



CITY OF RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA

22112 El Paseo • Rancho Santa Margarita • California 92688-2824
949.635.1800 • fax 949.635.1840 • www.cityofrsm.org

July 9, 2026

Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive, West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

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

Dear Honorable Judge Sheila F. Hanson:

The City of Rancho Santa Margarita has reviewed the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury Report entitled, "Wildfires Hit Home". As required by California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the City of Rancho Santa Margarita is responding to the findings and recommendations included within the report. Each of the findings and recommendations is listed below in italics, followed by the City's response.

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 and non-financial resources. Among the financial costs are dramatic increases in homeowners' insurance premiums, nonrenewals, and inability to obtain insurance.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

F2: 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.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

F3: 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.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

F4: 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.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

F5: 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.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

F6: 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.

Response: The City of Rancho Santa Margarita agrees with this finding.

Recommendations:

R2: 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.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented upon coordination by the County of Orange. The City of Rancho Santa Margarita is able and willing to participate in such an annual event. Additionally, the City already hosts an annual wildfire prevention and preparedness event with local community partners in Rancho Santa Margarita, and has done so for the past five years.

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.

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented. The City applied for, and received, designation as a Fire Risk Reduction Community as listed by the California Board of Forestry for the 2026 List. Additionally, the City has supported and applauded the designation of the Rancho Cielo HOA as the first Firewise Community in RSM, and several HOAs have pending applications for the Firewise designation.

R4: 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.

R14: By April 30, 2027, the County of Orange and each city should publish annual monitoring dashboards showing (a) entitlement pipeline conditions, (b) realistic site yield, (c) assembled funding sources for affordable units, and (d) conversion rates from planned capacity to issued permit and completed units, ensuring that County and city-determined capacity assumptions remain aligned with actual production. (F13)

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because the City complies with all California Department of Housing and Community Development and Housing Element requirements including Annual Progress Reporting. HCD provides a robust dashboard fulfilling this need.

R15: By September 30, 2026, and ongoing, the County Board of Supervisors and all city councils should make a coordinated and sustained effort to educate their constituents about the RHNA process – its requirements, its impact on local planning and community character, and the role residents can play in shaping outcomes. Public education efforts should also include guidance on how community members can effectively engage with the California Legislature and advocate for more realistic, data-driven housing policies. (F1, F7)

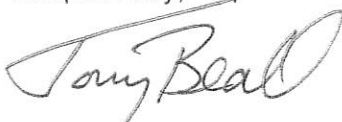
Response: This recommendation has been implemented. The City conducted rigorous outreach and education about RHNA during the 6th Cycle Housing Element and endeavors to keep the public informed about the process going forward into the 7th Cycle RHNA.

R16: By December 31, 2026, all cities should look to enhance their relationships with not-for-profit affordable housing developers to increase the opportunity to develop more affordable housing (F8, F10, F12)

Response: This recommendation has been implemented via the City's Housing Element programs.

Should you have any questions or need any additional information, please contact Cheryl Kuta, Assistant City Manager/Development Services Director, at 949-635-1816 or via e-mail at ckuta@cityofrsm.org.

Respectfully,



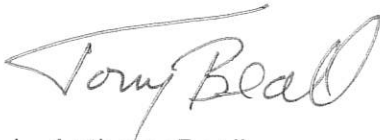
L. Anthony Beall
Mayor

Cc: Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Response: This recommendation has already been implemented. The City of Rancho Santa Margarita has an ongoing outreach and emergency response program, including the annual Wildfire Prevention workshop and an active Community Emergency Response Team program. The City's Emergency Manager and Development Services Director have been designated as direct contacts for fire prevention and safety efforts.

Should you have any questions or need any additional information, please contact Dr. Jennifer Cervantez, City Manager at (949) 635-1800 or via email at jcervantez@cityofrsm.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L. Anthony Beall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "L." and last name "Beall" clearly legible.

L. Anthony Beall
Mayor

cc: Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center West
Santa Ana, CA 92701