

**STAFF REPORT – PLANNING
CITY OF TEMECULA
PLANNING COMMISSION**

TO: Planning Commission Chairperson and members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Luke Watson, Deputy City Manager

DATE OF MEETING: April 17, 2024

PREPARED BY: Mark Collins, Assistant Planner

APPLICANT NAME: City of Temecula

PROJECT SUMMARY: Long Range Project Number LR21-1331, a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)

CEQA: Categorically Exempt Per Section 15061(B)(3)
Statutorily Exempt Per Section 15262

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt a Resolution of the Planning Commission adopting the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The City of Temecula, along with other communities in Southern California, has a long and important history with wildfire. Historically, each community has dealt with the issue of wildfire prevention on its own, without required consistency between jurisdictions. This individual approach has created a patchwork of policies across communities which cross multiple jurisdictions, each potentially having its own policy, equipment, and personnel. Although these individual approaches do benefit the community, this does not allow for a regional or even community wide approach to wildland fires, which is a detriment to the safety of all residents and structures within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) across the state.

As fire science, specifically wind and ember behavior modeling improves, it further highlights the holistic and multi-agency approach necessary to address such a complex and multi-faceted issue. To address these growing concerns, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 emphasized the need for federal agencies to work collaboratively with communities in the WUI. This is accomplished through a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), which is an opportunity to influence and, in some cases, specify how agencies perform fuel reduction activities on properties within the CWPP.

Recent fire activity has highlighted the danger and potential impacts to Temecula's residents, communities, infrastructure, and the environment. The lessons learned from recent fires in the area were not lost, and the City quickly applied for and was awarded a Cal Fire Grant totaling \$433,866

to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan or “CWPP,” for a 177-acre site located roughly at the confluence of the Temecula, Pechanga, and Murrieta Creeks.

The City contracted with Steven W. Carothers and Associates (SWCA) Environmental to accomplish these goals. SWCA has substantial experience in the region and specifically with developing CWPP’s. A Development Team was brought together that included representatives from all property owners within the project area as well as various stakeholders representing various interests and organizations, and surrounding Homeowners Association (HOA) Representatives. This team provided their expertise in various fields to ensure the plan provided the maximum protection for the community as well as the natural environment and all life that lives or traverses the project site.

Community involvement and participation is a key component of a CWPP. To that end, the City held a thirty (30) day Public Comment Period for the community at large, or any interested party, to provide their comments on the proposed CWPP. In addition, there were two public workshops held at the Conference Center located at City Hall on February 22nd, 2024 at 9:00am and again at 2:00pm. Staff received positive feedback and valuable insights from various parties at these meetings, comments were incorporated where possible.

The Development Team met on February 6th, 2023, for an initial review of the project scope, future meeting schedule, introductions for all parties and an overview of the components/processes of a CWPP. The Team met again on October 16th, 2023, to review some initial biological studies as well as some draft documents and the online ArcGIS Story Map. The Development Team met a final time on March 6th, 2024, to review the final CWPP.

This CWPP is one step in Temecula’s efforts to reduce wildland fire risks for the 177-acre project site as well as the surrounding communities. This CWPP is an organizing document and does not implement any specific actions or activities that would make any physical changes to the environment. The next step is an implementation agreement between the stakeholders, property owners, and agencies. This agreement would implement specific actions discussed in the CWPP, these actions would be analyzed for potential environmental impacts through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for specific proposed actions.

ANALYSIS

The Temecula Creek CWPP was created using CalFire grant funding, however it does not fund the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis of the project, the implementation plan/agreement, or long-term monitoring agreement which are critical to ensure the long-term success of this CWPP.

The 177 acres that comprise the Temecula Creek CWPP were specifically selected because the project site contains some of the most significant fire risks within the City. Additionally, the area contains substantial cultural, environmental and wildlife resources. This CWPP is intended to be the first step in implementing a citywide CWPP with the eventual goal of creating a regional CWPP that would consolidate and bring together all stakeholders and property owners under a single plan with unified goals.

Temecula's CWPP is designed to be a public facing, interactive tool for the community to understand the wildland fire risk to their property and learn prevention measures and methods to harden and/or protect their homes and families. Along with the CWPP physical documents, the City, with SWCA has developed an online public facing ArcGis Story Map that presents the CWPP as an interactive tool available to the community. Although this plan specifies and recommends specific actions, timing and methods for fuels reduction, it does not mandate these actions for property owners.

This plan takes into account the varying interests that are present at the project site and attempts to balance those interests as best possible while accomplishing the goals within the CWPP.

Staff has reviewed the General Plan and has determined that this project is consistent with the provisions of the Land Use and Public Safety Element of the adopted General Plan. A review of the General Plan did not identify any goals or policies that provided contrary policy direction or that indicated an inconsistency between the CWPP and the adopted General Plan. The specific examples demonstrating consistency are listed below.

Land Use Element:

Goal 5 A land use pattern that protects and enhances residential neighborhoods.

Policy 6.4 Protect and enhance significant ecological and biological resources within and surrounding Temecula.

Policy 6.3 Conserve the natural resources of areas watercourses, include Santa Gertrudis, Temecula, and Murrieta Creeks, through appropriate development densities.

Public Safety Element:

Goal 1 Protection from natural hazards associated with geologic instability, seismic events, wild land fires, flooding, and dam failures.

Policy 1.8 Reduce the risk of wild land fires through imposition of site-specific development standards during project review and coordination with the City Fire Department and other organizations.

Additionally, staff reviewed the Quality of Life Master Plan (QLMP) 2040, and has determined that this project is consistent with and furthers the goals contained therein.

Quality of Life Master Plan (QLMP) 2040:

Core Value No. 1 A safe and prepared community.

Core Value No. 3 A healthy and livable community.

Core Value No. 5 A sustainable and resilient City.

Core Value No. 6 Accountable and responsive city government.

LEGAL NOTICING REQUIREMENTS

Notice of the public hearing was published in *The Press-Enterprise* on April 4, 2024.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act Title 14, Chapter 3, California Code of Regulations (CEQA Guidelines), the project is categorically exempt from environmental review per CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(B)(3), and statutorily exempt per CEQA Guidelines Section 15262.. This project does not propose or authorize any changes to the physical environment and is a planning document only.

- ATTACHMENTS:**
1. PC Resolution
 2. Exhibit A – CWPP
 3. Exhibit B – CWPP Appendices
 4. Notice of Public Hearing
 5. Draft Notice of Exemption