

TUMWATER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING

August 9, 2022 Page 1

CONVENE: 8:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Chair Leatta Dahlhoff and Councilmembers Peter Agabi (late arrival) and Angela Jefferson.

Staff: City Administrator John Doan, Police Chief Jon Weiks, Fire Chief Brian Hurley, Communications Manager Ann Cook, and Police Administrative Services Manager Laura Wohl.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE, MAY 10, 2022, JUNE 14, 2022 & JULY 12, 2022:

MOTION: Councilmember Jefferson moved, seconded by Chair Dahlhoff, to approve the May 10, 2022, June 14, 2022, and July 12, 2022 minutes as published. A voice vote approved the motion.

ORDINANCE NO. O2022-018, HABITAT CONSERVATION – PRESCRIBED BURNING:

Fire Chief Hurley reported the City was recently contacted by two landowners in the City, Kaufman Entities and Puget Western. Both companies have completed a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to preserve prairie lands located within the City limits. Additionally, the City is currently working on the development of a Habitat Conservation Plan in partnership with the Port of Olympia that will include requirements to conserve native prairies.

To meet some of the standards within the HCP, prescribed burning is often necessary to help achieve a number of goals. Prescribed burning helps to replicate natural fires that have historically occurred on prairies. Prescribed burns kill weeds and invasive vegetation, eliminates accumulated debris and vegetation, and provides conditions conducive for native seeding and prairie restoration. Prescribed burning also reduces the threat of wildfire in urban areas.

Fire Chief Hurley referred to several maps of the properties. One of the properties is located off Old Highway 99 near the airport runway owned by the Kaufman Brothers. The second property is off 93rd Avenue near the new Flying J Truck Stop.

Management of the HCPs is coordinated through Eco Studies Institute and another company managing the prescribed burns. The burns are conducted under risk-mitigated conditions with trained and experienced firefighters. Fire program managers have conducted more than 1,000 prescribed burns

TUMWATER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING

August 9, 2022 Page 2

spanning the last 15 years. Many of them were on Joint Base Lewis McChord to help maintain native prairies on the base. The process is typically completed within one hour with no lingering smoke from the burn. Timing of the burn is important as it is conducted under mild weather temperatures with minimum wind conditions to minimize risks.

The burns represent a training opportunity for fire department staff. In a number of burns, local fire departments often assist the burn as it provides training and helps firefighters obtain red card certification, a wildland fire fighting certification.

The process entails the applicants applying for a permit from the City. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also issues permits. The burns are permitted by DNR. The City works with DNR representatives to ensure the burn plan is appropriate with staff and DNR personnel visiting the burn sites prior to issuance of the permits. The applicants are required to submit a Communications Plan for the burns. Following approval of the Communications Plan by the City, DNR issues the permits and the Fire Chief approves the City permits. The Fire Chief retains the authority to deny the burn if conditions are not appropriate.

Neighboring properties are notified in advance of the burn and any other individuals or companies requesting notification are notified by email on the day prior to the burn. City staff works closely with the contractor to ensure other City requirements are satisfied. Implementation of the plan is the responsibility of the applicant.

Currently, City code restricts burning in the City that could be considered a nuisance. The proposed ordinance creates an exception whereby a permit for a prescribed burn is issued by the City. The proposed ordinance establishes the process.

Staff requests the committee forward a recommendation to the City Council approving the adoption of Ordinance No. O2022-018 at the September 6, 2022 Council meeting.

Fire Chief Hurley noted that the authority for the burn is effective 30 days after approval of the ordinance. However, the owners have indicated timing for an effective burn is during the months of September and October. For that reason, staff requests consideration of the proposal as an emergency ordinance to ensure the effective date begins on September 6, 2022.

Chair Dahlhoff inquired about required elements in the Communications Plan. Fire Chief Hurley advised that the City has no defined requirements for the plan other than he plans to work with the City's Communications Manager to ensure the plan meets City requirements.

TUMWATER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF VIRTUAL MEETING

August 9, 2022 Page 3

Chair Dahlhoff asked whether messaging could be tailored to those that may have medical conditions that might be aggravated by smoke. Fire Chief Hurley advised that the City could release community messages prior to the burns to help mitigate issues. Chair Dahlhoff suggested working with Communications Manager Cook to coordinate social media messages in addition to requirements in the Communications Plan.

Fire Chief Hurley advised that notification of the burns to the community is coordinated by the companies conducting the burns.

Communications Manager Cook added that the City working in conjunction with Thurston County Alert and Smart 911 can contact individuals with medical issues within a specific area. It is possible to target messaging to individuals within a geographical area who have opted to receive messages.

MOTION:

Councilmember Jefferson moved, seconded by Councilmember Agabi, to recommend the City Council approve Ordinance No. O2022-018, Habitat Conservation – Prescribed Burning, at the September 6, 2022 Council meeting. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS:

City Administrator Doan encouraged the committee to review the presentation materials on the Regional Fire Authority prior to the Council worksession scheduled later in the day.

ADJOURNMENT:

With there being no further business, Chair Dahlhoff adjourned the meeting at 8:17 a.m.

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President
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