



# Oakland Wildfire Prevention Assessment District Frequently Asked Questions

## Programs:

### 1. What does the assessment pay for?

The District would continue and/or expand Goat Grazing, Yard Waste Disposal, Vegetation Management, CORE Training and Fire Prevention Education, and Roving Fire Patrols. These programs focus specifically on reducing the threat and spread of wildland fires to your parcel and the parcels located within the boundaries of the assessment district. These services are only provided to properties within the District.

- **Goat Grazing**—Herds of goats clear the excess brush and grasses that allow fires to spread rapidly. The goats remove vegetation from Joaquin Miller Park, Knowland Park, Gateway Gardens, King Estates Park and other large public open space areas within the assessment district boundaries. 350 acres are cleared annually.
- **Reduction of Excess Brush, Grasses and Other Fuels**— In areas where goats are not able to graze, other vegetation reduction and management would be provided within the District. These areas include 650 acres of City-owned open space and canyon hill parcels, and roadside clearance along the public streets, paths, firebreaks and escape routes. Additionally, fire companies and vegetation management inspectors conduct private property inspections to identify properties in violation of the Oakland Fire Code. The inspectors notify non-compliant property owners and after conducting re-inspections, non-compliant property owners will be charged the cost of having City crews or private contractors bring the private property back into compliance.
- **Yard Waste Disposal**— This new program will assist private property owners by providing a convenient way to dispose of tree branches, brush and other yard waste that can fuel fires. The City will provide crews to process property owners' yard waste into wood chips or mulch for the owner's use or otherwise dispose of it.
- **CORE Training and Fire Prevention Education** — The District's program adds training on wildfire awareness and develops and distributes wildland fire evacuation route information for neighborhoods and schools.
- **Roving Fire Patrols**— This program will provide additional fire patrols to monitor properties within the boundaries of the assessment district during high fire hazard days to monitor, correct and report potential fire hazards to the Fire Department.

### 2. How much will be raised by the assessment?

Together, public and private property owners will raise \$1.8 million annually for vegetation control and wildfire prevention programs. This will save the existing \$1.2 million goat grazing and brush, grass and fuel removal programs; add funds for more fuel clearance and more roving fire patrols; and add new programs for private property yard waste disposal, and specialized CORE training for neighborhoods and schools.

### 3. Who decided on these programs?

The Fire Department discussed existing and potential programs with a community advisory committee and at public forums. The City also conducted a survey to determine which wildfire prevention programs property owners thought were most beneficial. The Committee and City staff reviewed the results of the survey and selected the programs that best met the needs of the communities within the District.

### 4. Why is an assessment district necessary?

The area's history of destructive wildfires, such as the Oakland Hills Fire Storm of 1991, and its continuing vulnerability requires that preventive measures be taken to help protect homes, schools, business and places of worship. By reducing the area's wildland fuels, educating its residents, and deploying a roving fire patrol on high fire hazard days, the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District will decrease the risk of a fire starting or spreading quickly.

## **5. Why doesn't the whole City pay?**

The proposed wildfire prevention programs will only serve the property owners within the assessment district. These programs are above and beyond the regular fire fighting services the City provides to all residents throughout the City of Oakland. Since all property owners do not benefit from these additional services, by law, they cannot be charged the assessment.

## **6. Why use an Assessment instead of a Tax?**

An assessment is levied against properties based upon the special benefits received from the wildfire prevention programs. An assessment therefore allows property owners to decide whether to pay for these services. Proposition 218 requires that a mailed ballot be sent to property owners to conduct this type of an election. A special tax, while levied against property, is voted upon by registered voters whether they are owners or renters.

## **7. Why doesn't the City fund this out of its budget?**

Since 1997, vegetation control programs have been funded through state and federal grants and the City's capital and reserve funds. These funds are now depleted. Given recent budget reductions, the City's general fund cannot take on these additional expenses. However, the City will pay its fair share of District costs, assessing its 1,930 acres approximately \$148,000/year.

## **8. How do we know the money will be spent on these programs?**

All revenues collected from assessment district properties must be deposited in a special fund and used only for the District authorized fire prevention programs. If funds remain in the account at the end of the fiscal year, they will be rolled over to the next year and used to offset the next year's costs. The City will also have an independent audit conducted each year to make sure these funds were allocated only to the District's fire prevention programs.

## **9. What happens to these programs if the Assessment District is voted down?**

No funds are budgeted to continue these programs after the 2003 fire season. The existing goat grazing and brush, grasses and fuel removal programs will be eliminated.

## **Assessment District:**

### **10. What are the boundaries of the assessment district?**

Properties located within the proposed assessment district generally include the Oakland Hills and adjacent areas. Fire Department staff and California Department of Forestry staff inspected the area to determine which properties were located within the high fire hazard area. These properties are unique because they are situated within and among extremely dense vegetation, putting them at a higher risk of loss or damage if a wildfire were to start and spread. A map of the district is available at [www.oaklandwildfirepreventiondistrict.org](http://www.oaklandwildfirepreventiondistrict.org). The assessment roll and the map are on file with the City Clerk.

### **11. How are assessments determined?**

Your assessment amount has been determined based upon the benefit your property receives from the fire prevention programs. Several factors including your property's use (e.g. single-family home, apartment, office building, etc.), parcel size or unit count, and the development status of the parcel (developed, improved, undeveloped) will determine the amount your property will be assessed. For example, properties with a structure (e.g. a home or office) would benefit more than an undeveloped parcel because the property with the structure would incur a greater loss if a wildfire were to consume the parcel. Therefore the annual assessment for the developed parcel would be greater than the undeveloped parcel.

## 12. How much will property owners have to pay?

Single family parcels represent approximately 90% of all parcels within the District boundaries, therefore the single family parcel is used as the base level of measurement.

- The assessment rate for a single-family home is set at \$65.00 per year.
- Condominiums and townhomes would pay \$48.75/year.
- Apartments would pay \$32.50/unit/year.
- Developed commercial, industrial, institutional, recreational and public parcels would pay \$274.95/acre/year.
- Improved parcels such as a park would pay \$82.49/acre/year.
- Undeveloped public open space would pay \$34.37/acre/year; undeveloped single-family parcels would pay \$16.25 per year.

Improved parcels and undeveloped parcels pay proportionately less based upon the reduced benefit they receive from the fire prevention programs.

## 13. How long will the assessment last?

If levied, the assessment will be collected annually commencing July 1, 2004 for a period of ten (10) years.

## 14. Can the City raise the assessment? Lower it? Eliminate it?

The assessment rate shown on your ballot is the maximum assessment you can be charged annually as long as your parcel's use does not change. For example, if your parcel is undeveloped and you subsequently build a home on your parcel, you would then pay the developed assessment rate. Each year the assessment rates will be reviewed and approved by the City Council. The City Council may reduce or eliminate the assessment in any fiscal year.

## 15. How much will be spent to administer the district?

After initial start-up costs, the annual administrative costs will not exceed 5% of the District budget. These expenses include the required annual assessment engineer's report, the County Assessor's fees, the annual independent financial audit, and the costs of the advisory commission.

## 16. Will there be citizen oversight?

The City Council will create an advisory commission representing District neighborhoods to monitor district programs and advise them on the district budget.

## 17. How and when will my assessment be paid?

The annual assessment for your parcel will be included as a line item on your property tax bill each year. When you pay your property tax bill, the Alameda County Tax Collector will forward the amount collected for the Oakland Wildfire Prevention Assessment District to the City of Oakland.

## Voting:

### 18. What is the process for voting?

- A notice and ballot will be sent to each property owner's mailing address in November. Your mailing address was obtained from the Alameda County Assessor's office.
- Property owners are encouraged to complete and return their ballots using the postage-paid envelope which accompanies the notice and ballot.

- A separate ballot must be submitted for each parcel you own. The ballots may be placed in a single return envelope if you choose.
- In order for your ballot to be counted, the “Yes” or “No” box must be checked on the ballot and the ballot must be signed by the property owner, or by an authorized representative of the owner.
- All ballots must be received prior to the conclusion of the public input portion of the City Council hearing on January 6, 2004. Please mail your ballots back early to ensure delivery by this deadline.
- If the “Yes” ballots received, weighted by assessment amount, exceed the “No” ballots received, weighted by assessment amount, City Council can impose the assessment.
- The ballots will be tabulated on January 7 and January 8, 2004 at City Hall. The public can be present when the ballots are being tabulated.
- The results of the election will be reported to City Council on January 20, 2004, at which time the Council may take action.

## 19. What if I misplace my ballot or want to change my vote?

Ballots can be replaced, withdrawn or re-cast by the property owner or the owner’s authorized representative. This must be done before the close of the public input portion of the public hearing scheduled to be held on January 6, 2004. To obtain a replacement ballot, please call (510) 339-3092. The replacement ballot will supercede any previous ballot submitted.

## 20. How can I express ideas to the City Council?

The City Council will hold a protest hearing on the District on January 6, 2004, beginning at 7:00pm in the Council Chambers located at One Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA. All citizens are invited to attend and participate. If you wish to address the Council you must complete and submit a speaker’s card to the City Clerk before 7:00pm on the day of the meeting.

## 21. Who do I call with questions?

Contacts: Voting procedures or assessment rates and process, please contact the engineering consultant, Joe Francisco, at (510) 339-3092 or [joef@franciscoandassociates.com](mailto:joef@franciscoandassociates.com)

Fire prevention programs or budgets, please contact Fire Marshall Ernie Robinson at (510) 238-4051 or [erobinson@oaklandnet.com](mailto:erobinson@oaklandnet.com)

General information on the District, please contact your City Councilmember or the City Manager’s office, Jayne Becker at (510) 238- 6369 or [jbecker@oaklandnet.com](mailto:jbecker@oaklandnet.com).

Your City Councilmembers can be reached at (510) 238-3266.

District 1, Jane Brunner, [jbrunner@oaklandnet.com](mailto:jbrunner@oaklandnet.com)

District 4, Jean Quan, [jquan@oaklandnet.com](mailto:jquan@oaklandnet.com)

District 6, Desley Brooks, [dbrooks@oaklandnet.com](mailto:dbrooks@oaklandnet.com)

District 7, Larry Reid, [lreid@oaklandnet.com](mailto:lreid@oaklandnet.com)