

RCCC Resilience Committee

DRAFT Resolution on Emergency Communications

June 27, 2022 Updated July 25, 2022 Updated August 22 Updated September 2, 2022

Amendment to 2023 Operating Budget

AR 2022- XX

Submitted by: Assembly members _____, _____ and _____

PROPOSED AMENDMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INCREASE <input type="checkbox"/> DECREASE <input type="checkbox"/> NEUTRAL (check one)

Department: AFD or OEM

Amount: \$175,000

Description of amendment:

This will fund a Public Information Officer position to accomplish the following:

- Coordinate immediate reports to the public on fires that are not yet contained or under control and continue regular reporting from a consistent authoritative source during that event on a regular basis until the fire is declared contained and controlled.
- Maintain and publicize resources directing residents to early information on any emergency
- Provide a communications system that indicates who has current control of an incident and where and when authoritative updates can be found. As public information responsibilities change during an incident, the system must be updated to identify the new source of incident command and their communications. This capability will be enhanced with advancing technologies but should not wait for the next technology upgrade to be implemented.
- Staff programs providing training on Ready Set Go, Firewise, Shelter In Place; and coordinate annual preparation drills and other community preparation and risk reduction efforts with planning and community engagement beginning in the winter, prior to the wildfire season
- Create a Build Up Index (BUI)/Risk Hazard Communication Dashboard with a primary web page for awareness.
- Pursue funding for Community Wildfire Protection Planning and assist with development of priority projects for the annual State and Federal capital projects planning (CAPSIS.)

- Update the AFD and OEM web page information on Ready Set Go training (consistent with the State of Alaska’s implementation for coordination during integrated command incidents) and update current MoA information and AFD procedures.
- Staff and plan for annual tabletop multi agency wildfire response drills, and biennial community evacuation drills involving residents rotated around different areas of the community at risk of wildfire evacuations.

Revenue Source to Pay Increased Cost? (complete for increase to budget)

Amount: \$175,000

Specific revenue source to pay amendment’s cost: Areawide Property Taxes if OEM or Fire Service Area if the position is under AFD.

What Revenues will be Decreased/Saved? (complete for decrease to budget)

This position that can accomplish grant writing to fund parts of the need.

SUPPORT FOR THIS BUDGET REQUEST

- During the 2018 Earthquake, timely, authoritative information was difficult for residents to find and a confusing set of reports were shared in the public, diminishing people's access to the information they needed to ensure their immediate safety and begin recovery. Following the earthquake, positive changes were made as a result of lessons learned about the importance of communications.
- Hillside has many isolated residential areas, connected to primary roads by substandard roads with limited capacity for emergency vehicle access, resident evacuation; and are at risk due to fuel loads and inconsistent ROW maintenance to be compromised during a wildfire event. These isolated areas may require residents to leave very quickly with little time for preparation; and, sheltering in place may be necessary in areas cut off by fire or blocked by traffic.
- The Anchorage Fire Department adopted the national Ready Set Go program for community awareness, training and use during emergency situations including wildfires, but has not fully implemented the program in its community outreach, or during subsequent MoA wildfire incidents.
- The MoA has notification procedures in place for residents but an inconsistent approach to *early* incident communications whereby in some cases Nixel may be used, OEM may use Facebook, the Mayor’s office may issue a news update on behalf of the OEM, the State may be report on AKfireinfo.com, or DNR Forestry may issue reports on

Facebook, with no means for the community to know who is the primary source, or when authoritative information will be provided. While there can be value in multiple sources as a situation develops; clarity in initial primary sources, consistency, and coordination is essential.

- The MoA has an MOU with 211/United Way for the 211 system to be activated for an emergency however 211 is only staffed during M-F day-times only and is not available to assist Anchorage residents in the evenings or weekends, such as when the Zircon Fire started and residents were being evacuated. 211 is not a first early point of contact for disaster communications and relies on other agencies for information. 211 is an effective resource-matching service for individuals requesting help in locating a resource to assist them, including nearby evacuation centers, assistance with emergency preparations, and could be helpful with general emergency preparation resources.
- The OEM indicates on their website that the current disaster communications sources for information are
 - “Alaska United Way-will have up to date disaster information” but is only open M-F during the day unless activated by MOA
 - “Nixle-text and email- Emergency information from Emergency Management, Police, Fire, and other Municipal agencies” but currently only the APD has been using the Nixle system for traffic information.
 - “KFQD Radio 750 AM and 103.7 FM”
- The OEM listed sources for disaster communications do not align with the actual communications used in recent events such as the Zircon or Elmore fires which used different Facebook pages for updates to residents, and the Mayor's office news releases.
- Residents currently must rely on searching social media and online news sites for information and frequently find posts and speculative sources of information before knowing where to find timely, authoritative sources of current information.
- Residents need local information in early communications to help understand the significance of the event to them, e.g. an earthquake is going to affect everyone more uniformly, whereas a fire is much more specific and could even be different due to wind direction.
- Technology is viewed as a solution for some of the communication issues, however technology enabled tools will always be changing with new capabilities and a future technology cannot be an excuse for not using the current tools to their full potential. There is no single or preferred set of tools that will be ideal for the many different situations, rather whatever tools are available need to be used in a predictable, consistent manner.
- Current wildfire hazard conditions in the MoA are reported to the public through news sources in a variety of ways including weather service “red flag days,” State Forestry Wildland Fire Preparedness Levels, and local AFD fire danger level category ratings and burn restrictions.
- Wildfire response field and table top drills have been infrequent. These must include multiple agencies and community involvement to test and evaluate response to typical wildfire scenarios including isolated residential areas and traffic management with

counter flow or interruption of the limited evacuation routes to designated evacuation locations.