



CITY OF HUNTINGTON BEACH

Casey McKeon | Mayor

July 23, 2026

Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of Orange
Office of the Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: HUNTINGTON BEACH RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Honorable Judge,

On behalf of the City Council and with the support of the Huntington Beach Fire Department, I am pleased to submit Huntington Beach's formal response to the Orange County Grand Jury's report, "Wildfires Hit Home." The attached document, reviewed and approved by the City Council, addresses each finding and recommendation as required.

We recognize the Grand Jury's concerns regarding the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires in Orange County, particularly in wildland-urban interface areas. With the release of updated Local Responsibility Area maps, Huntington Beach now includes a designated High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (HFHSZ). While our city faces a lower wildfire hazard compared to other Orange County communities, we remain vigilant and proactive in our approach.

The Fire Department has implemented a defensible space inspection program and maintains robust community outreach program. We are committed to expanding outreach to all affected residents and participating in countywide wildfire prevention initiatives.

We agree with the Grand Jury's findings and support recommendations for increased community engagement, participation in annual wildfire prevention fairs, and promotion of programs such as Safer from Wildfires and AB 888. Huntington Beach will continue to provide residents with the knowledge and resources needed to reduce fire risk and maintain resilient communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. We look forward to continued collaboration



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and communication to protect Huntington Beach and Orange County residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. McKeon".

Casey McKeon
Mayor

Enclosure: Huntington Beach's Required Responses from "Wildfire Hits Home"

cc: Orange County Board of Supervisors
City Council
City Manager
Fire Chief



Required Response to the Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations in “Wildfires Hit Home”

Background

The City of Huntington Beach is impacted by wildfires and, with the release of updated Local Responsibility Area (LRA) maps in 2025, now contains a designated High Fire Hazard Severity Zone (HFHSZ) within its jurisdiction. This zone includes 217 parcels, primarily consisting of single-family homes and a small number of condominium-style apartments, all of which must comply with HFHSZ requirements.

To meet the mandates imposed on HFHSZs and reduce wildfire risk to the community, the Huntington Beach Fire Department (HBFD) conducted a robust public engagement and comment process. We subsequently issued a non-codified ordinance adopting the CalFire maps (Ordinance No. 4336).

Following adoption of the maps, the HBFD developed a defensible space inspection program to document findings and issue reports as required by Civil Code 1102.19. The purpose of these inspections is to assess compliance with home hardening and defensible space standards. While current regulations do not require property owners to implement the recommendations, the inspection reviews defensible space conditions and home-hardening measures that can reduce the risk of wildfire loss and educates affected property owners of the interventions to reduce risk.

A significant portion of the HFHSZ is in the Brightwater neighborhood on the bluffs above the Bolsa Chica wetlands. In 2020, a brush fire occurred in the wetlands near the Brightwater development, burning 62 acres and advancing toward the Brightwater community. Prior to annexation in 2020, Brightwater was under OCFA jurisdiction, which required a fuel modification plan to protect the development. In 2016, the Fire Department reissued the OCFA fuel modification permit, and it is now enforced by HBFD. This fuel modification, in combination with the rapid response of our firefighters, is credited with preventing the destruction of homes in the area.

The city's response to the Grand Jury's request for agreements on the findings is based on a general knowledge of the impact of wildland fires in our State and County. Having a relatively small HFHSZ and no VHFHSZs, Huntington Beach homeowners have significantly less hazard compared to other Orange County cities with Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ). We remain engaged with our community and will continue to ensure that our residents have the knowledge and resources to reduce fire risk and maintain robust wildfire prevention interventions to combat the rising costs of insurance.

Findings

Finding 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, on renewals, and inability to obtain insurance.

City Council Response: Agree

The City is aware of reports indicating that homeowner's insurance premiums are increasing for properties located within High Fire Severity Zones in California. After consulting with members of the Brightwater HOA, which comprises the largest part of the HFHSZ, we are not currently aware of specific homeowners experiencing increased premiums due to the wildfire hazards.

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.

City Council Response: Agree

The City agrees that proper maintenance of the Home Ignition Zone can significantly reduce the potential for a home to ignite during a wildland fire event. The HBFD will continue to enforce the Brightwater Fuel Modification Plan, which incorporates a fire-safe home ignition zone requirements, and will continue providing wildland safety information to residents city-wide.

Finding F3

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

City Council Response: Agree

Community education and engagement are essential components of wildfire risk reduction, empowering homeowners to harden their homes, maintain defensible space, and improve the overall resilience of their properties. The HBFD maintains educational materials on the City's web site and will continue expanding outreach efforts through public events, fairs and community meetings such as HOA gatherings to directly engage affected residents.

Finding F4

Achieving 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) reduces wildfire risk and helps lower insurance premiums.

City Council Response: Agree

The City agrees that community-level wildfire mitigation efforts have the potential to reduce risk and, in turn, may contribute to lower insurance premiums. The HBFD permitted Brightwater Fuel Modification Plan already includes a community requirement to maintain defensible space adjacent to the homes bordering the Bolsa Chica Nature Preserve. The HBFD will continue to promote community-wide mitigation in our outreach.

Finding F5

All county residents should be aware that Safer from Wildfire regulations require insurers to offer discounts to homeowners and communities implementing home-hardening and defensible-space measures, regardless of whether the property is located in a Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

City Council Response: Agree

The City concurs that insurers should offer discounts to homeowners that implement home-hardening and defensible-space measures. The City has already provided this information to the Brightwater HOA and will further promote Safer from Wildfire regulations to the broader community, particularly homeowners in the HFHSZ.

Finding F6

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 in vulnerable communities.

City Council Response: Agree

The City agrees that AB 888 represents a valuable tool for reducing wildfire risk through targeted investments in home hardening and defensible space improvements. We will continue sharing grant information with our community through various communication channels including print materials, social media, Orange County wildfire fairs, and HOA presentations.

Recommendations

Recommendation R2

By December 31, 2026, cities and fire service agencies, including the Orange County Fire Authority, should commit to participation in a countywide annual wildfire prevention fair planned by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to showcase wildfire prevention outreach programs. [F1–F6]

City Council Response: Will be implemented

HBFD, the lead department, is prepared to participate in a countywide annual wildfire prevention fair in the near future. We will encourage all residents—especially those living in the HFHSZ—to attend.

Recommendation 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 distribute information, develop their own outreach programs, and establish a direct point of contact for residents, in addition to providing referrals to OCFA programs. [F1–F6]

City Council Response: Will be implemented

HBFD created a Wildland Fire Hazard Severity Zone webpage on the department's website. The page provides information on defensible space requirements, home hardening strategies, building requirements within the HFHSZ, and instructions for requesting a defensible space inspection from HBFD staff.

In addition to the website, HBFD staff maintain direct contact with affected target residents such as the Brightwater HOA to ensure residents are aware of the hazards associated with the nearby severity zone. Staff have not yet established formal outreach for other areas within the HFHSZ, and the HBFD will continue to improve their outreach. HBFD staff also regularly engage with individuals concerned about brush fires in open-space areas with heavy fuels—such as Central Park South—even when those areas fall outside the HFHSZ.

HBFD's Community Risk Reduction Division is responsible for this outreach. The goal is to expand outreach beyond the Brightwater HOA to all single-family homes, condominiums, and apartment communities in the HFHSZ to provide education on defensible space, home hardening, and wildfire risk reduction best practices. Since the law does not require home hardening or individual property defensible space in the current law for HFHSZs, we provide information on options to reduce the risk of wildfire damage using proven techniques and technologies.