

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION MINUTES
Monday, July 14, 2025**

Graham called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

Council Present: Mayor Graham, Councilors Bloom, Dahle, DuQuenne, Hansen, Kaplan and Sherrell.

Council Absent: None

Staff Present:

Sabrina Cotta	City Manager
Alissa Kolodzinski	City Recorder
Chris Chambers	Forestry Officer

I. Call to Order

II. Reports and Presentations

a. Community Wildfire Protection Plan

City of Ashland Forestry Officer Chris Chambers, along with Certified Wildfire Mitigation Specialist, Jerry McAdams, Volunteer, Charisse Sydoriak, and Executive Director of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce Sandra Slattery, presented the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) found in the agenda packet (presentation attached.)

Chambers emphasized Ashland's high wildfire risk and the need for a new approach to wildfire preparedness. The 2025 CWPP differs significantly from the 2004 version, focusing more on preserving the community, economy, and way of life under the threat of urban conflagrations.

McAdams stressed the importance of the fire-adapted communities' piece, highlighting Ashland's vulnerability due to its older, combustible homes and high density. The council was encouraged to consider increasing capacity in this area, given that wildfire is one of the highest risks to the community.

Sydoriak, explained the community engagement process used in developing the CWPP. This included surveys, interviews, and outreach to socially vulnerable populations. The team collected data from various demographics, including homeowners, renters, and property management companies.

Slattery from the Ashland Chamber of Commerce discussed the economic stability section of the plan. She highlighted the chamber's long-standing partnership with Ashland Fire and Rescue in wildfire preparedness efforts and outlined initiatives to educate and support local businesses in emergency preparedness.

The presentation covered several key aspects of the CWPP:

- **Risk Assessment:** The team used advanced mapping techniques, like LiDAR, to identify wildfire risks, including structural threats and vegetation details.
- **Infrastructure Protection:** The plan emphasizes securing Ashland's electric and water systems, including replacing wooden poles and fuses. It also involves collaboration with Oregon State University to bolster the water system's resilience.
- **Insurance Crisis:** Residents face increased premiums and less accessible coverage due to higher wildfire risks. The CWPP suggests forming partnerships and obtaining certifications, like the Wildfire Prepared Homes Program, to help residents maintain and lower insurance costs.
- **Recovery Planning:** Highlighting the need for a comprehensive wildfire recovery strategy, focusing on economic stability and maintaining the community's socio-economic structure.
- **Implementation Priorities:** The plan outlines steps for implementing the CWPP, including revamping codes and ordinances, conducting outreach, improving evacuation systems, and performing wildfire risk assessments.

The presenters emphasized the need for community-wide participation in implementing the plan, stating that it belongs to the entire community. They also stressed the importance of securing sustainable funding for implementation.

Several crucial points and concerns were extensively discussed by the council concerning various elements of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP):

- **Funding:** The council discussed various funding options, including successful models from other communities, to support the plan's implementation. Emphasis was placed on the importance of setting realistic funding expectations and achieving a sustainable long-term funding strategy.
- **Code Enforcement:** The council explored transitioning from voluntary participation to enhanced code enforcement to ensure broader compliance and effectiveness in wildfire risk reduction, fostering community understanding and cooperation.
- **Affordability:** The council addressed potential trade-offs and challenges tied to affordability across community segments, underlining the importance of addressing economic disparities and ensuring equitable solutions.
- **Insurance:** Discussions centered on refining insurance-related initiatives to clarify the city's role and position. And to position the community for pilot programs with insurance companies.
- **Community Engagement:** To boost wildfire preparedness, the council proposed strategies to enhance community participation, including utilizing the CERT program and developing neighborhood ambassador roles to engage residents and strengthen local readiness.

In preparation for the plan's return for approval, the Council directed staff to provide a comprehensive set of details, including:

- A detailed outline of the city's specific responsibilities and the costs associated with them; an analysis of how existing staff and resources might be better leveraged.
- A focus on identifying potential efficiencies to streamline implementation.
- A clear plan outlining what would enable the city to implement the CWPP effectively and sustainably.

This feedback reflected a shared commitment to ensuring that the city is both proactive and responsive in safeguarding against wildfire threats while balancing the multifaceted needs of the community.

The council emphasized the importance of the CWPP in addressing Ashland's wildfire risk and the need for a cultural shift towards community-wide preparedness. Highlighting the importance of asking "who benefits and who pays" when implementing the plan to ensure equity.

III. Adjournment of Study Session

The meeting was adjourned at 8:58 p.m.



City Recorder Alissa Kolodzinski



Mayor Tonya Graham

2025 Ashland Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Photo credit: Darren Campbell



City Council Study Session
July 14th, 2025

CWPP Contractor:



Funded by a grant from the USDA Forest Service

No surprise,
Ashland is in
the middle of
the target



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Ashland has a **very high risk of wildfire—higher than 97% of communities in the US.**

↓ Choose from the topics below to learn more

Understand your risk

Risk to Homes

Where are homes at risk of wildfire?



Very High

Reduce your risk

Risk Reduction Zones

Which actions are most effective to reduce risk?



Very High

Wildfire Likelihood

How likely is a wildfire in this area?

Very High

Vulnerable Populations

Who is most at risk and how do you reach them?

Low

We must recognize that our communities were developed in a climate and environment that no longer exist.

We have the tools and knowledge to reduce community wildfire risks. But we must address the profound and deeply rooted misalignment of political and social expectations regarding what it means to live with wildfire.

Now is the time to invest in long-term, economically efficient solutions, rather than short-term, risk-averse tactics.

We have to live with wildland fire. We don't have to live with fire in our communities.

From: Calkin, et al., 2023, Wildland-urban fire disasters aren't actually a wildfire problem.

What is a CWPP?

1. Community's strategic plan to avoid a wildfire disaster
2. Key to unlock grant funding
3. Directs U.S. Forest Service to consider community priorities in the City's watershed
4. A CWPP requires collaboration, measures to reduce structural ignitability, and prioritizing fuel reduction areas (HFRA, 2003)

2004 to 2025: Changing Priorities

1. 2004 Ashland CWPP focused on watershed and forest values
2. Time was limited to engage full community
3. The wildfire picture has radically changed since 2004
4. Major shift to community preservation due to increasing urban conflagrations in wildfire-prone areas.

2004 to 2025: Building on Success

1. Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project, or AFR, created a model of success for community wildfire mitigation.
2. AFR initially planned for 7,500 acres at a cost of \$12 million. Final project covered 14,000 acres and cost \$33 million, a testament to success attracting funding and enabling more work.

An External Assessment: Jerry McAdams, CWMS

Ashland's Obligations based on the CWDG Grant

1. Assess community structure ignitability & fill risk assessment gaps.
2. Assess critical infrastructure vulnerable to wildfire impacts.
3. Develop a risk reduction strategy for vulnerable community members.
4. Enable citywide structural ignitability risk reduction.
5. Mitigate landscape wildfire potential.
6. Strengthen wildfire prevention strategies.
7. Promote personal health and safety.
8. Develop an economic resilience strategy.
9. Identify what is needed for a post-fire recovery plan.
10. Develop a strategy to secure sustainable funding to create a fire adapted community.

A Community Process

Contributors	#	Working Groups	#
State representatives	6	Community profile	1
Federal employees	6	Reflecting on the past 20 years	4
City Council	3	Assessing Community Risk	8
Chamber of Commerce	3	Public Health and Safety	10
City Committee Members	7	Economic Sustainability	12
Jackson County	2	Insurance	4
Universities	8	Rental Properties	6
Hospital Services	3	Socially Vulnerable People	10
Non-profit Organizations	6	Build Mitigation Capacity	7
Businesses	15	Landscape Resilience	3
Homeowner Associations	4	Codes and Ordinances	4
City staff	22	Response & Prevention	2
Contractors	7	Wildfire Recovery Planning	2

CWPP Organization

The CWPP Vision (1)
Thematic Goals (5)
Challenges (44)
Initiatives (~220)

The CWPP Vision

Vision Statement: *We envision a future where Ashland's fabric, economy, and spirit not only withstand wildfire—but grows stronger and more connected because of it. In this future, residents, students, workers, visitors, and pets remain safe during wildfires and return quickly to undamaged homes, schools, businesses, and gathering places.*

Thematic Goals

Stronger Together, Safer Forever – Inspire and mobilize the Ashland community through trust, shared leadership, and open dialogue to achieve 90% risk reduction within 10 years.

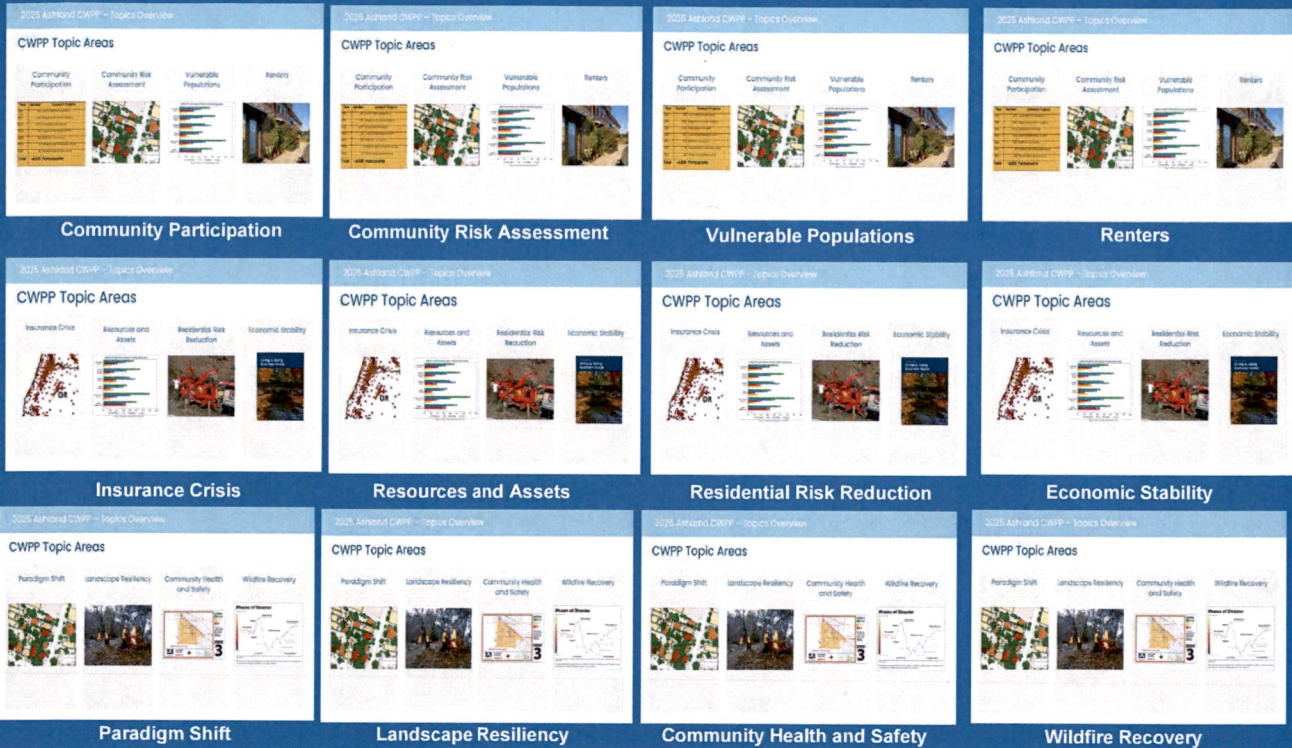
Strengthen What Matters, Track What Counts – Harden Ashland's highly valued resources and assets (HVRAs) to wildfire through data-informed strategic planning, regular risk assessments, and monitoring progress.

Smart Standards, Big Results – Revise municipal codes to align with the 90% risk reduction goal by integrating clear compliance timelines and financial assistance for eligible populations.

Strengthen Our Core, Fund the Mission – Establish a reliable local funding mechanism and build core capacity to partner, secure, manage, and match essential risk reduction resources.

Meaningful Work, Massive Impact – Secure funding to support wildfire risk assessments, implement inclusive community engagement initiatives, create and maintain resilient forests, and fund structure-hardening and defensible space work.

CWPP Topics Overview



Community Surveys and Attitudes



Outreach Respondents

Year	Number	Outreach Projects
2015	437	Local CWPP conversations
2019	~1,136	Single-family home residents
2020	2,472	Evacuation time study
2024	225	Local conversations w/ SVPs
2024	319	CWPP on-line survey
2024	8	Property mgt companies survey
2024	22	Private rental owners survey
Total	~4,619	Participants

Engagement Highlights



Outreach Gaps: Traditional communication methods fail to reach many socially vulnerable residents; hands-on, trusted community engagement is essential.

Renter Challenges: Nearly half the community rents, yet tenants have little control over wildfire risk, face resource gaps, and are vulnerable to displacement and rising rents.

Barriers to Action: Financial constraints, limited knowledge, and physical limitations prevent many from reducing wildfire risks.

Mitigation Challenges: Workforce gaps, misinformation, and weak accountability hinder effective wildfire risk reduction efforts.

Residential Risk Reduction Challenge Statements

Challenge RR-1: *Residents' perceptions of wildfire risk varies significantly by housing type, location, ownership, and experience, leading to inadequate preparations.*

Challenge RR-2: *Physical/functional limitations prevent many residents from conducting wildfire risk reduction work.*

Challenge RR-3: Financial constraints pose a significant barrier to wildfire risk reduction across all demographic groups.

Challenge RR-4: Collective residential risk reduction is essential to protect everyone, yet many neighbors do not participate, or their efforts are inadequate even when they are in a NFPA designated Firewise USA® Neighborhood.

Challenge RR-5: *Licensed and unlicensed workers are either not empowered to, are unaware of, or choose not to follow fire-resistant construction and/or landscaping best practices and some residents don't want to make recommended adjustments to be wildfire safe.*

Renter Preparedness Challenge Statements

Challenge RE-1: Most renters lack authority to implement risk reduction measures. Rental owners and property management companies (by proxy) are ultimately responsible for reducing wildfire risk, but they don't appear to have incentive or motivation to take necessary action.

Challenge RE-2: Renters living in multi-unit housing face greater challenges. Many renters don't understand wildfire risk or are not motivated to learn.

Challenge RE-3: In the aftermath of wildfire, the availability of affordable rental homes in Ashland may become severely limited, potentially forcing many residents to relocate.

SVP Preparedness Challenge Statements

Challenge SV-1: Many socially vulnerable households underestimate their wildfire risk and face multiple barriers to reducing that risk.

Challenge SV-2: SVPs require a variety of communication modalities to develop trusting relationships critical to fostering engagement.

Challenge SV-3: A majority of socially vulnerable residents live in housing that is highly vulnerable to wildfire ignition.

Top 4 Risk Reduction Barriers to Making Homes Safer from Wildfires

84% had no of renters felt like they control over their home's safety from wildfire.

Lack of Agency

Almost **1 in 5** residents are living below the federal poverty line and nearly 40% of Ashland households are deemed "cost burdened." (ACCESS, 2023)

Financial Constraints

Approximately **22%** of SVPS reported not receiving any wildfire safety information, revealing a major outreach gap, particularly among apartment dwellers.

Inadequate Knowledge

The top barrier reported by **single family residents** was physical difficulty in performing mitigation work, cited by **nearly half (49%)** of respondents

Physical Limitations

7

77% of respondents say action is needed as quickly as possible



The 2010 Oak Knoll Fire

Key CWPP Topic: Economic Stability

1. Double down on Smokewise Ashland program offerings for businesses
2. Increase capacity in partnership with the Chamber to assess and address business vulnerability to wildfire, including physical buildings, employees, and customers.

Key CWPP Topic: Community Health and Safety

Community Health and Safety Challenge Statements

Challenge HS-1: Emergency notifications and advisories are not accessible to everyone, are confusing to some members of the community, and the communication system has operational weaknesses.

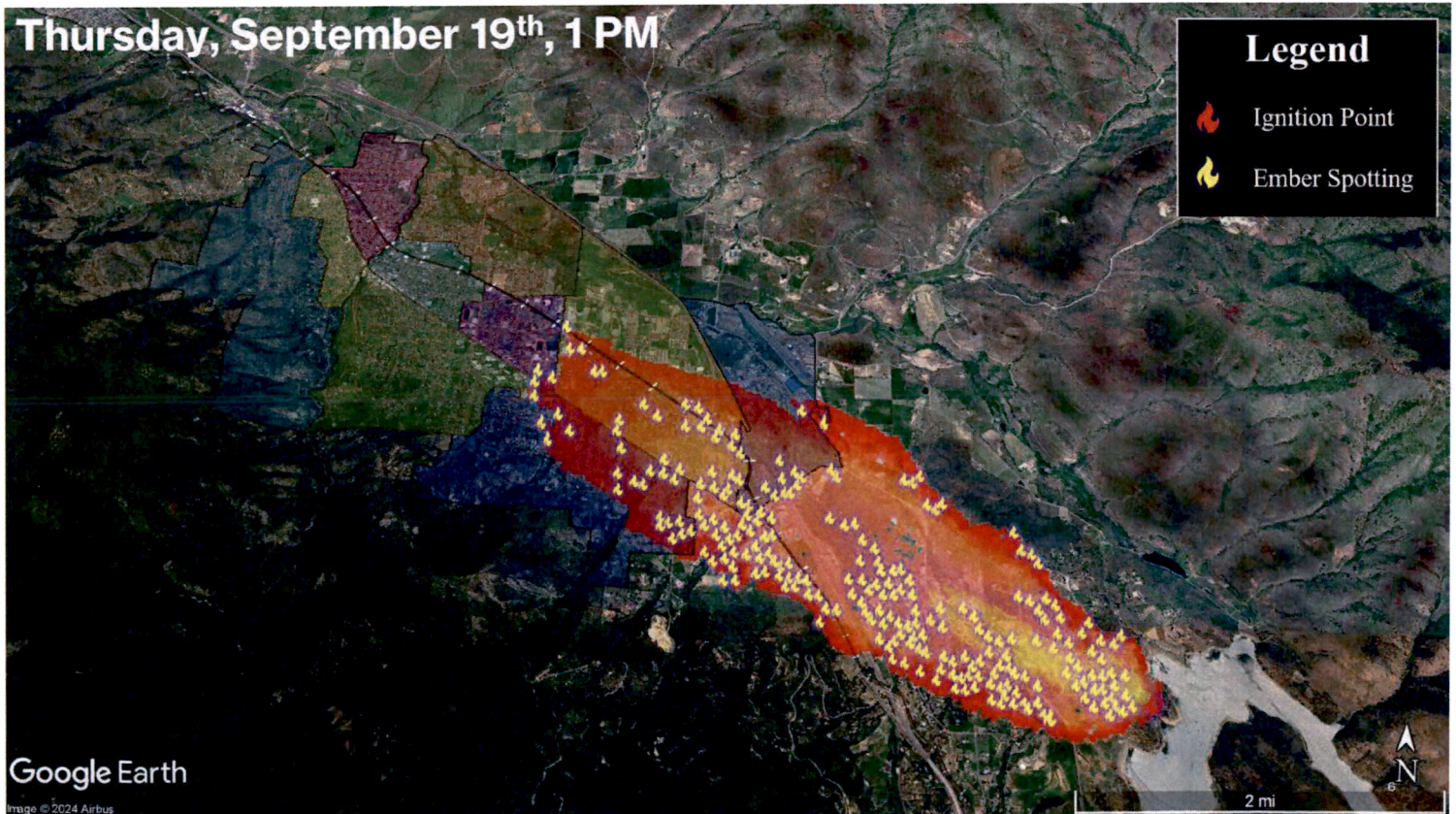
Challenge HS-2: Many are concerned that safe evacuation during an event will be extremely difficult for many reasons, including not having the means to evacuate, confusion about what to do and where to go, blocked roads, and fallen utility poles.

Challenge HS -3: While the city has a 4-year-old community smoke impacts response plan, it has not been adequately funded and fully implemented. Community awareness of smoke impacts on public health and proactive protective measures could be improved.

Challenge HS -4: Local citizens and commuters are concerned about their health and safety during a wildfire event. Some fear they will be unable to receive health care or survive if they can't evacuate.

Key CWPP Topic: Wildfire Fuels Management and Landscape Resiliency

1. Strategic fuel breaks around the city
2. Maintain old, and grow new forest resiliency work on public and private lands
3. Prioritize dealing with recent tree die-off on federal lands in lower watershed
4. Work with USFS and Mt. Ashland Association to better protect this community asset



Key CWPP Topic: Prevent an Urban Conflagration

The goal is to achieve meaningful wildfire risk reduction in 10 years. This requires strategically mitigating risk on ~90% of structures in the city.

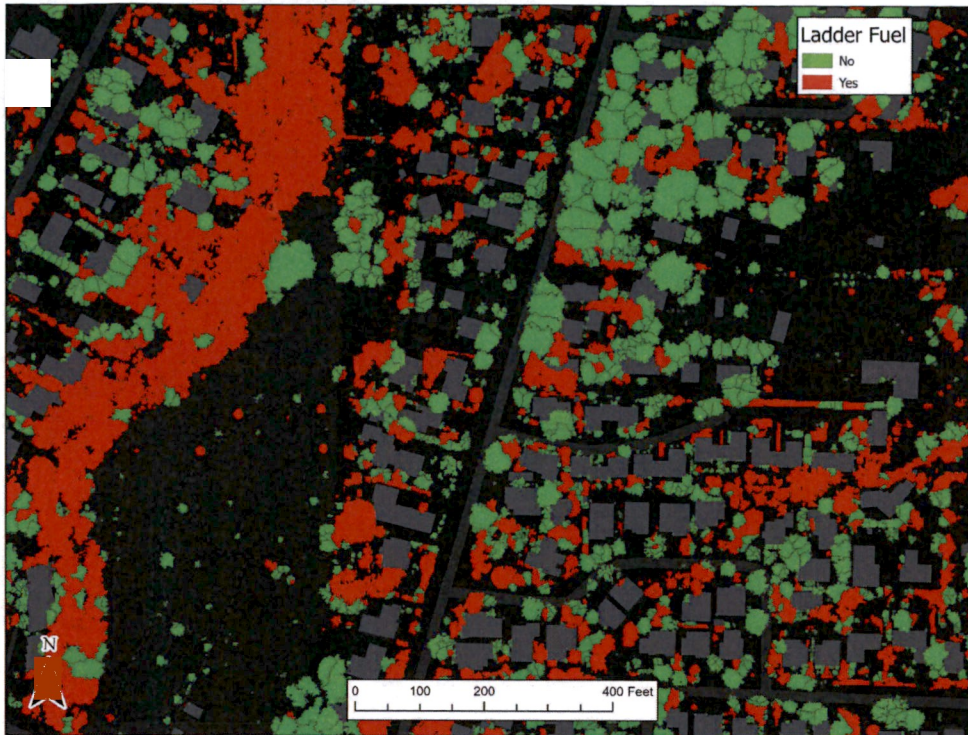


Much of Ashland lacks adequate Structure Separation Distance (SSD), to avoid structure to structure fire spread, a key risk factor identified by the National Institute for Standards and Technology, upon reviewing past urban wildfire disasters.

Why a New Wildfire Mitigation Paradigm?

- Past voluntary wildfire risk reduction programs have been inadequate in results and pace, including Firewise USA and the recent FEMA grant.
- Building stock is primarily older, not built to wildfire code, and high density.
- Aligning our community's safety with science-based codes will allow us to withstand inevitable fires of the future.
- We are on notice: The Alameda Fire experience demands we act now





Cutting-edge hazard mapping was created by the City, Rogue Reconnaissance, and Oregon State University using ultra high-resolution aerial data from a method called LiDAR. The risk and hazard assessment will be used to help prioritize areas of the city and to measure progress.

Ladder fuels are a key measure of the potential for crown fire and ember production.

Other Key Content:

1. Electric Infrastructure Hardening
 2. Water System Analysis
 3. Insurance Crisis
 4. Wildfire Recovery Planning
-

WILDFIRE MITIGATION PLAN

May 2022

Prepared For:



Electrical Department,
City of Ashland, Oregon

Version: DRAFT 05/27/2022
FINAL 05/31/2022

Prepared By:



Engineers: Jerry Witkowski, P.E.
Jiajia Song, P.E.
Martin Stoddard, P.E.

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The insurance Crisis in Ashland threatens Housing, Renters, & Local Businesses

- Ashland property owners face rising premiums (as much as 700%) and shrinking coverage. Inability to get insurance affects property values. Some homeowners are choosing not to have insurance.
- Some insurers will only insure properties that meet fire-resistant standards.
- ~67% of Ashland renters are uninsured — at risk of losing all assets and housing because of wildfire.
- Socially vulnerable residents (low income, seniors, disabled, single parents, and limited-English speakers) are least insured and face displacement.
- Rising insurance costs threaten Ashland's economy — business continuity and housing security are at risk.

The Wildfire Insurance Crisis

Home insurance in areas with high wildfire risk is becoming more expensive and harder to obtain, with potential consequences for state and local budgets.



Wildfires contribute to more costly insurance
The rising costs of wildfire recovery and rebuilding are among the reasons home insurers are raising rates, issuing non-renewals, and exiting risky locations.



High insurance costs lead to underinsured homes
In some western states, insurance has increased more than 50% in the last five years. A growing number of homeowners are underinsured or uninsured.



The underinsured struggle to recover from disasters
After wildfires, uninsured and underinsured households lack the resources to rebuild, extending the period of displacement.



Without insurance, home financing is unavailable
Inadequate insurance leads lenders to deny mortgage applications, reducing home ownership and impacting property values.



Inaction raises costs for local and state budgets

Delays in rebuilding increase the demand for temporary housing and social services, adding billions to recovery costs.

Declines in home values reduce local services such as police, schools, and street maintenance that rely on property tax revenue.

The need for revenues increases the frequency of emergency allocations, unplanned tax increase and may threaten bond ratings.

What needs to happen: Reduce community risk

Investing in community-scale wildfire-resistant construction, vegetation management, and neighborhood planning can minimize damages from wildfire and improve the accessibility and affordability of insurance.

<https://headwaterseconomics.org>

HEADWATERS
ECONOMICS



NEED HELP?

**WILDFIRE
PREPARED**
A PROGRAM OF IBHS

About ▾

Designation Levels ▾

Homeowner Resources ▾

Protect Your Home from Wildfire

The Wildfire Prepared Home designation program enables homeowners to take preventative measures for their home and yard to protect against wildfire.

Apply Now

FIRST STREET

Paradise: A case study.

Paradise experienced large-scale property damages and population displacement during the Camp Fire in 2018. More than 50,000 people were displaced and more than 18,000 structures were destroyed, causing an estimated \$16.5 billion in damage. These extreme impacts also caused Paradise to default on its municipal bonds in the months following the Camp Fire. Furthermore, sustained high levels of wildfire and smoke exposure in Paradise resulted in cascading effects of population decline, decreasing property values, and accelerating insurance increases.



PHOTO SOURCE: NOAH BERGER, AP

CHANGES IN INSURANCE, POPULATION, AND PROPERTY VALUE SINCE THE CAMP FIRE IN PARADISE, CA

	2018	2023	Absolute change	Percent change
Insurance Cost	\$2,178	\$2,979	+\$801 ↑	36.8%
Population	26,532	8,285	-18,247 ↓	-68.8%
Property Value	\$570,602	\$330,310	-\$240,292 ↓	-42.1%

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY;
ZILLOW ZHVI.

Getting to Work

Implementation Priorities

Scaling up wildfire risk assessments and structure-hardening programs citywide.

Strengthening evacuation systems and smoke resilience initiatives.

Focusing outreach on socially vulnerable populations and renters, ensuring equitable access to wildfire risk reduction resources.

Building a full-time CWPP implementation team and a robust tracking dashboard.

Securing an average of \$8 million annually for 10 years to fund wildfire mitigation, workforce development, and public engagement.

Revamping local codes and ordinances to align with modern wildfire science.

Critical Insights: What the CWPP Asks of Ashland's Leaders

•Scaled Risk Reduction Requires Bold Leadership

Significant impact is possible — but only with visible, sustained leadership and a willingness to make hard choices.

•Expect Pushback — Plan for It

A long-term, proactive public engagement and communications strategy is essential to build trust and momentum.

•Capacity Matters

Implementation demands a **full-time, dedicated facilitator** to build partnerships and manage funding. The work required cannot be absorbed by existing staff.

What the City Can Do to Lead Effectively

1. **City Leadership Must Be Visible and Accountable**
Retrofitting landscapes and buildings for fire resistance will be costly — and City-owned properties must set the example.
2. **Equity Requires a New Approach**
Outreach and support strategies for renters and socially vulnerable populations must be reimagined — business-as-usual will leave people behind.
3. **Partnership Over Promotion**
Facilitate and support collaboration with a broad network of community partners
4. **Workforce Training Is Critical**
Landscapers and construction workers will need training, oversight, and accountability to capture capacity and meet standards
5. **Risk Reduction Is an Investment in Economic Stability**
Proactive, community-wide mitigation can improve access to insurance and protect both property values and economic stability.
6. **Ashland Will Look Different — By Design**
A fire-adapted future means embracing visible changes in how our city looks and functions — and helping residents understand why that matters.

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Next Steps After Adoption

1. August 19th Council Business Meeting for CWPP Adoption
2. Build a CWPP Implementation Partnership
3. Apply for external funding
4. Create Wildfire Risk Reduction Fee spending plan using CWPP priorities

Thank you!

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