

April 17, 2025

To: Tom Gray, Chair, Fire Protection Committee

From: Tony Safford and Art Chapman, Ad Hoc Committee on Outreach and Fire Protection Committee Members

Re: Recommendations on Outreach

RECOMMENDATIONS ON A PUBLIC OUTREACH STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
ORDINANCE NO. 01-205 AND THE FIRE HAZARD FUEL REDUCTION PROGRAM

Congratulations to the CCSD for passing the Ordinance No.01-2025 (hereafter the “Ordinance) giving our Fire Chief the authority to inspect both developed and undeveloped lots with regard to weed abatement. Taken together with Fire Hazard Fuel Reduction Program (hereafter “FHFRP”) and its broader definition of hazard abatement we’re confident that the Cambria Fire Dept now has the reach and authority to dramatically reduce fire threats throughout our community. Thank you.

Publicly presenting the Ordinance and the FHFRP as separate legal documents however is problematic. As stand-alone texts, each is vague and confusing; referring to other codes and ordinances without providing those documents; they are often open to interpretation by homeowners and even by the Fire Chief himself. In short, documents are a challenge for public understanding and let alone compliance.

Unintentionally, the CCSD’s transparency (in sharing the two documents) actually creates opacity (in that they are difficult to comprehend). And nowhere we might add are there Spanish-language versions of the documents.

But now with the success of Chief Burkey’s Community Emergency Preparedness Meetings the community is primed for action and empowerment. Going forward his concepts of neighborhood liaisons and networks are mechanisms by which we can come together and have a serious discussion in a coherent way and decide collectively what we need to do. In anticipation we must craft the mitigation message in such a way that it is clear, authentic, and *community-generated* rather than agency dictated.

The ad hoc committee therefore cautions against strict enforcement of mitigation particularly on developed properties without first making concerted outreach efforts to

meet with the community – including the Hispanic community - to seek buy-in and consensus. Messages urging compliance that come from the top down generally fail. Worse, messages *requiring* compliance through citations and fines will be met with resentment and push back.

For Cambria homeowners to accept – and even welcome – the Ordinance and FHFRP, we recommend that the Fire Dept:

- 1) Combine the salient points of the Ordinance and FHFRP into one single holistic bullet-point document, free of legalese, understandable to the layperson. We are puzzled why such easily understood concepts as “defensible space” and “Zone Zero” are not currently incorporated.
- 2) Circulate it along with the attached NFPA “Reducing Wildfire Risks in the Home Ignition Zone” brochure to all home and property owners with a cover note from Chief Burkey clearly stating expectations (and timelines) of the Ordinance and FHFRP.
- 3) Introduce the Ordinance and FHFRP at the neighborhood meetings planned by the Fire Chief. Continue to encourage neighbors themselves to embrace the value of wildfire mitigation (and even adopt their own strategies and messaging in doing so). Stress that you are seeking cooperation rather than citation.
- 4) Restage the Community Emergency Preparedness meetings in Spanish for the Hispanic community, including Spanish-language versions of the Ordinance, FHFRP and relevant printed materials.
- 5) Continue to support the Red Cross and its Homeowners Wildfire Preparedness Program which covers virtually the same ground but without the legislative stick. FYI the Red Cross received over 60 sign-ups for home inspection and will commence this work in late April.
- 6) Continue to work with the public-facing Cambria Fire Safe Focus Group to amplify the importance of the Ordinance and FHFRP and seek community support and consensus.
- 7) Seek funding as needed for the above-mentioned points through, for example, CalFire or Listos grants.
- 8) Approach our local organizations (e.g. our community focused and faith-based groups) for funding and/or volunteers to assist low-income homeowners who cannot afford required mitigation and elderly homeowners unable to complete such tasks.

- 9) Continue at pace with its current – and very successful – annual weed abatement program on undeveloped lots.

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the essential work of the CCSD and Cambria Fire Department in particular.