

Attachment B

Proposed Response to the 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report



NEWPORT BEACH FIRE DEPARTMENT

100 CIVIC CENTER DRIVE, P.O. Box 1768, NEWPORT BEACH, CA 92660

PHONE: 949-644-3355 WEB: www.newportbeachca.gov

JEFF BOYLES
Fire Chief

DATE: July 14, 2026

RE: Response to the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury Report "Wildfires Hit Home"

FROM: City of Newport Beach

BACKGROUND

Due to the increased risk posed by wildfires in California, the Orange County Grand Jury issued a report, "Wildfires Hit Home," which aims to: (1) identify the shared responsibilities of local governments and fire service agencies, communities and homeowners to reduce the risk of wildfire in the wildland-urban interface, (2) investigate the status of actions taken by the California legislature and Department of Insurance to provide relief to policyholders, and (3) inform communities and homeowners on home hardening, defensible space, insurance risk reduction, and wildfire safety awareness.

Eighteen of the twenty most destructive fires in California state history have occurred since the year 2000, including the twelve deadliest fires in California state history. These statistics prove that something has changed in the past thirty years. Wildfires are not only occurring more frequently, but they are also more destructive than in years past. The frequency and intensity of wildfires have escalated due to prolonged droughts, rising temperatures, and development encroachment into wildland-urban interface areas. Catastrophic losses from these wildfires have resulted in a continuing insurance crisis.

The Grand Jury report required responses from several Orange County Agencies, including responses from the City of Newport Beach to the following:

- Findings: F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, F-6
- Recommendations: R-2, R-3, R-4

RESPONSES TO GRAND JURY REPORT FINDINGS

Finding F-1: More frequent and severe wildfires driven by increasingly hotter, drier, and windier conditions in the Orange County wildland-urban interface are escalating impacts on financial and non-financial resources. Among the financial costs are dramatic increases in homeowners' insurance premiums, non-renewals, and inabilities to obtain insurance.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: The City of Newport Beach maintains a proactive, long-standing commitment to wildfire mitigation. For more than 20 years, the City has established and rigorously maintained extensive fuel modification zones, particularly within the Newport Coast area.

As escalating wildfire risks continue to impact both the state economy and the financial well-being of Newport Beach residents, the City actively collaborates with diverse regional and industry partners to mitigate these hazards. These ongoing efforts are designed to reduce local wildfire risk, enhance community resilience, and support the continued insurability of local homes. Most recently, the City partnered with a modern insurance brokerage to directly assist residents facing increasing premiums or policy non-renewals due to localized wildfire risk.

Finding F-2: Actions that address conditions in the home ignition zone to significantly reduce ignition potential can prevent a community wildland-urban interface fire disaster or suburban conflagration.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: The City of Newport Beach concurs that managing the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) is one of the most critical and effective actions homeowners can take to mitigate wildfire risk. Empirical research and scientific testing have proven that proper HIZ maintenance significantly reduces the risk of home ignition caused by ember cast during a wildfire event. To embed this critical practice within the community, the city conducted an extensive public outreach campaign, hosting more than 40 meetings with various community stakeholder groups. These targeted engagements included Homeowners Associations (HOAs), the Chamber of Commerce, and local real estate associations, and were specifically designed to elevate awareness of the Home Ignition Zone as a primary focus for local wildfire resilience and risk reduction.

Finding F-3: Expanded engagement with the community to raise awareness and provide support regarding home hardening and defensible space will increase effectiveness of wildfire risk mitigation and insurance risk reduction efforts.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: Robust community engagement is vital to empowering residents with the knowledge required to systematically reduce structural and vegetative vulnerability ahead of a wildfire event. To move beyond generalized hazard mapping, the City of Newport Beach utilized advanced XyloPlan modeling technology to analyze local fire pathways and evaluate specific risk exposure down to the individual parcel level. The City is actively leveraging the data-driven insights from this localized analysis to educate individual homeowners on high-impact, property-specific risk reduction strategies. Successful wildfire mitigation programs use data to shift from activity-based to outcome-based thinking to prioritize mitigation resources. Furthermore, by equipping residents with the Wildfire Prepared Home Standard developed by the Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety, the City provides a clear, science-backed framework. This ensures that localized home-hardening and defensible space efforts are directly aligned with the objective underwriting expectations of the insurance industry, supporting long-term community resilience and property insurability.

Finding F-4: Achievement of community-level and property-level wildfire risk mitigation designations (such as Firewise USA Site, Fire Risk Reduction Community or Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety certification) lessens wildfire risk and helps reduce insurance premium costs.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: The City of Newport Beach strongly supports comprehensive wildfire and community risk reduction across all operational levels. In executing these programs, the city maintains a critical strategic distinction between administrative activity and measurable outcomes.

To date, Newport Beach has successfully established the Newport Beach Fire Safe Council and secured Firewise USA designations for four local communities, all of which remain in good standing. The city recognizes that achieving these organizational designations does not independently lower localized wildfire risk; rather, they serve as foundational frameworks. While establishing these community-led structures constitutes a necessary and vital precondition for success, the City views them as a starting point rather than the ultimate destination. True risk reduction is realized only through

continuous, physical implementation of home-hardening and defensible space standards across every parcel.

Finding F-5: All county residents should be made aware that Safer from Wildfire regulation requires insurers to provide discounts to homeowners and communities that implement home hardening and defensible space measures regardless of whether a property is located within a Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: The City of Newport Beach actively promotes and disseminates information regarding the California Department of Insurance "Safer from Wildfires" regulatory framework. In an environment of escalating property insurance costs, the ability for property owners to secure mandatory premium discounts serves as a highly effective mechanism to incentivize localized physical risk reduction.

The City maintains that broad, transparent communication regarding these financial incentives is essential at the local, regional, and state levels. By linking physical mitigation measures, such as structure hardening and defensible space compliance, directly to insurance cost relief, public agencies can effectively drive the widespread homeowner action necessary to achieve meaningful, community-wide wildfire resilience.

Finding F-6: AB888, California Safe Homes Grant Program, provides financial assistance to eligible homeowners, cities, counties, and special districts for home hardening and defensible space measures. Applying for and using these grant funds will reduce wildfire losses and improve insurability and resilience of vulnerable communities.

The City of Newport Beach agrees with the finding.

Response: The City of Newport Beach recognizes that external grant funding is an essential tool to expand community-wide resilience, bridging the gap for homeowners who face financial constraints when enacting critical wildfire mitigation measures. Securing and executing these state and federal funds directly enhances localized hazard reduction efforts.

Currently, the City is actively utilizing a grant awarded through the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) Wildfire Prevention Grants Program, funded by California Climate Investments. This targeted funding is being deployed to execute critical fuel reduction and brush-thinning operations within Buck Gully. By addressing ladder fuels and accumulated

biomass, this project is specifically designed to suppress ground fire intensity and establish an essential buffer to protect adjacent residential structures.

RESPONSES TO GRAND JURY REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation R-2:

By December 31, 2026, cities and fire service agencies, including Orange County Fire Authority should commit to participation in a county-wide annual wildfire prevention fair planned by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to showcase wildfire prevention outreach programs.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

Summary/Explanation:

The City of Newport Beach remains actively committed to participating in annual wildfire prevention fairs to showcase its public outreach and mitigation programs. The City would be willing to participate should the Orange County Board of Supervisors host an event. Notably, the City collaborates with the Irvine Ranch Conservancy Wildfire Prevention Symposium, a comprehensive countywide event dedicated to addressing wildfire mitigation, public education, and strategic partnerships aimed at reducing regional wildfire risk.

Recommendation R-3:

By December 31, 2026, cities, unincorporated areas, special districts, and fire service agencies in High and Very-High Fire Hazard Severity Zones should initiate planning activities to achieve community-level wildfire risk mitigation designations and/or establish a local Fire Safe Council within one year.

The recommendation has been implemented.

Summary/Explanation:

The City of Newport Beach has successfully established a local Fire Safe Council and currently maintains four recognized Firewise USA Communities in good standing. We will continue to evaluate additional programs to support community-level wildfire risk.

Recommendation R-4:

By December 31, 2026, to ensure city residents are engaged and aware of wildfire risk reduction resources, OCFA member and non-member cities should provide information, develop their own outreach program, and establish a direct contact person(s) for their residents. This is in addition to whatever referrals or references made to OCFA outreach programs.

The recommendation has been implemented.

Summary/Explanation:

The City of Newport Beach and the Newport Beach Fire Department have established a comprehensive public outreach program, hosting multiple educational events annually. Furthermore, a dedicated Deputy Fire Marshal is formally assigned as the direct point of contact for residents regarding these wildfire safety initiatives.