CITY OF

NEWPORT BEACH

City Council Staff Report

July 14, 2026
Agenda Item No. 10

TO:	HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
FROM:	Jeff Boyles, Fire Chief - 949-644-3101, jboyles@nbfd.net
PREPARED BY:	Justin Carr, Assistant Fire Chief - 949-644-3040, jcarr@nbfd.net Raymund Reyes, Administrative Manager - 949-644-3352, rreyes@nbfd.net
TITLE:	Response to the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury Report "Wildfires Hit Home"

ABSTRACT:

The 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) report "Wildfires Hit Home" investigates the increase in wildfires throughout the State of California and mitigation and response efforts. It addresses community education and outreach, insurance costs and regulations, and the responsibilities of local governments and fire service agencies in reducing the risk of wildfire in the wildland-urban interface. The report includes a commendation to the City of Newport Beach (City) for its dedication to the highest level of fire protection and safety.

Per California Penal Code Sections 933, the Grand Jury requires (or, as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in the report. Responses must be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on or before August 19, 2026. The Newport Beach Fire Department agrees with and supports all findings and recommendations contained in the Grand Jury report and prepared a formal response for City Council approval and submission.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

a) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) and 15060(c)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines because this action will not result in a physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly; and

b) Approve the Newport Beach Fire Department's response to the 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report, "Wildfires Hit Home," authorize the Mayor to sign the cover letter, and authorize the Fire Chief to finalize and submit the response on behalf of the City of Newport Beach to the Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court.

DISCUSSION:

The 2025-2026 Grand Jury recently completed an investigation into the increase in California wildfires in wildland-urban interface areas, fire insurance coverage, and the insurance industry, and the actions of various fire service agencies and communities in risk reduction and fire prevention. The resulting report, "Wildfires Hit Home," was issued on May 19, 2026.

Based on analyses of historical data, government legislation, and the actions and responses of public agencies and communities, the Grand Jury issued six findings:

- **F1**: 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 (especially with regards to home insurance) and non-financial resources.

- **F2**: Actions addressing conditions in the home ignition zone that can significantly reduce ignition potential can prevent a community wildland-urban interface fire disaster.

- **F3**: Expanded community engagement regarding home hardening and defensible space increases the effectiveness of wildfire risk mitigation and insurance risk reduction efforts.

- **F4**: Community-level and property-level wildfire risk mitigation designations (e.g. Firewise USA) lessens wildfire risk and helps reduce insurance premium costs.

- **F5**: All Orange 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 or not a property is located within a Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

- **F6**: Assembly Bill (AB) 888, the 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 Grand Jury proposed four recommendations based on these findings:

- **R1**: By December 31, 2026, the Orange County Board of Supervisors should plan to host a county-wide annual wildfire prevention for the county and all cities and fire service agencies.

- **R2**: By December 31, 2026, cities and fire service agencies should commit to participation in the county-wide annual wildfire prevention fair.

- **R3**: 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.

- **R4**: By December 31, 2026, OCFA member and non-member cities should provide information, develop their own outreach program, and establish a direct contact person(s) for their residents to ensure residents are engaged and aware of wildfire risk reduction resources.

The Grand Jury also issued two commendations; one to Yorba Linda Water District, and one to the Newport Beach Fire Department. The Grand Jury recognized the outstanding efforts of the City's fire department in fire protection and safety, and for being a role model for other cities in Orange County and elsewhere. The commendation also noted the department's designation as a Class 1 fire agency from the Insurance Service Office in 2024 and the Fire Prevention Division's leadership for their extensive knowledge of fire science.

Per California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requires (or, as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in the report no later than 90 days from the publication of the report. Given the May 19, 2026, publication date, responses must be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on or before August 19, 2026. The City of Newport Beach is required to provide responses for all six findings and recommendations R2, R3 and R4.

The Fire Department agrees and supports all findings and the three recommendations issued by the Grand Jury report. The prepared response addresses each finding and recommendation, detailing the City's long-standing efforts in wildfire-prevention and mitigation, community engagement, and furtherance of programs that promote community risk reduction. This includes the establishment of a local Fire Safe Council, maintaining four recognized Firewise USA Communities, utilization of grant funding to supplement fuel mitigation efforts, constant community education, and use of fire fuel modeling technology. Staff is requesting City Council approval of the prepared response for submission to Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact related to this item.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Staff recommends the City Council find this action is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Sections 15060(c)(2) (the activity will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment) and 15060(c)(3) (the activity is not a project as defined in Section 15378) of the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3, because it has no potential for resulting in physical change to the environment, directly or indirectly.

NOTICING:

The agenda item has been noticed according to the Brown Act (72 hours in advance of the meeting at which the City Council considers the item).

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury Report “Wildfires Hit Home”
Attachment B – Proposed Response to the 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report
Attachment C – Draft Cover Letter to the Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court