



**REVISED FINAL DRAFT SUBMITTED FOR
APPROVAL**

LOS ALTOS HILLS COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT Strategic Plan 2021-2022

Municipal Resource Group, LLC

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Facilitated by:
Municipal Resource Group, LLC



INTRODUCTION

The Los Altos Hills County Fire District ("District"), established in 1939, is a dependent district of the County of Santa Clara with delegated authority from the County Board of Supervisors to the LAHCFD Board of Commissioners to manage the affairs of the District. Seven Commissioners are appointed by the County Board of Supervisors to serve alternating four-year terms.

As a Special Fire District, tax revenues fund District-managed programs to protect lives and property within an approximate 12 square mile area of incorporated and unincorporated communities.

The District, along with the City of Los Altos, contracts with the Santa Clara County Central Fire Department ("Central Fire Department") to provide emergency medical response and fire prevention and suppression to the residents of Los Altos Hills and Los Altos. The contract and subsequent memoranda of agreements may be found [here](#).

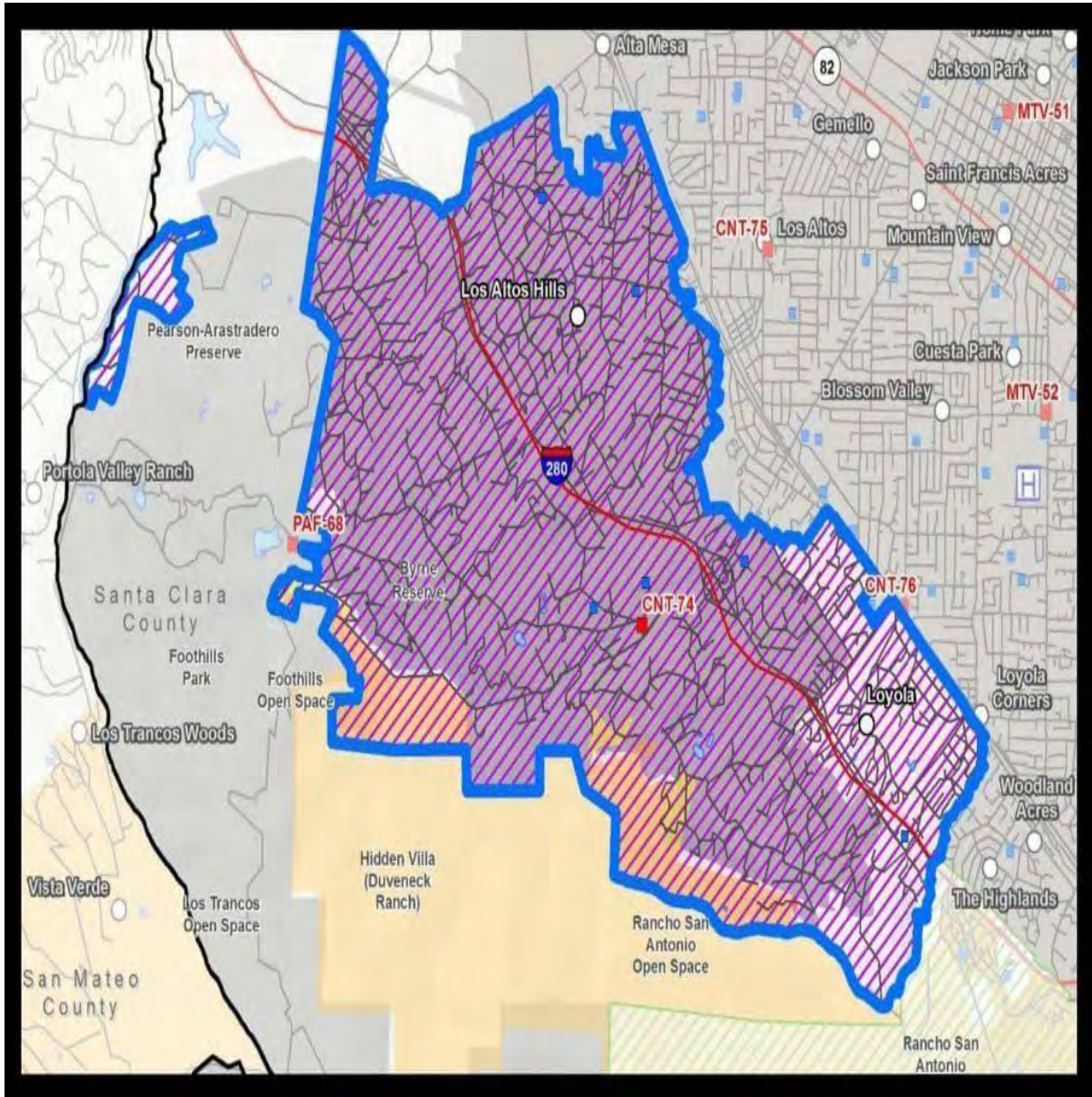
This Successor Strategic Plan supports the broader regional emergency response and risk reduction efforts as described in Santa Clara County's Community Wildlife Protection Plan, which is linked [here](#) from the County website.

MISSION

The Mission of the Los Altos Hills County Fire District is to protect the lives, property and environment within the District it serves from fires, disasters, medical emergencies or other incidents through education, prevention, protection and emergency response services, and to be responsible for the financial stewardship of District taxpayer funds.



Los Altos Hills County Fire District boundary map



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Los Altos Hills County Fire District presents the two-year successor Strategic Plan. This Plan sets forth a framework of future goals and builds upon the accomplishments and progress made as a result of the District's initial Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

Three events in 2020 both challenge and provide opportunities to the District in unexpected and significant ways. 1) Santa Clara County completed the District management audit and initiated a comprehensive review of fire services concurrent with a LAFCO County-wide fire service review. These studies will ultimately determine the regional perspectives for fire protection in Santa Clara County. 2) Global pandemic COVID-19 paused life as we know it and triggered a move to remote work and reduced collaboration opportunities and is expected to last 12 months or more. 3) Lastly, 2020 saw a dramatic increase in destructive wildfires in California, including CZU and SCU Lightning Complex fires, the latter burning within Santa Clara County. The CZU threatened the County and District, with ember casts (live embers) falling within District boundaries. Central Fire Department patrols monitored and eliminated any spot fires from expanding. Combined, these two fires burned more than 480,000 acres. The District must be attuned to these dramatic conditions, encouraged by climate change and chronic drought conditions, which are changing the complexity and character of the District as an organization in response to these events.

Now, more than ever, public agencies must coordinate and work together to deliver critical services in a time of increased demands and limited resources. This successor Strategic Plan process provides the opportunity to evaluate the District's role in the community and beyond. We can see overlapping networks of communication, expertise and support throughout the community, and now seek to broaden our regional impact.

The goals and objectives included within describe a robust strategic vision for allocating resources in a thoughtful and prudent manner, and expand programs to support SCCFD fire protection and emergency response.

"Over the next 30 years, the fire and emergency services will need to partner with related service providers to create a local response network that can provide a host of services under the umbrella of a multifaceted organization, if it hopes to meet the needs of the community served."

**--21st Century Fire
and Emergency
Services White
Paper, published
July 2020**



Organization

The District's initial Strategic Plan (2015-2020) has guided development of the District's administrative functions to support programs, operations and management. Personnel operate in the areas of executive management, financial administration, Commission and administrative support, and program support.ⁱⁱ No long-term salary or benefit liability has been created by the District's organizational structure. Legal support is provided through the County Counsel's office.

In conjunction with the Strategic Plan, District decisions and actions are guided by the annual budget and the District's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP)/Annex 4 (County region that includes District boundaries). These three documents are the pillars guiding short- and long-term decisions made by the Commission and staff. The Strategic Plan, developed with Community and stakeholder input, reflects the vision and priorities for service delivery through 2022.



The annual budget allocates resources based on priorities identified in the Strategic Plan and the annual work plan. Specific and technical plans are developed based on fire science and often in partnership with various stakeholders identified in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. These three documents are critical to District operations and are reviewed and updated **consistent with the District's continuous improvement strategy.**

LAHCFD VALUES

- Organizational integrity, dedication and trust
- Leadership actively seeks input from our community to adapt to their changing needs
- Providing essential services to the community served
- Regional approach for cooperative engagement with partners, agencies and entities to ensure, share and provide resources and support
- Local control while seeking positive solutions



Methodology

Typically, a strategic planning process gathers community members, stakeholders, District Commissioners and staff together to discuss and reach consensus on the contents of the Plan. As public health orders continue to limit public gatherings to reduce the risk of COVID-19, this process moved online. The lack of in-person collaboration prevented the synergy and creativity generated when people respond to one another's comments and questions to reach mutually agreeable solutions.

Even so, a series of virtual meetings have provided opportunities to consider and discuss the District's **work objectives**. The Commission's Ad Hoc Strategic Plan Subcommittee has monitored Strategic Plan 2015-2020, and recently conducted two Community Meetings in preparation for the successor Strategic Plan process. A Special Meeting of the Commission along with check-ins at regularly scheduled Commission meetings occurred throughout November 2020. Additionally, over 125 community members provided public comment before the County Board of Supervisors at their October 6, 2020 hearing about the County's Management Audit of LAHCFD. Public input from these meetings expressed strong support for local actions to enhance fire safety and resilience.

Accomplishments

Over the course of the last five years, the District has refined its organizational structure to meet growing service demands. District communication flows through multiple channels and provides the latest updates on emergency conditions and services. Community groups are connected with District activities and information.

This successor strategic planning process has identified the following District accomplishments:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implemented CWPP with focus on Hazardous Fuel Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Implemented all accepted audit recommendations, participated in Board of Supervisors meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Positive collaboration with local agencies/County Fire personnel
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Prepared Addendum to CWPP for residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Partnership with FireSafe Council to manage fuel reduction programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developed electronic records management practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Supported adoption of higher standards for fire safe building regulations by Town	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Conducted community evacuation drill	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Continuously improve District website, including current warnings, alerts
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Developed methods for direct and online communication with residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Refreshed ARK and supplies and engaged LAH CERTs, HAMS and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Utilize best practices in vendor procurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Created new commissioner handbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased use of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Revitalized Los Altos Hills CERT program



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|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted compensation analysis and position descriptions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt organizational structure to meet service demands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved outreach efforts to community via website and social media |
|---|---|---|

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

Change is a constant factor, and while the District may not control external factors, it can adapt approaches to work in a way that maximizes District strengths and opportunities. The exercise of defining current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is common in strategic planning, and provides transparency as an agency develops longer-term goals. Elements in each of these categories were discussed and grouped to consider how they may impact future District activities.

SWOT Analysis

	Helpful	Harmful
INTERNAL	Strengths: Decision-makers local Stable funding Skilled commission and staff with relevant expertise Engaged community, CERT, volunteers, amateur radio groups Relationships with regional organizations Integrating services with SCCFD and County	Weaknesses: Turnover = loss of historical knowledge Public's lack of understanding of District's role Lack of administrative facilities Technology: difficult to stay current and expensive Ability to adapt quickly enough to implement programs and respond to public needs for life and property safety
EXTERNAL	Opportunities: Adapt to any demands Identify high risk fire fuel areas Regional partnerships to share resources More modes of communication available Utilize District parcel for fire protection services Utilize recent fire events to develop prevention and protection life and property safety programs	Threats: Increasingly severe weather threats and drought influenced by climate change Uncertainty of impact of COVID-19 economic impact to long-term financial stability Wildland fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters



Gap Analysis and Critical Issues

The SWOT analysis highlights the following key areas where opportunity exists to protect lives, property and the environment.

- Where are the highest risk areas for wildland fire?
- What opportunities exist to use District resources and assets in partnership with regional organizations to improve community resilience and safety?
- What are parameters for use of District funds and resources?
- How will increasingly severe weather events threaten the District?
- How can the District better communicate and educate residents to build resilient communities to protect life and property and prevent loss in disaster?

Warmer temperatures and reduced rainfall dry out vegetation; dry fuel presents grave danger in a time when “fire season” is extending for longer periods ([ref article](#)). As California continues to experience long-term drought patterns and reach new high temperature records, 2020 will far exceed recent annual acres burned. As of October 4, 2020, 2,411,641 acres have burned in the 2020 California wildfire season. The previous five-year average (full calendar years) is 453,627 annual acres burned.

The document created by the County detailing strategies for wildfire protection is the Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Santa Clara’s CWPP, issued in August 2016, is the County-wide planning document. Annexes address specific issues and unique characteristics of different regions of the County, including Annex 4, covering Los Altos Hills County Fire District.

In April 2019, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors received a presentation from the County Central Fire Chief on the Wildland Fire Program Workplan. Due to budget shortfalls, most aspects of that program have not been funded. In a report presented October 6, 2020ⁱⁱⁱ Chief Bowden stated, “*The individual fire agencies and special districts within the county will need to continue to attempt to collaborate and combine resources where feasible to address the growing wildfire danger within their respective jurisdictions.*”

With this successor Strategic Plan, the District is defining **specific** actions and **considering potential areas** for further **action**, to support the local community as well as the broader County effort to reduce risk due to wildfire. A renewed focus on regional partnerships to combine strengths, expertise and assets will improve both emergency response and preventive efforts.

The circumstances described above are not unique to this area; regional partnerships are trending nationally to maximize limited resources. The CPSE (Center for Public Safety Excellence) and ICMA (International City/County Management Association)





released a white paper in July 2020 evaluating eight approaches for local government and fire agencies to work together to address service demands in the 21st century (footnote). One of those eight approaches focuses on creating local strategies to work with a variety of partners to provide services more efficiently in this time of competing priorities and limited resources.

Goals and Objectives

District funds support the community through education, outreach, communication, programs for the reduction of vegetation and brush, and funding for contract emergency medical and fire suppression services. The following goals and objectives are presented as a roadmap for the District through 2022 to expand and improve regional emergency response, and are expected to be revisited periodically. Many of these goals directly support key objectives in the Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, particularly in Chapter 5, Mitigation Strategies.

In summary, these are the District's six strategic goals:

1. Update LAHCFD Annex 4/Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Addendum
2. Align District operations with County-wide fire protection goals and County recommendations
3. Build Community Resiliency with integrated hazardous fuel reduction, prevention and protection programs
4. Develop policies and procedures to support District water systems for protection of property, life safety and fire suppression systems
5. Support emergency response and build programs of outreach, communication, education and regional benefits
6. Adapt organization and allocate resources to promote stability and sustainability of the District to continue its operation as a valued local Special District



STRATEGIC GOAL 1:	OBJECTIVES:
<p>Engage community and partners to review and update the LAHCFD Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) Annex 4 and Addendum Guide for Residents</p>	<p><u>Description</u></p> <p><i>Annex 4 is our local CWPP which describes wildfire hazards and mitigation measures to meet our community's unique local, social and ecological characteristics. We are updating these guiding documents periodically to conform to current fire science knowledge and capture lessons learned from increasingly severe wildfire occurrences.</i></p>
	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <p>1a. Develop a timeline for action steps for a public process with stakeholders and community members</p> <p>1b. Identify experts and resources to be consulted during this process</p> <p>1c. Research and hold meetings with experts and resources to identify current best practices for CWPP</p> <p>1d. Collaborate with Central Fire Department personnel to align Annex 4 CWPP with County regional fire protection plan</p> <p>1e. Upon completion of CWPP Annex 4, revise Addendum Guide for Residents</p> <p>1f. Create a communication plan for residents and stakeholders to educate those who live in and work with the District to understand the revised CWPP Annex 4.</p> <p>1g. Obtain updated maps, integrate into GIS mapping.</p>



STRATEGIC GOAL 2:	OBJECTIVES:
Align District operations with County-wide fire protection goals and County recommendations	<p><u>Description</u></p> <p><i>As a Dependent District of the County, the LAHCFD operates within parameters established by the County, and participates in the County and LAFCO Countywide Fire Protection Studies as a regional partner.</i></p>
	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <p>2a. Reporting process to County: Adhere to County Management Audit recommendations, prepare monthly reports and deliver report presentations to County Committees and to the Management Audit Division</p>
	<p>2b. Participate in LAFCO Countywide Fire Service Review and County Comprehensive Review of Fire Services that will report on County Fire Protection</p>
	<p>2c. Establish District records in a manner consistent with County policies and procedures for record management systems and retention schedules.</p>
	<p>2d. Work with County Counsel to identify District parameters for capital expenditures, and any other requirements for allocation of District resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conform to County procurement policies, procedures, and State requirements under the public contracting codes.



STRATEGIC GOAL 3:	OBJECTIVES:
Mitigate risk and build community resiliency through integrated hazardous fuel reduction, protection and prevention programs	<p><u>Description</u></p> <p><i>As illustrated in the Forward Looking Resiliency Chart (link), fund, create and implement programs based on fire science, CWPP/Annex 4 and the annual budget to enhance community resiliency, educate District residents and reduce community hazards.</i></p>
	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <p>3a. Identify high fire risk areas; initiate collaborative solutions with regional partners and SCCFD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target roadside fuel reduction • Target open space fuel reduction • Enhance vegetation management
	<p>3b. Continue to partner with regional organizations to support Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) surveys of properties and provide action items for life and property fire safety</p>
	<p>3c. Consider incentives, consistent with CWPP and County Management Audit, to reduce fire fuel load and to motivate property hygiene and home hardening against fire danger.</p>
	<p>3d. Create certificate of completion for HIZ participants to provide to their homeowner's insurance carrier.</p>
	<p>3e. Use technology to strategically target fuel mitigation program delivery (GIS for brush chipping, shaded fuel breaks)</p>
	<p>3f. Seek resident, vendor, staff and volunteer input for continuous improvement feedback to create, enhance and expand programs</p>



STRATEGIC GOAL 4:	OBJECTIVES:
<p>Develop policies and processes for management of District's water systems of hydrant and hydrant infrastructure for protection of property and life-safety and support of fire suppression systems.</p>	<p><u>Description</u></p> <p>Continually improve community fire protection through District's water system consisting of 540 hydrants and hydrant infrastructure; develop a studied approach to issues related to District-owned hydrants and hydrant infrastructure</p>
	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <p>4a. Develop policies and guidelines for hydrant and infrastructure location, replacements and additions and evaluate pipeline resiliency when opportunities for improvements occur in coordination with County Central Fire, engineering consultants and water purveyors.</p>
	<p>4b. Develop hydrant and infrastructure mapping and asset identification system utilizing GIS</p>
	<p>4c. Supplement local and regional fire suppression capabilities through funding of portable pumper vehicle.</p>



STRATEGIC GOAL 5:	OBJECTIVES:
<p>Deliver community services that support emergency response and build programs of outreach, communication, education and regional benefits</p>	<p><u>Description</u></p> <p>Collaborate with regional partners to strengthen community resilience, transparency and effectiveness of local government programs. Continue to identify opportunities to use District resources to benefit a broader regional area in support of common interests.</p>
	<p><u>Deliverables</u></p> <p>5a. Explore joint projects with neighboring agencies that affect our overlapping and adjacent service areas to provide resilience from wildfire and other disasters.</p>
	<p>5b. Support, encourage and revitalize Los Altos Hills Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program</p>
	<p>5c. Support, encourage and revitalize Amateur Radio operator activities</p>
	<p>5d. Support and maintain the ARK and emergency supply containers and equipment</p>
	<p>5e. Plan and host evacuation drills</p>
	<p>5f. Continue using existing communication tools, including social media, while evaluating new technology and regional resources to educate community and align outreach communications with neighboring agencies</p>
	<p>5g. Expand outreach by evaluating new opportunities to drive community to website to find current updates and critical information</p>
	<p>5h. Continue to assess early notification advisories and ways to improve participation by District residents.</p>



STRATEGIC GOAL 6:	OBJECTIVES:
Adapt organization and allocate resources to promote stability and sustainability of the District to continue its operation as a valued local Special District	<u>Description</u> Optimize organizational structure to align with the District's Mission and Goals; utilize available resources and adapt to a regional approach for community resiliency
	<u>Deliverables</u>
	6a. Participate in LAFCO County-wide fire protection services review and County comprehensive review of fire services plan study; evaluate structure in context of these proceedings
	6b. Provide resources to maintain a sustainable administration to meet District operational needs
	6c. Develop efficiencies for administration through utilization of County Departments to augment staff expertise and capacity.
	6d. Create succession plan to support continuity in staffing
	6e. Ensure budget decisions are consistent with Strategic Plan and fiscally sustainable
	6f. Identify adequate space for training, District meetings and District assets
	6g. Explore opportunities for grant funding to augment District services
	6h. Repurpose use of District parcel to expand fire protection response capability for local and regional benefit.

Recognition of Contributors

Thank you to all of the community members who participated in providing input to this Successor Strategic Plan. General Manager J. Logan, Emergency Services





Manager Denise Gluhan, Special Projects Consultant Sarah Henricks, Deputy Chief Brian Glass and Commissioners shared their expertise and hours of meeting time. The Commissioners who have **contributed to** this Plan are:

Commission President:	Mark Warren
Commission Vice-President:	Melvin Vaughn
Commissioner	Janice Carr
Commissioner:	Terry Kearney
Commissioner:	Dorothy Duffy Price
Commissioner:	Roger Spreen
Commissioner:	George Tyson

Special mention and thanks to the Ad Hoc Commission Successor Strategic Plan Subcommittee, consisting of Commissioners Roger Spreen, Duffy Price and Janice Carr for their leadership and insight to achieve this Plan under unprecedented circumstances.

References and Resources

Santa Clara County Central Fire Department Contract for Services and three Memoranda of Understanding

<https://www.lahcfd.org/download/contract-and-mou-with-santa-clara-county-central-fire-protection-district/?ind=1485193931347&filename=contract-LAHCFD-LA-SCCCFPD-dec2016.pdf&wpdmdl=1494&refresh=5ff4c564615771609876836>

Santa Clara County Community Wildfire Protection Plan

https://www.sccfd.org/images/documents/fire_prevention/CWPP/CWPP_Strategic_Countywide_Document_08_29_16.pdf

Los Altos Hills County Fire Department Community Wildfire Plan/Annex 4

https://www.sccfd.org/images/documents/fire_prevention/CWPP/Annex_4_Los_Altos_Hills_County_Fire_District_2019.06.pdf

Los Altos Hills County Fire Department Addendum (guidebook for residents for Annex 4)

<https://www.lahcfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/AddendumtoRevisedAnnex4.pdf>

Los Altos Hills County Fire Department Adopted Budget FY 2020-2021

<https://www.lahcfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FY21-Budget-Adopted.pdf>

Santa Clara County Central Fire Department Strategic Plan 2020 – 2022

https://www.sccfd.org/images/documents/key_reports_documents/SCCFD_2020-2022_StrategicPlan.pdf



Cal Fire statistics

https://fire.ca.gov/media/t1rdhizr/top20_destruction.pdf

Endnotes

ⁱ https://fire.ca.gov/media/t1rdhizr/top20_destruction.pdf Cal Fire website; annual statistical reports for 2020 are expected to be posted in the near future.

ⁱⁱ District's Forward-Looking Community Resiliency infographic illustrates current Prevention and Protection Programs, and Integrated Hazardous Fuel Reduction Programs.

ⁱⁱⁱ Santa Clara County Fire Chief Bowden memorandum to Board of Supervisors October 6, 2020

<http://sccgov.iqm2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=11652&Inline=True>

Agenda item #13, begins on page 229 of packet