



Board Report

File #: BC 24-063, **Version:** 1

- a. Support finding the pilot project for wildfire prevention and removal of eucalyptus trees (“Pilot Project”) is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to Section 15269(c) of the CEQA Guidelines because the pilot project includes specific actions intended to prevent or mitigate risks of fire;
- b. Support approving the Pilot Project for eucalyptus trees located within the defensible space of roads and structures in the unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2. The Pilot Program would finance 50% of the costs of trimming and/or removing eucalyptus trees on eligible private properties in the North Monterey County area;
- c. Support approving a Coastal Development Permit for the areas covered by the Pilot Project that are located in the coastal zone; and
- d. Support approving and authorizing the Housing and Community Development (“HCD”) Director or their designee to execute a three-year Standard Agreement in the amount of \$990,000 with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (“RCDMC”) to provide administration of the Pilot Project for a term effective upon execution through June 30, 2027.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Budget Committee:

- a. Support finding the pilot project for wildfire prevention and removal of eucalyptus trees (“Pilot Project”) is statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) pursuant to Section 15269(c) of the CEQA Guidelines because the pilot project includes specific actions intended to prevent or mitigate risks of fire;
- b. Support approving the Pilot Project for eucalyptus trees located within the defensible space of roads and structures in the unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2. The Pilot Program would finance 50% of the costs of trimming and/or removing eucalyptus trees on eligible private properties in the North Monterey County area;
- c. Support approving a Coastal Development Permit for the areas covered by the Pilot Project that are located in the coastal zone; and
- d. Support approving and authorizing the Housing and Community Development (“HCD”) Director or their designee to execute a three-year Standard Agreement in the amount of \$990,000 with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (“RCDMC”) to provide administration of the Pilot Project for a term effective upon execution through June 30, 2027

SUMMARY:

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (“CalFire”), North Monterey County has large areas designated as High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Within these areas there are rural residences surrounded by trees and vegetation creating the potential for significant impacts from wildfire. The area also contains stands of non-native Eucalyptus trees. Eucalyptus trees present a unique hazard due to natural shedding of leaves, bark, and limbs combined with flammable natural oils in these trees.

Recognizing the fire danger Senator John Laird and District 2 County Supervisor Glenn Church were successful to secure grant funding (Grant Subaward No. LI2023-032) in the amount of \$1,000,000 for the creation of a wildfire mitigation and eucalyptus tree removal pilot project in Monterey County. The intent of

the Pilot Project is to reduce the impacts of wildfire by making funds available to financially assist property owners with trimming or removal of eucalyptus trees located in the defensible space of private structures and roads. Results of the Pilot Project will be shared with the State and reported to the Board of Supervisors with the intent of informing potential future funding and activities related to wildfire preparedness. Guidelines and the Application Process for the Pilot Project are attached to this report as **Attachment A**.

A large portion of Supervisorial District 2 is located within the coastal zone and is subject to the North County Land Use Plan (“LUP”). Within the coastal zone, a Coastal Development Permit is required to authorize removal of trees and other major vegetation. Because this program involves the trimming and removal of trees (potentially as many as 200 trees based on an estimated cost of approximately \$5,000/tree), a Coastal Development Permit is included. The North County Land Use Plan protects native trees and vegetation as well as vegetation communities that support sensitive habitat. Eucalyptus trees are not “native trees” to Monterey County and are not individually protected under the LUP policies; however, removal of eucalyptus trees or other vegetation in native monarch butterfly habitat, in wetland areas, or in riparian areas is prohibited to protect habitat for fish and wildlife. The LUP also encourages the County to support the efforts of various fire protection agencies and districts to identify and minimize fire safety hazards to the public. With habitat exemptions in place, the proposed Pilot Project balances the fire hazard policies of the LUP with forest and habitat protections. A draft resolution containing findings and evidence for the Pilot Project is attached to this report as **Attachment B**. This Coastal Development Permit is appealable to/by the Coastal Commission.

Provided the Coastal Development Permit and Pilot Project are approved, staff is recommending that the County partner with the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County (“RCDMC”) to carry out the Pilot Project. To do this, the County would make RCDMC a subrecipient of the grant funding awarded to the County, and RCDMC would coordinate with the County and applicable Fire Department and interested property owners, oversee financing and payments under the program, and maintain records of work performed under the program. An agreement with RCDMC to provide administration for the Pilot Project is attached to this report as **Attachment C**.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This Pilot Project has been developed in coordination with the North County Fire Department and representatives from the RCDMC with input from staff at the District 2 Supervisor’s office.

FINANCING:

The Pilot Project is funded entirely by a grant from the California Office of Emergency Services in the amount of \$1,000,000. It is recommended that HCD allocate 1% (\$10,000) of the \$1,000,000 grant to cover staff time involved in the preparation of the Pilot Project and for oversight of the program. RCDMC will also recover their costs for program administration by allocating (2%) \$20,000 of the grant funding. The remaining balance of \$970,000 will be used to pay for the work covered by this Pilot Project on private properties. Grant funding in the amount of \$1,000,000 was received from the State of California, Office of Emergency Services.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES:

The Eucalyptus Tree Removal Pilot Program utilizes grant funds for fire fuel mitigation in a high-risk area effectively using state and local resources.

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

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Approved by: Craig Spencer, HCD-Director, x5233

The following attachments are on file with HCD:

Attachment A - Pilot Project Guidelines and Application Process

Attachment B - Draft Resolution (Coastal Development Permit)

Attachment C - Agreement with RCDMC

Attachment D - Grant Agreement

Attachment E - Defensible Space Guidelines

Attachment F - Map of unincorporated areas of Supervisorial District 2

Attachment G - Monarch Butterfly Habitat Map