

## **MOTION**

### **Enhancing and Strengthening Los Angeles County's Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Planning**

Like all of California, Los Angeles, and particularly Sunland-Tujunga and the greater San Fernando Valley, face unprecedented dangers from our state's "trifecta" of natural disasters, wildfire, flooding, and earthquake. The dangers of wildfire and flooding continue to worsen as a combination of climate change, misguided (in retrospect) forestry management and development policies, and other direct and indirect factors. Our community has endured multiple wildfires, including two of the largest in L.A. history, the 2017 Creek and 2018 La Tuna fires, as well as resultant mud slides. With each passing year the likelihood of a significant earthquake increases. In addition to these "out of nowhere" dangers we must also reckon with new, long-term dangers like increased periods of extreme heat and drought and extreme weather in general.

These dangers are highlighted in a report issued by the Los Angeles County Department of Sustainability (CDS) in October 2021, "LA County Climate Vulnerability Assessment<sup>1</sup>." This document lays out the current and future risks to all Angelenos. It includes some two dozen maps of specific areas and communities at risk for wildfire, inland flooding, coastal flooding, extreme heat, and other hazards that pose threats to life, property, and sustainability. Sunland-Tujunga has many such areas.

Reports like this one, along with hard experience over the last decade, leave no doubt that the City and County have a long way to go before we can consider ourselves prepared for the next significant natural or humanmade disaster. Neighborhood Councils, as the elected bodies closest to residents, can take a leading role in pushing for preparedness.

In our community, during the Creek and La Tuna evacuations in several places bogged down into near gridlock. Fortunately no human life was lost, though 40 horses perished when a rancher was unable to reach her property in time. Likewise, during 2018's Woolsey Fire, the biggest in L.A. history, evacuations were uncoordinated and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ceo.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/LA-County-Climate-Vulnerability-Assessment-1.pdf?utm\\_content=&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_name=&utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_term=](https://ceo.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/LA-County-Climate-Vulnerability-Assessment-1.pdf?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=)

chaotic, with much of the West Side slowing to a crawl as tens of thousands fled. The after-action report prepared for this Board by Citygate Associates, LLC<sup>2</sup> described the dynamic nature of evacuations, including detours, necessitated by the fast-moving inferno. The authors noted in particular that the effort to evacuate a quarter million County residents “may not be reproducible as, in the early hours, there was not a clear, single, comprehensive voice speaking to evacuation, and not all notification tools were used or used often enough.” This kind of situation could easily play out in our part of the City.

These have been the warning shots. The Camp Fire in Paradise was another one. Over the Fourth of July weekend in 2018 a strong regional earthquake reminded us of our vulnerabilities yet again. And in January 2022 we were reminded that tsunami is a potential hazard.

We have gotten relatively lucky so far. However, if the City and County do not act decisively and quickly to update, upgrade, and modernize our emergency response systems and procedures it is only a matter of time before tragedy strikes. This is especially true when it comes to evacuations, where the County, like dozens of others throughout the state, is frighteningly unprepared. Public safety is the first obligation of public service. We have no time to waste.

### **Los Angeles is in Good Company**

Over the last five years many California counties have taken deep looks at their emergency preparedness plans, particularly evacuation routes and procedures. The efforts include formal civil grand jury investigations, which have occurred in nearly half the state’s counties, as well as expert third part analyses like the Woolsey after action report, academic studies, and news media investigations.

Collectively these efforts reveal the distressing degree to which communities throughout California are unprepared for the inevitable. A recurring theme is significant and often potentially catastrophic shortcomings in evacuation planning and infrastructure. Other issues include significant gaps in emergency alert systems and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/Citygate-After-Action-Review-of-the-Woolsey-Fire-Incident-11-17-19.pdf>

communications and poor coordination plans between and among different cities, counties, and agencies.

In 2018 we could never have foreseen such a confluence of events. In 2022 we have no excuse to be unprepared, and as noted the dangers will only get worse in the near term. Indeed the issue is more immediate than ever.

As we enter the 2022 peak wildfire season, here in Sunland-Tujunga it is essential that residents understand evacuation conditions and constraints. We still have not fully evaluated evacuations in 2017 and 2018 or learned from them. It is therefore urgent that steps be taken to fill in those gaps in our knowledge. We must ensure our community is prepared for the next emergency before it happens. We still have time.

**Motion**

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Sunland Tujunga Neighborhood Council formally request that the 2022-2023 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury prepare an investigative report into the state of evacuation preparedness. The 2021-2022 Grand Jury final report included an investigation entitled, "Only We Can Prevent L.A. County Wildfires," which evaluated the status of the county's wildfire work farms. An evaluation of evacuation routes and constraints is a next logical step.

I FURTHER MOVE that the STNC form a standing Wildfire Working Group. The Group's first task will be to study evacuation routes, constraints, and procedures in Sunland Tujunga. The Group will interface with our local fire personnel and CalFire/Forestry Department personnel as appropriate. The Group will report back to the full STNC no later than October with findings and recommendations.

I FURTHER MOVE that the STNC invite representatives from the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) to join our August meeting to discuss emergency preparedness, particularly evacuation planning.

I FURTHER MOVE that the STNC calendar follow-up meetings with LAFD regularly, and no less than once per quarter, to ensure we remain up to date on relevant information, which we will disseminate in the community.

PRESENTED BY:

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SECONDED BY:

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