

LA Fire

Meeting at Potrero Canyon, 3/7/2023

Brush Clearance:

LA Fire keeps an eye on all City properties and asks the city agencies responsible for them (in the case of Potrero, LA Parks) to clear brush to code. State requires 100 foot of clearance from structures and roadways. LA City requires 200 foot clearance.

Brush clearance, likely by Waste Unlimited which has been contracted by the city, has begun brush clearance, which has been observed by people along Friends Street. They have cut the weeds and left the cuttings on the floor. This is permissible, per code, which requires cutting to three inches of the stem, and an additional one inch of shreds left on the ground (a total of 4 inches left on the ground).

The Brush unit said they keep an eye on City parks and notice them for requisite brush clearance, just as they do homeowners. If the entity fails to clear, they will cite them. Each city entity must contract with a brush clearance service to clear the brush. In rare cases, LA Fire will come out and clear the overgrown brush in the interest of public safety; but this is rare and undertaken in order of priority. The city is replete with overgrown brush this year, in large part due to heavy rains which gave spurred vegetation growth, and Potrero, with its strategic planting of low fuel vegetation is not likely to fall within an urgent tier of priority.

LA Fire staff informed us of a program called “adopt a park’ which would allow the community to raise money to hire a brush clearance service to ensure requisite clearance. If we do this, we would work directly in partnership with the Council Office and Urban Forestry and identify a “plot plan” for fuel mitigation and would even be able to pick indigenous plants for planting by UF. We are informed by CD11 and Michael Amster that Waste Unlimited has already been contracted by the City to manage weeding. We await confirmation (from Fire and Amster) as to who is currently contracted for Potrero Canyon Park brush clearance.

Drone Program:

A pilot drone program would be greatly beneficial for Potrero Canyon, we were told, both for fire mitigation as well as law enforcement after hours.

A drone program does have some pitfalls, however. These include privacy issues which invariably arise when anything that is flying above homes also recording video or taking pictures. There is an ordinance that drones must fly at least 100 feet. That may be

just low enough off the floor of the Canyon to avoid backyards along the rim. Something to be discussed. Also, in the case of a fire, helicopters that drop water will not fly where there is a down, so we would need to ensure that the helicopter unit is in touch with our program, so as to ground all drones in the event of a fire response. Traci Park is willing to talk more about the privacy issues and believes the current City Attorney may also be amenable to the conversation. This is a balance of interest involving protection of privacy and the community interest in public safety.

Another food idea that was floated for Potrero Canyon was the use of fixed cameras on poles.

Tree Branches and Power Lines:

DWP takes care of powerlines and branches. They are very much on top of it. The lowest rung of the power lines, where most people observe the close proximity of tree branches and become alarmed, does not carry electricity – these are just cable lines. So DWP is not concerned about those. Trees must be 10 feet from powerlines and DWP monitors their powerlines very closely to maintain clearance. If community members see a branch that seems too tall, they should report it to 311. Fire does not take care of street trees; the city does.

BBQs and Parks:

The only limitation to the use of BBQs in parks are on red Flag Days; and there were only three of those last year. Red flag days are not simply hot days. They must be a combination of hot, with high winds and low humidity. If all three thresholds are met, they produce what is labeled as a Red Flag Day.

Park BBQs are built to be away from homes and fuel. Park BBQs all have a ‘spark arrestor’ and must be coal operated (producing fewer sparks that emanate lower embers). The city encourages BBQ use in parks per a policy to encourage safe outdoor recreation and enabling the use of outdoor public green space for all families.

Reporting to the community:

LA Fire now has a westside community liaison with whom we are in touch and will invite to an upcoming PPCC meeting, along with Captain Kitahata, in April.