



County of Monterey

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Board Report

File #: 21-533, **Version:** 1

Authorize the Office of Emergency Services to submit a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program application to FEMA in the amount of \$40 million for the Monterey County Community Wildfire Resilience Project

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors authorize the Office of Emergency Services (OES), to submit a Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the amount of \$40 million for the Community Wildfire Resilience Project that will provide funding for defensible space and home hardening.

SUMMARY:

Monterey County Office of Emergency Services (OES) recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the submittal of a grant application for the Community Wildfire Resilience Project, a \$40 million HMGP project that directly assists Monterey County property owners and residents to reduce the threat to life and property in the County's high risk wildfire areas. This program will offer FEMA cost share incentives to property owners to implement defensible space and home hardening projects to ensure that windborne embers do not ignite flammable materials on or near homes and start a chain of fires within a community.

DISCUSSION:

Following every federally declared disaster, FEMA allocates post-disaster hazard mitigation funds directly to impacted communities to reduce the risk posed by any natural disaster. As a result of the 2020 wildfires that impacted Monterey County, the County is eligible for HMGP grant funding. Monterey County OES recommends that the Board of Supervisors approve the submittal of a grant application for the Community Wildfire Resilience Project, a \$40 million HMGP project that directly assists property owners and residents to reduce wildfire impacts in high-risk areas.

In a recent study, the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety found that as many as 90% of homes damaged or destroyed by wildfire were first ignited by embers or other fires set by embers. Embers can fly miles ahead of the wildfire front and when they land on combustible materials on or near homes, they can ignite a new fire which can start a chain of fires within a community. In the County, erratic fire behavior due to rapidly shifting winds and low humidity is common and in recent years wildfire activity has been increasing in severity and intensity. The most effective way for homes to withstand a wildfire is a "coupled approach" with both ignition-resistant home hardening and the creation of defensible space by reducing combustible materials surrounding the home.

Monterey County has the potential for significant wildfire losses in the County's extensive Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI), particularly for homes built without ignition-resistant construction materials and practices and

with inadequate defensible space management. The goal of the Monterey County Community Wildfire Resilience Program is to reduce the threat to life and property in the County’s WUI by providing cost share incentives to encourage property owners to reduce vegetation and mitigate vulnerable building elements that pose a risk for wildfire ignition. The FEMA HMGP funding will allow the County to reimburse homeowners in targeted high-risk areas a percentage of eligible defensible space and ignition resistant construction projects with a reimbursement cap to be determined during the project development phase. The Monterey County Community Wildfire Resilience Project will be an opt-in program organized into two phases. Phase 1 will include outreach, site identification, property inspections, individual project scoping, agreements, permitting, environmental compliance, and FEMA approval of final scope. Phase 2 will include project implementation, completion inspections, and homeowner reimbursement. Monterey County OES will apply for, administer, and manage the overall project for the 36 months performance period.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

OES will collaborate with County Counsel, the CAO Budget and Analysis Division, the Housing and Community Development Department, and the Sustainability Program.

FINANCING:

Applying for this grant does not obligate the County or General Fund to any financial commitment. The \$40 million project includes up to \$35 million, from FEMA, to reimburse the upfront costs incurred by homeowners for a percentage of eligible project work, with the homeowner responsible for the local cost share.

The remaining, up to \$5 million, will be used for County costs related to program development, project management, public outreach, site inspections, project design, etc. over the three-year grant performance period ; The County’s 25% cost share commitment is estimated to be up to \$1.25 million. This amount can be offset by use of in-kind services and resources and will be determined upon application approval and prior to grant acceptance. Upon approval of the grant project, the Office of Emergency Service will request the Board of Supervisors to allocate funding to implement the grant project.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

This project supports Monterey County’s Strategic Initiative Policy Areas below.

Check the related Board of Supervisors Strategic Initiatives:

- Economic Development
- Administration
- Health & Human Services
- Infrastructure
- Public Safety

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