

MOUNT HERMON INFORMATIONAL MEETING NOTES FROM 4/29/2021

(You can also watch the video recording of the meeting on the Mount Hermon Community website under News & Events)

MHC Meeting featuring Sheriff's Update with Sergeant Jason Dunn; Felton Fire Protection District Update with Fire Chief Robert Gray; FireWise Community with Lynn Sestak; Community Announcements with Reggie Coates; Summer Registration Update with Bill Fernald; and 2020 Roads/Trails/Bridges Financial Review with Bryan Hayes. [See video on our MHC website for more detail]

Contact information for all the speakers at this 4//29/2021 meeting:

Robert Gray – rgray@feltonfire.com
Jason Dunn – jason.dunn@santacruzcounty.us
Lynn Sestak – lynn.sestak@yahoo.com
Adam Hensleigh – mhcare4rep@gmail.com
Bryan Hayes – bryan.hayes@mounthermon.org
Bill Fernald – bill.fernauld@mounthermon.org
Reggie Coates – mail@mounthermoncommunity.com
Laurie Shipley – mail@mounthermoncommunity.com

-- Welcome to 4/29/2021 Virtual Meeting by Mount Hermon Community President: Reggie Coates

-- Sheriff's Update with Sergeant Jason Dunn:

There was a series of arsons in Felton over a span of several weeks in February 2021. Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park and sheriff jurisdictions had arson fires.

Sgt. Dunn states these 2021 fires proved to be quite different from the 2020 CZU because they were set by an arsonist. The investigation was more challenging because the suspected arsonist was not caught in the act of setting the fires and the evidence found at each scene was all circumstantial.

Sgt. Dunn extends thanks for the great teamwork by the various fire department and law enforcement professionals working in tandem with the District Attorney. Consequently, a case for multiple arsons was started. This person was arrested and is currently in custody. The case is now being adjudicated by the District Attorney who has filed charges with the evidence gathered at the various fire sites.

The fires were started at the following areas: Henry Cowell area near Graham Hill Rd., the site of a controlled burn. Additional locations included: Roaring Camp, the end of Kirby St. next to Hallcrest Vineyards, behind the Felton Safeway; fire across from Mount Hermon Road near Daybreak property.

Sgt. Jason Dunn stated he is tasked this year with planning fire preparedness for Santa Cruz County. The Dept. has been preparing for county-wide fire evacuation plans as they want to be prepared for this fire season and mitigate properties/areas for all fire danger.

Sgt. Dunn also stated the overall crime in the Mount Hermon area has been minimal.

-- Felton Fire Protection District Update with Fire Chief (FC) Robert Gray:

FC Gray expressed thanks for teamwork in both Felton and the San Lorenzo Valley area. He thanked Sgt. Jason Dunn for the decline in fires related to unhoused residents, attributing this to the fire safety

education program stressing the dangers of “cooking in the woods.” FC Gray stated that the fire department is looking for solutions regarding vegetation management.

FC Gray appointed Captain Audrey Dawson to do fire safety inspections. She has a lot of experience in wild land fires and worked on many strike teams. Her duties will include conducting home and property inspections in the Felton and Mount Hermon areas; making assessments about what is necessary to make individual properties as well as the communities “fire safe.”

FC Gray said all requests for an inspection by Capt. Dawson can be made by calling the Fire Department to request an appointment (831) 335-4422.

Questions that Fire Chief Gray has been asked:

- “Exactly what is the fire issue here?”
- “Why suddenly have we been experiencing these huge fires, and never seen this before? “
- “Are you going to fine me and/or am I going to get into trouble?”

Answers FC Gray has given: The drought stressed fuels (vegetation) over some dry winters; especially in 2015 and 2016 has dried the vegetation. There was some relief from these conditions in 2017 and 2018 but vegetations were still not able to come back to what the levels were. Going into last year and this year, the fuel numbers are so low, it is rivaling some the numbers we have not seen for 10 or 15 years during the summer season. The biggest problem is that we are seeing bigger fire issues in early 2021.

The Fire Dept. is seeing an overall increase in fires. Another factor of concern regarding fires is that we have still not had enough rain in 2021.

Fire Chief Gray dispels PG&E rumor that the fires were due to their need to replace all their utility wires. He explained that except for the CZU fires in 2020 (28 fires started by lightning strikes), a large part of the wildfires were caused by humans, either accidental fires or deliberately set fires, such as arson and vehicle fires.

Fire Chief Gray’s suggestions on how we can be vigilant about fire safety:

- Do not build bonfires or use outdoor fire pits during times when fire danger is high.
- Observe the weather conditions; especially when there are warm and dry winds from the north east that can cause a “red flag condition,” indicating a high chance of wild fire. Listen to our local weather forecasters regularly. They have developed expertise in determining when the weather may lead to a fire, and/or fire hazards.
- Prepare individual properties as well as a community-wide fire safety plan each year.

Question from host Reggie Coates from a resident in the chat room: “Who is the agency that notifies residents of fire danger if a property close by needs some attention? “

Answer from FC Gray: “Fire danger determination is subjective. Some people think some things are a fire hazard but upon assessment, that area could be found to not to be a hazard or meet fire code requirements for a violation. At present we are unable to assess vacant properties, but are looking into being able to do so in the future.”

-- Firesafe Santa Cruz with FireWise Community Clerk Lynn Sestak

Lynn Sestak extends her thanks to Fire Chief Robert Gray and Capt. Dawson, stating they both had made major contributions to our area's fire safety by spreading interest in FireWise and volunteering to be on Santa Cruz FireWise Council as a FireWise Community Coach.

Lynn Sestak's Introduction: Lynn is a volunteer of the Santa Cruz and Santa Clara FireSafe Council and a long-time resident of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Lynn's interest in fire safety began two years ago, when she was awoken at night to the sounds of explosions in the canyons below their communities' homes where fires broke out.

FireWise USA is a recognized program for the National Fire Protection Fire Association of California. This organization is important as the entire west coast has had an increase of wildfires. Our area includes Santa Cruz Mountains, Los Cumbres, Riva Ridge, Marty Road, Sunset Ridge Road, Terrace Grove, Bonny Doon, Felton, Paradise Park, Prospect Heights, Redwood Cathedral Highlands and more.

FireWise is a:

- National Program active in 42 states
- Located in over 1600 sites.
- Has increased growth in areas affected by wildfires.

FireWise establishes a framework for a 6-step process for communities to set up Firewise procedures assisting:

- Neighbor's ability to collaborate around fire safety in their community.
- Voluntary participation
- A decreased fire risk for residents and first responders
- Individual homeowners in taking the next step in home hardening with community collaboration.

The 6 Steps to Achieving FireWise USA Recognition:

1. Form a neighborhood steering committee comprised of residents and other wildfire stakeholders, to organize and drive the process.
2. Complete a wildfire risk assessment. Ideally including feedback from the Fire Dept. in your jurisdiction.
3. Host a minimum of one wildfire risk reduction educational event or related activity per year. Ex: Wildfire evacuation workshop; Defensible Space.
4. Develop a multi-year action plan based on the sites risk assessment and priorities (Suggested: consult with Capt. Dawson to make assessments and recommendations).

FireWise suggests that a community create a 3-year action plan and address the most pressing fire safety issues in the first year and fix additional issues that may need grant funding in the following year.

5. Meet the minimum wildfire risk reduction investment: a 1 hour volunteer requirement per year, or the annual rate of \$25.43 per residence. (Example: home defensible space, road work-parties for brush clearing.)
6. Have the steering committee create a USA portal account and apply to your state FireWise USA location.

Lynn pointed out that even if one resident/family has done everything necessary to make their home and property a defensible space, but their neighbor's home catches on fire, it is still very possible that the neighbor's fire could spread to their house. Community participation toward making every house, property and the entire community "fire safe" can accomplish neighborhood wide fire safety, which individuals cannot achieve on their own.

Some fire safe improvements your community can make include:

- Making roads more accessible so your community can evacuate.
- Make sure fire professionals can get into your community to stop fires.
- Evaluate roads to see if they are wide enough and well-marked.

By going through the FireWise process, you signal to the fire protection community that you care about the first responder's safety and your community being fire safe. Not all 497 homes must participate in the FireWise program. A few homes can start as participation grows.

Additional Benefits of FireWise participation:

- Framework for community action and other emergencies such as earthquakes.
- Peace of mind.
- Community building.
- Access to professional assistance (FireSafe Council) and potential grants.
- Builds goodwill with local firefighting professionals.
- Potentially favorable to insurance (USAA and Mercury Insurance offer insurance discounts if you are in a FireWise community).

Lynn said that both she and Adam Hensleigh want to be part of this FireWise steering committee. Another beneficial aspect of FireWise is that someone like Capt. Dawson to complete your community's wildfire risk assessment by walking through your community and doing individual home and property inspections.

Potential neighborhood activities for fire safety (for investment hours):

- Chipping, brush clearing or chain saw days.
- Fire hydrants, clear surroundings-blue reflective dots in the street, wrap in blue tape.
- Road and driveway clearance for fire engines (14 feet up and 10 feet wide).

- Mark turn around locations for emergency vehicles.
- Create GIS map (houses and water sources).
- Emergency Communication Plan (use messaging app for communication).
- Evacuation Drills.
- Tour neighborhood to identify priorities.

Examples of what other communities have done with help from FireWise:

- Las Cumbres: created alternative evacuation routes and drills.
- Chemeketa Park: pioneered “Pods” and use “WhatsApp” for emergency communication.
- Forest Lakes: focus on vegetation management and grant seeking.
- TangleWood: work closely with Felton Fire Captain, fire retardant deck treatments.
- Riva Ridge: use of CALFIRE off season crews for shaded fuel breaks.

What’s next in moving forward with becoming a FireWise Community:

- Assess our MH Community’s interest in pursuing FireWise National recognition.
- Identify a steering committee for your community of approx. 3-5 people. If you are interested in being a part of this committee, contact Adam Hensleigh via email at: mhcare4rep@gmail.com.

-- Community Announcements with Reggie Coates:

FIREWISE STEERING COMMITTEE: Adam Hensleigh needs volunteers for the FireWise steering committee so they can share information about the FireWise program.

WOOD CHIPPING PROGRAM: Sunday, May 9, 2021; Chipping Program. Wood chipping, cleaning & clearing brush & tree branches.

To participate in this program, your branches should be in the following condition and location:

- Have no leaves on wood being chipped.
- Between 1 inch to 4 inches in diameter.
- Wood must be on the road, laying in one direction, with all cut ends together.
- MH Road’s crew will also be trimming back trees from our roads for fire safety.
- Chipping staff WILL NOT return to same place twice.

MAPPING OUR NEIGHBORHOOD: It is of utmost importance to find out who lives where in Mount Hermon. We are starting a C.E.R.T. *Map Your Neighborhood* campaign to find out the names, addresses, contact information, and special needs of each resident in Mount Hermon. This will take place over this summer. Laurie Shipley is the point person. She is a C.E.R.T. member and has a passion for the safety and emergency preparedness for the Mount Hermon residents. She can be reached at: mail@mounthermoncommunity.com. We will be actively collecting this information in June. Area Representatives will be contacting each resident to gather information. We are aiming for September 1, 2021, to have this data. You can contact your area representatives if you would like to help.

Reggie explained that after the devastating Oakland fire of 1991, a man spoke of how his mom would have been saved if only someone knew she was there in her home. She died in her home because there was no community effort to know your neighbors. This is one way we can be ready for disasters.

-- Summer Registration Update with Bill Fernald

Bill discussed the MH 2021 summer season stating that "We have some real challenges going into this summer as there are many unknowns in this COVID world with things changing daily, especially in the hospitality and large group gatherings." There will be no overnight camps offered this year at Ponderosa and Redwood Camp. Instead, we are planning on operating day camps at Redwood Camp for local children living in the San Lorenzo Valley, Scotts Valley and Santa Cruz. Because of COVID restrictions, there will be a reduced number of day camp guests.

Ponderosa Camp will not have any scheduled camp activities operating there; instead, MH will be completing some much-needed facility improvement projects and will use this space for the overflow of summer staff.

Mount Hermon does not have any set COVID rules yet and has been operating by the rules of the City and County based on regulations for four major areas: day camps, places of worship, restaurants and hotels. We are still interested in how the State of CA views MH conference center given the variety of activities we offer. Additionally, the CA governor announced that the tier systems may go away 6/15/2021 but the last time they revamped the tier system, it became almost more restrictive.

Things that could impact how we operate after the date mentioned above are what will be determined as the rules regarding social distancing and wearing masks. This will highly impact indoor groups, numbers of participants and how we conduct special and larger groups. We do not have Summer Season 2021 specifically planned since we will have to wait and see what is determined after June 15, 2021, and how it impacts the Summer Season of 2021.

MH Residents: Please note you will not be able to use the meadow because we are planning an outdoor dining area there. We will use the mid-section of the parking lot for food kiosks and use the meadow for eating with picnic tables and umbrellas where guests will be able to socially distance while eating their meals.

Every Sunday, we will hold registration for camps/events from 4 to 6pm at the field. Part of Mound Ave. will be closed for 2 hours during the registration period which will also include health screening. Bill said he can be reached at the contact information listed at the beginning of this document.

-- 2020 Roads/Trails/Bridges Financial Review with Bryan Hayes:

Bryan shared, through a visual presentation, the detail of where homeowners' fees went during last year. There are 497 homes in Mount Hermon. See the video on our website to see these charts and exact

financial detail. He would be glad to send a copy of this information to anyone who asks. He can be reached at the contact information listed at the beginning of this document.

Bryan shared that MHA has been working hard recently to clear brush between Ponderosa Lodge and the Cross.

Question from MHC President Reggie Coates from a resident in the chat room: "Is there a COVID screening process for the MH staff and guest conferees? "

Answer from Bryan: The staff and guests will need to have verification of vaccinations or COVID negative test results within 72 hours of arrival. The staff is tested for COVID once a week and children are given daily health screenings.

-- Adjourn by Ron Taylor

Submitted by Maria Demarest, MHC Secretary

VIDEO OF THIS 4-29-21 MHC MEETING CAN BE FOUND AT <http://mounthermoncommunity.com> under *News & Events*. Featuring Sheriff's Update with Sergeant Jason Dunn; Felton Fire Protection District Update with Fire Chief Robert Gray; FireWise Community with Lynn Sestak; Community Announcements with Reggie Coates; Summer Registration Update with Bill Fernald; and 2020 Roads/Trails/Bridges Financial Review with Bryan Hayes.