

Wildfire Prevention Zone Ballot Measure Q&A 7/27/24

What is the Wildfire Prevention Zone (WPZ)?

The WPZ is the part of the Oakland hills that's classified by CalFire as a very high fire hazard severity zone. There are about 25,000 parcels; a map is included in the ballot measure adopted by the City Council.

What is the WPZ Ballot Measure?

The ballot measure¹ will fund an ambitious plan, the 2024 Vegetation Management plan.² It's a special tax of \$99/parcel or the pro-rated equivalent for multi-unit or commercial properties with exceptions for low-income owners. The rate can increase by the lower percentage of the consumer price index or 5%. The tax will sunset in 20 years, allowing the plan to be improved after its initial ten-year cycle.

How will the funds be spent?

"This Special Tax will create a dedicated funding source to support the City's efforts to address wildfire risk by:

- Implementing a comprehensive vegetation management plan,
- Expanding roadside clearing to protect emergency evacuation routes
- Enhancing fire patrols on high-fire danger days
- Expanding goat grazing fuel reduction efforts
- Performing annual inspections of all parcels in the WPZ
- Providing public education efforts to help residents, businesses, and property owners protect themselves in their neighborhoods
- Providing community oversight and annual auditing of the funds."

Why doesn't Oakland already do this?

Oakland already does a bare minimum that it pledges to continue. It's evident to nearly everyone that more resources are needed to do an adequate job. Wildfire prevention activities compete with other important public safety priorities, especially crime prevention and law enforcement. Other city services, street maintenance and paving, housing, economic development, and social services make demands on the budget. The WPZ tax measure will provide dedicated funds reserved for minimizing fire risk.

Didn't we already pass a measure like this?

We successfully established the Wildfire Prevention Assessment District (WPAD) in after the 1991 Tunnel Fire. Its renewal was defeated ten years ago, falling a few votes short. The current measure aims to correct the shortcomings of its predecessor. The most important improvement is a very robust Vegetation Management Plan; voters will know what to expect from the tax they are paying. Many weaknesses of the original measure are being given more attention, such as improved contracting processes, an improved Fire Prevention Bureau and inspections, and strong support from the Fire Chief and staff. A directive making wildfire prevention a priority for all city departments spawned an interdepartmental task force. Finally, in the new measure, community representatives will receive an independent audit of expenses and an annual report on the activities undertaken, making their annual recommendations directly to the City Council.

How can I help this pass?

Public education and communication are essential. If you'd like more information or want to participate in the campaign, please send an email to stage@berkeley.edu. Would love to hear your ideas. We're working on a catchy name, a website with more information, some funds to cover mailings, and processes to sign-up to volunteer or to donate once we have registered committee. All suggestions are welcome!

1. The full Wildfire Prevention Zone legislative package, including the map, are posted here: <https://oakland.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6693996&GUID=D0DA215B-C9A5-4DA1-8829-F17131389E3B>. See three documents labelled "Supplemental."

2. The Vegetation Management Plan can be found here: https://cao-94612.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/ER23007_Att.-D-Revised-Vegetation-Management-Plan-Copy.pdf.