



CITY OF BEVERLY HILLS STAFF REPORT

Meeting Date: April 22, 2010
To: Honorable Mayor & City Council
From: Fire Marshal Greg Barton
Subject: Cost Recovery for Brush Inspections
Attachments:

INTRODUCTION

The Fire Department currently conducts Brush Clearance Inspections in the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone for compliance with the California Fire Code and the Beverly Hills Municipal Code. This zone includes all properties located North of Sunset Blvd. and is established by the State Fire Marshal based on its susceptibility to urban interface wildfire potential.

The brush inspection program requires hours of actual inspection time, associated equipment costs and administrative support such as printing, mailing, and filing that are a definable cost to the Fire Department. In April, 2007, a Citywide Fee Study was conducted by an outside consultant. This included an assessment of the Fire Department's brush inspections, which had previously been conducted free-of-charge for the initial inspection and the first re-inspection.

During last year's budget challenges, the City looked at ways to recover some of the costs associated with the services the City provides. As part of the overall approved budget, it was decided to recover all costs associated with initial Brush Inspections (which occur annually). Cost recovery for the Brush Inspections was approved at the May 13, 2009 City Council Meeting with the other taxes, fees, and charges for fiscal year 2009/2010. The cost recovery fee for initial Brush Inspections and one re-inspection is \$383.28. Staff has been asked to revisit the cost recovery fee for Brush Inspections.

DISCUSSION

Current Brush Inspection Program

In 2006, the Fire Department increased the Brush Clearance requirement from 100 feet to 200 feet around structures to reduce the potential loss of lives and structures during a wildland-urban interface fire. During this first year, residents were educated on the new standard and not cited for non-compliance for the second 100 feet. In 2007, the Fire Department enforced the new 200 foot defendable space requirement. Brush Inspections began in May, 2007, following the fee study submitted in April, 2007. Due to

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the increase in required brush clearance around a structure, there was no actual data regarding the amount of compliance, nor the actual amount of time required to inspect the properties. The Fire Department has implemented these increased brush clearance requirements since 2007. Based on the Fee Study of 2007, the fees associated with this year's inspection program will be:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Initial Inspection(1 st re-inspection included) | \$383.28 |
| Non-Compliance after 2 nd inspection | \$468.80 |
| Non-Compliance after 3 rd inspection | \$632.10 |
| Non-Compliance after 4 th and subsequent | \$842.80 |
| Lot clearing by City Staff | Actual Cost |

Following community input, staff conducted research on brush inspection programs in other communities, most of which had no, or significantly lower, charges as they have not introduced cost recovery for the service. Given these findings and the differential in inspection time based on property size, a new fee structure may be considered based on these factors:

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Size of Lot | Cost Recovery Fee |
| 0 to 1/2 Acre | \$100 |
| 1/2 to 1 Acre | \$150 |
| 1 to 2 Acres | \$200 |
| 2 or more Acres | \$250 |

FISCAL IMPACT

Fiscal year 2009/2010 is the first year that property owners are being charged a cost recovery fee for the initial brush inspection; therefore, the City through its General Fund, has previously subsidized the cost of the initial brush inspection.

The inspections will begin on April 15, 2010 as planned, however, the City will not send invoices until the City Council reviews the issue. By reducing the Cost Recovery Fee for Brush Inspection, there will be a possible revenue shortfall for budget year 10/11:

| Size of Lot | Cost Recovery Fee | Number of Lots | Total Recovery |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 0 to 1/2 Acre | \$100 | 632 | \$63,200 |
| 1/2 to 1 Acre | \$150 | 696 | \$104,400 |
| 1 to 2 Acres | \$200 | 165 | \$33,000 |
| 2 or more Acres | \$250 | 32 | \$8,000 |
| TOTAL | | 1525 | \$208,600 |

Based on this fee model, 87% of impacted residents would receive a bill of \$150 or less.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends charging the fee structure cited above to recover the costs associated with brush inspections and related administrative processing costs.

Timothy J. Scranton, Fire Chief
 Approved By

