



A Tradition of Stewardship
A Commitment to Service

Agenda Date: 7/10/2018

Agenda Placement: 10A

NAPA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS Board Agenda Letter

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Stacie McCambridge for Barry Biermann - Fire Chief
County Fire Department

REPORT BY: Stacie McCambridge, Associate Governmental Program Analyst - (707) 299-1465

SUBJECT: Discussion on Chipping Program

RECOMMENDATION

County Fire Chief requests approval of and authorization for the Chair to sign Amendment No. 3 to Agreement No. 170397B with Joaquin's Landscaping extending the term through June 30, 2019, with a two year roll over clause, which will allow expanded service to the chipping program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

County Fire Chief to present options of expanding the current Napa County Chipping Program and recommends hiring a private vendor utilizing a State Responsibility Area (SRA) Fire Prevention Grant awarded to the Napa County Fire Department. Due to the popularity of the program, there is a wait period and by expanding the program it will increase turnaround time and community participation.

PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

1. Staff Report
2. Public Comment
3. Motion, second, discussion and vote on the item.

FISCAL IMPACT

Is there a Fiscal Impact? Yes

Is it currently budgeted? No

What is the revenue source?	Napa County Fire Budget/Grant Funds
Is it Mandatory or Discretionary?	Discretionary
Discretionary Justification:	By expanding the fuel reduction chipping service, staff can provide expanded chipping services throughout Napa County to assist in protecting families and property in the event of wildfire with defensible space.
Is the general fund affected?	No
Future fiscal impact:	Future funding will be provided by the Napa County Fire Department budget.
Consequences if not approved:	The program could have an extended wait time and short window to sign up for applicants.
Additional Information:	.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (State CEQA Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Napa County Fire Department, in cooperation with Napa Communities Firewise Foundation, has sought to reduce risks through a Fuel Reduction Chipping Program. The program has been in effect since 2005 which during this time had been supported through various State and Federal grants. Over the last several years the program has been funded through the Napa County Fire Department and monitored by the County Fire Marshal. At the Board of Supervisor's meeting on June 11, 2018; the Board of Supervisor's requested, based on public feed back, that staff evaluate expanding the current chipping program.

The program provides a free chipping service to all Napa County residents who live in a designated fire hazard zone which is most all of rural Napa. The intent of the program is to encourage residents to comply with defensible space requirements of both the State and County, in addition to be "fire wise". The program is not intended for commercial activities or general land clearing. The program currently runs annually between April 1st and October 31st, weather and conditions permitting.

The public has several avenues to access information regarding the chipping program. They are informed of the free fuel removal chipping service and are encouraged to utilize the service by signing up through the Chipping Website, Firewise Newsletter, Firesafe Council Bulletins, and fire prevention forums. The program is on many of the social media sites as well as the County website under the Fire Department page. Other outreach sources will include mailers and ads located on local radio stations. There is also a chipping hot line phone number should the public not have access to social media or a computer. The chipping program requires residents to request chipping through a County maintained website portal providing information as to the responsible property owner, location and size of piles. This information is captured in a database that is reviewed weekly by the Napa County Fire Marshal's Office to monitor trends and progress.

Due to the fires of October 2017, staff has seen a decline in requests this year. Many of the previous chipped areas where affected during the fire siege resulting in hazardous fuels being consumed. It is anticipated as regrowth appears demand will sharply increase. To date, for 2018, the program has received 403 requests, and has chipped 239. In 2017, the program had received 670 requests and chipped 653 requests leaving 17 requests

unfinished. The remaining requests were rolled over to be the first on the 2018 chipping list. The program was put on hold October 8th through October 20, 2017 due to the wildfires throughout Napa County. In the past, staff has not been able to fulfill requests due to noncompliance with the guidelines presented when submitting an application. These guidelines are found on the Napa County Fire Department's page located on the County of Napa website. For example; maximum individual piles are restricted to 50 feet long, 6 feet high by 10 feet wide (deep), piles must be safely accessible by the chipping crew, piles should be stacked cut end toward the road for ease of grasping, stem diameter is limited to a maximum of 6 inches, no mechanically piled brush by tractor or dozer, piles must be limited to brush and tree limbs from the property itself. Items not allowed include: poison oak, construction materials, grass clippings, stringy vine type brush, leaves which may foul or damage the chipper. Newly added to this list is burnt or charred materials. There is a potential safety hazard related to chipping burnt or charred materials and related dust created during the chipping process. If a pile is encountered with any of the "non allowed" items, the resident is contacted and told that the pile can not be chipped. Requests for the past several years:

- | 2016 - 566*
- | 2015 - 718
- | 2014 - 714
- | 2013 - 725

*2016 chipping requests are at a reduced level due to an unforeseen loss of free County inmate labor causing the program to temporarily freeze the chipping list while finding a solution to continue the project.

In the Summer of 2016 the program experienced an unforeseen early end to the chipping season due to the lack of labor through the Napa County Corrections Department. These inmates were supervised by one or more extra help County employees funded through the County Fire budget. In order to keep the chipping program available, we were forced to hire a private contractor at a substantial cost increase while researching a remedy to replace the labor once used through the County Jail at no cost to the program. The 2018 chipping season began in April utilizing a restructured work force with no delay in service. Personnel costs for the last three fiscal years absorbed by the County Fire Department to facilitate the chipping program were:

- | 15/16 FY = \$38,265.25 spent on County chipping crew. (Completed with contracted chipping crew and inmates.
- | 16/17 FY = \$7,177.50 spent on County chipping crew, \$66,539.99 spent on private vendor (inmates ended in August, 2016/private vendor started in September, 2016)
- | 17/18 FY = \$79,258.97 spent on County chipping crew to date. (Extra hire help employed)

Currently chipping crews are working 5 days a week, 8 hours a day. Daily crews consist of one crew boss and 3 chippers. The program includes a pickup truck and chipper supported by a total of 7 crew bosses and 5 individuals for the chipping labor. In order to increase the productivity of the program the County would need to increase the size of the chipping crew.

- | Option 1, add extra help County employees and purchase a second chipper. This would be a cost of approximately \$700 a day for the second team and a one time cost of approximately \$50,000 for the chipper. The chipper could also be leased at \$2,000 a month. If the County chose the model of purchasing a chipper, grants would be sought to help with the cost. This would allow for two teams of chippers to be utilized.
- | Option 2, hiring a private vendor at approximately \$2,000 a day using contracted equipment or \$1,300 a day using a County supplied chipper. This would allow for two teams of chippers to be utilized.

On February 7, 2017 the Board of Supervisor's approved a SRA Fire Prevention Fund Grant Agreement between the

Napa County Fire Department and the State of California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for \$67,200. The grant funds are designated to pay for the increased operational costs of hiring a private contractor to aid in the chipping of fuel reduction. This grant is due to expire on March 15, 2019.

In both options, the program would utilize two teams April through October or expand to year around with either of these options. The Fall and Winter months bring an element of risk with weather and conditions that interfere with productivity and add concern of safety issues such as slippery areas and muddy roadways.

Though the program is provided free to residents, the service does come at a cost which is borne by the Napa County Fire Department. The program is not a land owner entitlement but a community service. Due to the popularity of the program, there is up to a 4 to 6 week waiting period once a request is submitted. It has come to staff's attention that residents often do not use the services due to this delay. By expanding the program it will increase turnaround time and community participation. With Napa County having a long and active wildfire history, making available the fuel reduction chipping service, it is possible to provide the citizens of Napa County with a method they can take to protect their families and property in the event of a wild land fire such as the recent Lake County Pawnee Fire. To expedite the program, staff is recommending Option 2 above and will work during the next few months to purchase a chipper using grant funds. It is anticipated that next fiscal year, the program will be managed using extra help employees.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

None

CEO Recommendation: Approve

Reviewed By: Helene Franchi