildfire division. We have Kerry Stewart, who is our current fire marshal, and Yvonne Espinosa, who's our managing managing engineer at our fire prevention section. First of all, it's fire prevention week. And, you know, we're glad to be able to present started yesterday. And so this is a busy week for us. We all know that the the real key to life safety in the fire service is fire prevention. And so right now we're going to talk briefly about the wui code. And then we're going to talk a little bit about the management from from the actual wildfire division, as you all might remember, in 2021, actually in April of 2020, in an online meeting in the middle of covid, the city adopted the first wui code. So we became the first major city outside of California to adopt the wui code. And so with an implementation date of January of 2021. So we worked through that. We worked through a conservative adoption of the code. At that point, we were adopting the 2015 code at that point, because we had started this adoption as a part of a resolution from 2014. And so our first adoption was a conservative adoption of the 2015 wui code in in January 2021, when we put it into effect. Since then, we've adopted the code and we put the code on the regular adoption cycle with the rest of the codes that the city has. So right now, we're currently under the 2024 wildland urban interface code. Wildland urban interface code is a standalone code, but

since we have a fire code, we're able to adopt a very amended version of it because most of the things that are in the code are already covered by the fire code in a city like Austin. One of the things that we really focused on as a part of the wui code was ignition resistant construction. And I'm not sure if this is going to play. Let me see here. Do you know if we can get that video to play? All right. So we'll go on without the video. Really what the video shows is it shows the ember cast. One of the big things that's a concern when we're talking about wui code and we're talking about fire code in general is especially in wildfires. Is the ember cast. 90% of the fire spread from wildfires comes from the ember cast. Only about 10% comes from direct flame impingement. I know there's a big focus on what happens when you're right up against the green belt, but that's really just a small percentage. Only 10% of what the fire spread comes from is from that. And so one of the things that we did here in Austin that was pretty unique at the time was really focused on ignition resistant construction and ember protection as our primary means of protecting structures. And so we've we've done that. We've implemented it. We've worked really hard on it for the last, last five years since the code rolled out. We are in a spot where we've upgraded the code this time, and we're continuing to work on making things better again. One of the things we wanted to focus on is ignition

[2:48:19 PM]

resistant construction and hardening the structures that lasts for 20 years, whereas removing fuels and brush and trimming those things, while they're important, don't last because the stuff grows back in six months. So that work is the is the hardened structures and ignition resistant nature of all the building building components. You can see here that our plan reviews have gone up about 25% each year. And so each one of those plan reviews and inspections represents a structure that's protected in Austin. Now, obviously, you can see there's more inspections than there are plan reviews. That's because sometimes we require two inspections on on a single review. And so you can see through the years, you know, we've had a huge increase in the number of inspections and the number of plan reviews where, you know, we're probably going to get close to 4000 reviews for this year and, and probably close to 3500 to 4000 inspections. So again, some of this is controlled by how busy construction is in the area.

[2:49:19 PM]

And with home, home building slowing down a little bit, we will see a little bit of a slowdown, but we've had a massive response and we've really been able to protect a huge number of structures, both new construction and as things are remodeled. Some some recent updates to the wui code, you know, we, we did some updates that went into effect October 1st. And so we, what we do as a part of our code adoptions is we make sure that we're, we're continuing to do our stakeholder engagement and that, you know, over a six week period, we did multiple stakeholder meetings and a part of this as well. Now with the we because we're doing biannual stakeholder presentations and we code updates, making sure that we're, you know, collecting the questions, getting feedback on how the codes are working, not just for us, but for the builders and for the homeowners as well. Some of the recent inspections changes that

we got as a result of feedback were allowing digital submissions for reinspection, which was something that made it easier for the end user, and then also removing the requirement for a point of contact to be on site for, for inspections and for some of the inspections. What that does is allows the builder to not have to be at every inspection if we know what we're coming back for, to look at a site, we don't necessarily need somebody there. We can go there and conduct the inspection on our own, which is a big deal because it saves them from having to be, you know, if they have 20 inspections over a period of a week, it may save them 20 hours of time spent coming back to the site. So again, we continue to listen to what to what feedback we're getting from the community and from the builders.

[2:50:55 PM]

You can also see in the top corner here and in the picture what you know, what a homeund the house. The deck is protected. And you can see the idea from what we have in that layout there of what what we possibly can have and what can be done that helps protect the structure. So having that ignition zone around the structure that's that's clean and clear really helps reduce the likelihood of home ignitions. And so this is an ideal ideal outcome that we would have in an area where there's a week where we could exist. You know, we have burning of the of the fuels right up until we hit the noncombustible areas around construction. And we're able to, to the house survives with with no issues. So some of the future efforts and some of the things we're looking at, we're looking to continue the coordination. You know, we have goals within the division. You can see here this is an actual design of what we anticipate. A perfect wui wui garden would look like or wui escape. This was from uc Berkeley, a design contest that they had that would. What would the perfect wui code building look like and what would the landscape look like? So in Austin, we really have been focusing as as a city on, using less water on our landscapes and in combination, the wui landscapes and the drought resilient landscapes have a lot in common.

[2:52:17 PM]

So there is some some areas where we can build on, on, you know, other city regulations where they're looking at trying to use less water. And we're looking at trying to keep combustibles away from the buildings. There's some common ground there. You can see this is an actual great looking landscape. It's one of the feedback. One of the things we get feedback wise is that, you know, it's, it's ugly to have hardscape or, or, you know, minimal scape yards, but, you know, this is a design that shows that it's not, it's not always the case. And so we really want to work on bringing, you know, attractive wui implementation to the Austin area because we know that that's something that the community cares about. One of the other things that we have listed here is making sure that we have the right products in town and making sure that the, the, the home builder groups have the right materials they need. We've worked really hard to identify a criteria, manual and materials that are available in the area, but we need to increase that. We need to improve the flexibility that the builders have for being able to, to do what do what we want done, but also have the materials to do it without it being a heavy lift for them or

causing them delays in their construction or, or for homeowners to not be able to get the materials they need. So, you know, the design here where it shows the corrugated steel fence, you know, that's a that's an alternative that's not that much more expensive and lasts a lot longer than a wood fence. And so those are the kind of things we're looking for where we can really kind of leverage the things that are going on in the community, work with other areas. We did a lot early on with the green building program, because a lot of the things in the green building program and the wui code, like windows and doors really match. And so, you know, those are all areas we're looking to improve. We're always looking to continue to improve the code and make the code better for everyone involved. And I'm going to pass it on to chief Skowron now. And he's going to give us a little bit on the wildfire readiness side.

[2:54:03 PM]

>> Thank you, chief vocke David Skowron, division chief Austin fires wildfire division. Good afternoon. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the wildfire division and the efforts that we're engaging in to to reach out to the community. So creating community engagement is one of the focuses that we we do so we implement the national cohesive strategy, which is fire adapted communities, fire resilient landscapes, and effective firefighting. A large portion of both the fire adapted communities and the fire resilient landscapes is working on community engagement. So we have engaged over the last year, we've engaged in 55 community events, and we've got some going on this week, including three events tomorrow night for national night out. And then we've also got a fire adapted communities folks are presenting to the Austin youth council later this week. We've had nine educational presentations by the fire resilient landscapes group about fire resistant landscapes, educational events with different partners, including.

[2:55:05 PM]

Different landscaping organizations and educational partners. And then of course, this summer we. We co-hosted the Austin wildfire symposium with the Austin area firewise alliance. We've also engaged Austin communications and engagement in conducting a wildfire awareness campaign. It's expected to produce 12 million public impressions. And then we're engaging them. We've run through most of this year's marketing campaign for the wildfire awareness, and we're engaging them on analyzing the success of that and refining it so that we can continue that awareness campaign throughout 2028. And then we're hosting the inaugural Austin ember bash in November. November 7th is going to be the Virginia brown recreation center, and it's going to be a large scale, family friendly annual awareness event. We look to really educate the public on that, maintaining partnerships is something that we do. We do a significant amount of prescribed fire burns supporting different partners on that. So Austin water, Austin energy, U.S. Fish and wildlife service, and then Austin parks and recreation. In fiscal year 2026, we provided and tracked \$421,000 of.

[2:56:27 PM]

Prescribed fire burns. And no, I'm sorry on that one was actually that's a wildfire. Fuels mitigation projects. So that's that shaded fuel breaks. We anticipate providing and tracking about the same amount of, of money over this next fiscal year as well. We also engage as executive team leadership for the city county wildfire coalition. And we recently completed the county community wildfire protection plan. So we also do support for fire adaptive communities. Our fire adaptive communities team does a significant amount of work. They partner with the fire wise alliance to to put on a different educational pieces, where they teach members of the fire alliance on how to do structure ignition zone evaluations. And then we also do the members of that team do structure ignition zone evaluations. And so over the course of the last fiscal year, we've done 427 with them and our partners. We've facilitated three new community risk assessments and action plans.

[2:57:33 PM]

We have a total of 28 firewise communities, which is the most in any given city in in the state. There's just a little over 100 in the state. So we're looking at almost over a fourth of that getting close to about a third are within Austin. And then our fire adapted communities. Also, they're looking at different. They've created a number of different partnerships. Right now, they're working with Garza to do 28 presentations at 28 schools in the eastern crescent, all in Spanish. They've done four of those already. We've also looked at internal partners with them to increase the number of access that we could get to do these size of these structure ignition zone evaluations. So we routinely get requests for smoke alarm installs. And we've we've plugged in our fire adaptive communities, folks to do sizes along with those as well as we're working with the fire marshal's office to do wui code remodel inspections to go ahead and send our fire adaptive communities folks out, coordinating with them to do a size at that same time on that property. And then I know chief vocke mentioned that there's a lot of overlap between water wise landscaping and fire wise landscaping as well. And so we've made connections with Austin water. And just recently, our fire adaptive communities folks did a webinar where for their, their water wise webinar on water wise landscaping and how that coincides with fire wise landscaping. Our fire resilient landscaping team, they also. They, they, you know, they educate the public on, on how fire resilient landscapes work. And so they presented at nine public education training this year, and they've completed four community scale fuels risk evaluations, which is our land parcels in neighborhood associations, so forth. To go ahead and do a risk evaluation and provide information on what steps can be taken to mitigate that fuels risk. And then at the moment, we're also they've developed a training program to train service providers on how to do fire resilient landscaping, and then also home hardening actions to take. That class is scheduled to begin November 17th. And then the third, the third leg of the national cohesive strategy is effective firefighting. So the wildfire division's effective firefighting operations team.

[3:00:12 PM]

Those are we've got five sworn members who work within the wildfire division. They coordinate training for battalion five, which, as you know, does advanced wildfire training and is located in different geographic areas throughout the city to provide quick response to wildfires and advanced tactics. Additionally, they coordinate our deployments. Tiffin's deployments is one of the areas that we're where we get a significant amount of experience and training for our members to, to actually like work on the big one as, as you'll hear people say, we don't usually have large scale wildfires within Austin or in the county, but when they go out to places in Texas where you have these thousand acre wildfires, they get significant training on how to how to put into action the tactics that we're teaching them so that when we do have a large scale event within Austin or within the county, they'll be prepared.

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And it won't be the first time that they've done that before. We've done significant tifmas deployments this year, and then our our office also responds when they're they're available to respond, they'll respond and provide subject matter expertise at wildfires within the the region. Just recently on the Evelyn fire, they responded and they were able to map the fire with field maps and provide that information to the Texas forest service, allowing them to demobilize early. And then Austin also, or Austin fire also obviously participates in the protective action plan. Austin fire responsibilities for the protective action plan, the all hazards protective action plan, or obviously hazard mitigation. So fire suppression, water rescue, hazmat control. We'll also update field maps with information that then provides our dispatchers or our personnel at the eoc. Situational awareness, the ability to to do those Warren central Texas messages and those I pause messages for where the evacuations would be happening. They'll identify and coordinate evacuation, small to large scale. So we're training our folks to respond early on that, to identify that if we need an evacuation, that we need to get ahead of it as quickly as possible and will participate in that with the life safety, of course, being our highest priority. And then we request additional resources.

[3:02:38 PM]

So all our command elements are trained on how to request Texas forest assets, aviation assets, mutual aid and auto aid. And now I'll open it up for any questions.

[3:02:59 PM]

>> Sure. Let's go ahead. And he's going to show the video real quick. If y'all can show the video, that'd be great.

[3:03:04 PM]

>> And while they're doing that, I'd also give chief Stewart an opportunity to see if she has anything to say. Chief Stewart was previously over in the position that David has, and now she's currently the fire marshal. So she's kind of been over both sides of it. So it kind of gives us an opportunity to overlap and really combine things to some degree.

[3:03:23 PM]

>> The only thing I would add is just the coordination between the wildfire division and the fire marshal's office, just to make sure that we're aligning and we're making strides to that to get, as we do inspections in the field for the for the wui code, making sure that we're offering to that homeowner for the rest of their property, that structure ignition zone evaluation, so that we're not just approaching what's in the code or a size that we're offering those together. So better aligning the wildfire division with the fire marshal's office.

[3:03:51 PM]

>> Thank you.

[3:03:52 PM]

>> Yeah. So this is from the Parmer Laine fire in 2023 in cedar park. This started as a grass fire. And if you can imagine the different types of combustibles that would be on the balconies of an apartment complex, they did a great job of stopping this fire. And then as soon as it plays, we'll see the ember cast. You'll see it'll go to an an ir video and you'll see the the ember cast that is generated off of that apartment. So they did lose one apartment building, but you can see the ember cast. And just depending on how hard the wind is blowing, what that can do, you can also see bottom left of this video when it goes back to the ir. There's a bunch of hotspots there on the ground. Those are mulch beds. So this video also is part of an investigation that the Texas forest service did about this fire. So you'll see a bunch of hotspots there on the ground in front of some of the structures, those that's mulch beds that have embers that are there. So that's why we focus on that 0 to 5 foot area. And reducing or eliminating combustibles is so that we don't have areas where embers can land. And that could be something as insignificant seeming as a pile of leaves next to the house. So we focus on that area because we don't want embers to be able to, to light their get going and then kind of auto extend up the outside of the

house. So a really good visual for what we're talking about when we say that ember ignition zone and eliminating, whether it's through mandatory compliance with the wui code or voluntary compliance through the structure ignition zone evaluations. That's why we're we're working to minimize combustibles in that 0 to 5 foot area.

[3:05:38 PM]

>> Thank you all for sharing that video. That's very helpful. Glad to answer any questions.

[3:05:43 PM]

>> Yes. Thank you all so much for the presentation. I had one quick question before before I call for more questions on page six. You're talking about future efforts and resources. Do we have anything that shows the disparity between having wui scaping and xeriscaping versus watering a lawn for a year, and what the what the cost difference would be to maintain and just curiosity, just it.

[3:06:07 PM]

>> I don't think we have that, but that's actually a decent idea. I think that would be something worthwhile for us to put together.

[3:06:13 PM]

>> Yeah. And again, just strictly curiosity, especially to be able to show that, you know, by virtue of what you're planning in your front yard, not only can you save money, but you're also helping yourself out. Absolutely. And that was the only question I had. Thank you. Thank you colleagues. Council member duchen.

[3:06:26 PM]

>> Thank you, chair. Thank you for the presentation updates here. Good to see you, chief Stewart and chief Skowron. I had a couple of questions I wanted to follow up with. Some of these things are things that we've talked about at various times in the last year and a half, and some are just really responding

to the presentation. I was curious on slide four, that's the reviews and inspections per year. This is the first year that we've had more plan reviews and inspections. Any thoughts on why that's inverted for the first time?

[3:07:05 PM]

>> Just like we can have multiple inspections for a plan review, we can also have multiple reviews for a submission as well. So we we don't just reject plans when they're submitted. It might be that we need them to tweak something. So we'll send it back to them for a change and then a resubmission. So it can happen both ways that we might have one inspection for a given plan review or multiple inspections for review as well.

[3:07:29 PM]

>> Well, I just wanted to add that the inspections generally lag behind the reviews also. So you're not seeing the entire inspections for the amount of reviews that were done.

[3:07:41 PM]

>> So it's very likely by the end of the year and the final stats that we actually have significantly more inspections, like in prior years because of that. Okay. Thank you for explaining that. I know one thing that we've talked about in the past is whether there is what are the insurance implications of trying to incentivize homeowners to try and pursue fire active landscapes and home hardening and the different things that we've talked about in the presentation? Have you all any updates? Do you have any updates you can share with me about progress made in that space? I know I've talked to some associations that claim that they've done some of the some of the work in their properties and have received some insurance benefits. So just like the chair noted, I'm wondering if there are avenues we can use to reach people and say, hey, if these might be other ways that are to your benefit to make these changes.

[3:08:37 PM]

>> So we've met with Texas department of insurance multiple times over the last five years. When we first met with them, it was it was kind of eye opening for us because we felt that they had no engagement in this area at all. And at that same time, we were getting reports of members being or some of our citizens being denied renewals on their insurance policies. So we have hesitated to

guarantee anything because obviously the insurance industry controls itself and regulates itself. Obviously, you know, Texas, the Texas department of insurance does have some influence, but overall, we have not really developed a relationship at this point. We would be willing to promise much. We do mention that there could be some possible benefits, but we don't have any direct benefit, you know, proof across the board that we've been willing to share yet.

[3:09:25 PM]

>> Okay. Well, that's a place I'd like to continue to work with you all on to see if, if not TD, whether or not there are private insurers that might be able to, we may be able to work with or collaborate with to somehow incentivize homeowners to pursue some of these upgrades or changes that could also see a benefit on the on the insurance. I wanted to also find out about. Let's see, I wanted to also ask about. You mentioned training service providers. I think towards the end of the presentation, can you just elaborate on what the service providers you have in mind who are being trained?

[3:10:03 PM]

>> So one of the things that one of the pieces of feedback that we get pretty frequently is that from some folks in the public who, who do a structure ignition zone evaluation, they then don't know who to call to do the work or don't know. We've talked to them sometime later and they've said, yeah, well, I wasn't able to, to find anyone who could do the, the one eighth inch wire mesh that we've talked about for different open gable vents and so forth, those openings. So the intention there is to provide a class for service providers where they can have a certificate of completion that says that they went through this class. They understand the language of home hardening and what it is we're talking about. And then they know all the different requirements to do the work. They know that the, you know, we don't want any combustibles within the first five feet of a of a property. And that we do want that one eighth inch wire mesh and what's acceptable for that sort of thing. So that's, that's the intent behind the class. And then our fire resilient landscapes folks have been working with the office of economic development to, to go ahead and advertise that and try and get that out to as many people as possible.

[3:11:11 PM]

>> So these are civilians. These are builders, these are people that are.

[3:11:15 PM]

>> And handy handy persons, landscapers, that sort of thing. Eventually, I think what we're looking at maybe is, is two different tracks where we might have one that's a set of classes that's, that's more tailored toward landscaping, and then another set of classes that's more tailored toward, you know, the, your traditional handy handy people that sort of that sort of work.

[3:11:37 PM]

>> Okay. That helps. I obviously love to continue to hear how your efforts go to train and bring around awareness there. I know one thing that we struggled with in the past is sort of the, our awareness that we generate about wildfire prevention and preparedness tends to be associated with an emergency elsewhere. And national news, I'm curious if you guys are thinking about any strategies that work around that cycle or that, I mean, I hate to be, I hate to be that guy, but that, that, that even will leverage, you know, if there is a fire in the panhandle, central Texas, if there is a fire in California or Berkeley or wherever else that we can somehow seize on that to raise awareness here at a moment that people are paying attention to this issue in a way that they typically don't.

[3:12:29 PM]

>> So there's always kind of a balance of. Between fear and in in a legitimate respect for the risks that that that exist. Right. And we can see it in the data too. Last year within the office alone, we did over 600 structure ignition zone evaluation requests. And that was driven, we think, primarily because of the palisade fires at the end of the year, right? This year in Austin, we've had it's been much rainier than than before. But I would argue that that's the perfect year to have the wildfire symposium and so forth and put out the message that it's when the wildfire, when when we're putting out the central Texas message and the ipos that it's time to evacuate, that's it's too late to do the the home hardening and so forth that we need folks to do. So as far as we haven't really looked at capitalizing on all these different events throughout Texas where we have these like the Ross fire that's recently happened. But what we're really more focusing on is trying to get the message out in as many places as we can. So again, like I said, our fire adaptive communities folks, they're working with Austin resource recovery to put out messaging to have them put out their messaging water wise. Like I said, that's a partnership I'm really excited about because you spoke about incentivizing.

[3:13:55 PM]

I'm hoping that we can push the water wise landscaping and the fact that there's an incentive involved with that, but then also say, hey, it really coincides with the fire, smart landscaping, things that we want to do. And then, you know, there's basically we're really just trying to get the message out and then trying to find those opportunities where like working, coordinating with the fire marshal's office, where

someone's getting a remodel inspection for wui code, and we do the holistic thing. So they might not be thinking about the fact that they actually need to make some changes to their house because they are within the wui. But the house was built in 1980 or something like that. But we can go ahead and get that. We can make that connection there and get that information out at that time.

[3:14:41 PM]

>> Okay, that's all helpful, and I'll look forward to seeing how those plans develop or how you continue to build in those programs. I do want to piggyback a little bit on your comment, though, because I did have a question about the effort that we can potentially make as part of that. You know, you talk about the 28 neighborhoods or areas that are firewise adapted now, which is great. And I'm, I'm, I'm happy with that progress. I'd like to understand if you guys have done any analysis yet on identifying similar high risk communities that are in our area, our city, that could be or maybe we ought to be kind of gently nudging to be the next firewise adaptive communities. Is that is that analysis that we can do, and we can develop a program around.

[3:15:31 PM]

>> So we do. Historically, we have not done as good a job at getting the communities on the east east side, right. Involved in, in the the efforts for wildfire mitigation. So what we've we've done, we really have tried to focus on that this year. Like I said, our fire adaptive communities folks are working with Garza. And that's a partnership. I'm, I'm really, really excited about. They've done four presentations thus far. They've got 28 total that they're going to do the four presentations that they've done have been in Spanish. They're trying to reach segments of the community that we really haven't been able to reach with that messaging recently. Additionally, that was something that we focused our marketing campaign on, is to get some of these areas on the eastern side, because we do have a high wildfire risk in various parts of the east side of Austin, it's just a little bit of a different risk than the traditional what we've over the last 15 years or so associated with high wildfire danger, which is that kind of California landscape that you see on the west side of Austin.

[3:16:37 PM]

So we are focusing those efforts as far as doing a like a distinct analysis on on the neighborhoods. I know our, our gis folks have have identified the different areas where, where wildfire risk is. And so, like I said, we, we have targeted our marketing campaign to those areas and our fire adapted community folks are trying to get, you know, and again, that's part of the reason why we're doing the ember bash on the east side of Austin is we're trying to get more participation in those communities over there. And then our

fire adapted communities, folks are looking to reach anybody in Austin to get the message out for wildfire preparedness.

[3:17:18 PM]

>> I would just appreciate, continue to work with you on making sure that we can figure out where the gaps are, whether regardless of geography, in terms of risk or in terms of I totally appreciate that different areas of town have different risk factors, whether it's topography or grass fires or whatever they are. But to understand kind of where the gaps are, because this leads to the last question I've got, which is one of the maybe the single biggest challenge that I keep running into is that I've got some communities that work really hard. Some homeowners that work spend tremendous time and resources to become fire adapted, home hardening, brush pickup, all the things. But and maybe an entire community or maybe entire street that does a great job except for one holdout. And they become a weak link in that entire neighborhood. And we run into, obviously, private property rights and challenges around that. I'm curious, or I'd love to continue to work with you guys on figuring out with law or other resources how we can incentivize or otherwise solve that challenge, because that's probably the number one complaint I hear about from constituents to say, I've done all the things I can do to protect me, but and so is my street. But I've got these 1 or 2 neighbors that I've even offered to pay to do work on their property, and they just resist doing that work.

[3:18:44 PM]

>> That that is one of the, the big challenges. I know one of the things that we've tried to address, we've tried to find other areas where we can partner with some other work that is going on to get the structure, condition, zone evaluation put in front of, in front of our community members, just because there are oftentimes they don't know about it or it's just not something that they see as a concern. But if we're showing up at the door because there's another service that's being provided. And again, this is where I point to our our work with the fire marshal's office on the code inspections. And then also our smoke alarm installs. We get lots of folks who reach out to the Austin fire department because they want to smoke alarm install. So we've started sending our fire adaptive community folks with our fire engines that go out and do those smoke alarm installs. And then that community member, they, they're there and they're willing to offer this free service. We don't get turned down very often on that. Whereas sometimes over the phone, someone may not quite understand what's going on and we will get turned down. So that's, that is definitely a council member. I guess I'll say I wholeheartedly agree is this is a difficult challenge.

[3:19:56 PM]

And this this is how we're looking for these ways that we can partner, we can find ways to provide this service. In a way where maybe it's not something that the community members are thinking about.

[3:20:09 PM]

>> And I appreciate that, and I'm glad to hear you guys are working on it to try and be creative. I just want to reemphasize that that's one of the, as you well know, that's one of the biggest challenges I continue to run into.

[3:20:20 PM]

>> Councilmember, I just add one thing to that. One of the things we explored early on in the adoption of the code is, is the use of the property maintenance code as a as a possible use. It's just very it's very difficult to do. And the process is very long. It takes a lot of effort. So that is something we could potentially explore down the road is using property maintenance code. But it's so limited in Texas. And you know, property rights are property rights. But I think that would be the method that we would have to do if we get to somebody that's completely resistant of, of everything else we would offer.

[3:20:49 PM]

>> Okay, that's I know nothing about how that's the first time I've heard that suggestion. So yeah, if we can visit further about that at some point or understand how that would work, that could be really useful. Thank you all.

[3:21:02 PM]

>> Vice chair.

[3:21:05 PM]

>> Our questions are adjacent, but but still distinct. And I think I'll start. If you're talking about the stick, I'll I'll ask about the carrot. I'm wondering what kind of support we can offer private landowners for fuel mitigation. I can add a little bit more on to give you some more options about where to start. You know,

we, we often hear in our office from hoa's, and sometimes they're concerned about hoa owned land and they don't even know where to start in dealing with it. And sometimes they are hearing from individual homeowners who, you know, are concerned and are looking for, for what they can do. And so I know our office would love it, love being able to point them towards some sort of a resource that can explain what is available to hoa's to homeowners. But I also think that, you know, as far as the questions that we were just having, I think it's probably a far more common scenario that someone doesn't have the resources or the capacity to, to make these improvements versus someone's offered to come and do it for them and pay for it, and they still don't want it type of scenario. So knowing what the resources are has lots of different applications, right?

[3:22:26 PM]

>> So, you know, I would say as far as pointing someone in the right direction, as far as like a homeowners association or so forth, I would definitely point them to the Austin, Texas wildfire hub. If they contact our office, we can certainly get them involved with the firewise alliance. And becoming a firewise community is one of those steps. They don't have to go the entire route. That's kind of what our our fire adapted communities folks really engage with is that you don't have to do all the things that are involved, because there are quite a few steps involved with becoming a firewise community, but you don't necessarily have to do all of them. You just have to have a group of homeowners who are willing to, to do the work. And we're more than happy to come out and provide some guidance on what that work is as far as providing resources, that's one of the benefits of us going through the revision of the cap. The community wildfire protection plan is that it has some opportunities to allow different communities to be able to apply for grants and so forth. As far as details on that, I don't have anything kind of right in front of me that I could provide you, but I'd be happy to work with you on on looking at what the options would be for different neighborhood associations and so forth, to utilize the cap to look into grants.

[3:23:41 PM]

>> Okay.

[3:23:41 PM]

>> Thank you. And is there a map or a list somewhere of the firewise communities?

[3:23:50 PM]

>> I'm trying to think if we have one exactly on the wildfire hub or not.

[3:23:54 PM]

>> I don't think we have one on the hub, but the we could check the coalition webpage, but we we could there's a list in the wildfire office that we could provide for sure.

[3:24:06 PM]

>> We could definitely provide one for you.

[3:24:07 PM]

>> Okay, that'd be great. And it might also be helpful to have it publicly accessible because, you know, a little friendly competition between some of the different neighborhoods type of thing. Yes. We come from a little bit of a type a family over here. Okay. So. You know, we heard about a lot of different types of inspections and approaches to improving the hardening against wildfire. I'm wondering, do y'all have any specific metrics for success of these programs for measuring whether we're doing we're making fast enough progress or we need to pick up the pace to get to our goals, that sort of thing.

[3:24:50 PM]

>> So, so to this point, you know, we've been trying to get the code up and running. I think we're getting to a point now where we can really start, you know, looking. And we have it was so widespread before and, you know, it was in new neighborhoods where we knew, okay, this is all new development. This is all code covered. But as we've been in five years now, we're starting to get a wider, wider aspect of, of, you know, code being introduced in different areas. And, you know, initially the commercial property wasn't initially on right away in January, it took us a little while to get the commercial properties up and rolling. So I think we're probably at a point now where we can start evaluating some of those things. We really haven't done a lot of evaluation up to this point. We've just been trying to get things right sized.

[3:25:31 PM]

>> Okay.

[3:25:31 PM]

>> Yeah. I mean, I feel like it's probably just the beginning of the moment for the program, but at some, maybe by the time we get our update next year, having shifted to not just measuring number of inspections and number of each type of initiative that have been completed, but also coverage and coverage overlaid with risk would be great to start to see. And then I'll stop asking all the math questions to thank you.

[3:26:03 PM]

>> Thank you all. Acm Batista. I wanted to make a comment before we close.

[3:26:24 PM]

>> Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Council members, I just wanted to add that say, thanks to the public safety groups and the presentations that they made today. I think one of the advantages that I have from sitting on the side and listening to you and your questions and concerns, is that I'm observing them from a position over there where I'm looking at my presentation and I'm processing your questions. So I just want you to know that from that, I take a lot of notes and I go back and have individual meetings with the department. So so for example, one of the things that caught my attention, councilmember duchen, you were talking about, I think txdot messaging boards, when you were asking the question to director Reddick. I totally agree with you because I've seen that in other states as well. And I definitely see the opportunity with the number of kiosks that we're going to have in the downtown area, to be able to use that in messaging opportunities in the future. So when I have that opportunity to have that one on one discussion with the director, we'll talk about those different ways to to reach those communities that way. But I also was thinking about social media next door for the neighborhoods as well as I imagine that a city our size has access to a number of email groups to be able to contact the neighborhoods directly. And lastly, I just want to say that with respect to the fire department, I've been so impressed with their organizational skills around the issues of Wu Huy, and their willingness to be collaborative and look at the totality of options that are out there in order to mitigate and prevent wildfire in our in our larger Austin area. I just recently came obviously from the los Angeles area and saw firsthand the devastation of ember casting and what it can do. So I'm very attuned to the work that they're doing and very supportive of them as well.

[3:28:29 PM]

Like I said, a very, very professional group. And with that, I just want to see if you guys have any questions of the public safety portfolio that I could take now and again, thank you for having the opportunity to be able to talk about the wui this afternoon.

[3:28:44 PM]

>> No questions. Colleagues, thank.

[3:28:47 PM]

>> Thank you for those comments. I have already received a map of firewise communities. I don't know if it's accurate with what you all have, but we'll be sending it your way.

[3:28:57 PM]

>> Lastly, I did want to say this is that as we update some of these plans and efforts, I encourage the chiefs and the directors to meet with you individually so that it doesn't have to be a situation, that it has to wait, you know, X number of months or the turn of the year to be able to come back and update the council and certainly for the public safety committee, if there is a request to have it done sooner, we can definitely do that. But at an individual level, if you have a question or you want something updated, just let me know in. The directors and chiefs are always very willing to meet with you in person.

[3:29:34 PM]

>> Thank you.

[3:29:37 PM]

>> Colleagues. That brings us to item number six. Identify items for future meetings. Does anyone have anything that they want to daylight. If not, you're welcome to reach out to me. And sorry about it.

[3:29:48 PM]

>> I'll just reiterate that I know that council member Laine and I were working on the facilities item that I think I shared with you before we started, so look forward to that one. Thank you.

[3:29:59 PM]

>> Members. There's no further business to come before the public safety committee of the Austin city council. Without objection, this meeting is adjourned at 330. Thank you everyone.