THIS LETTER IS FROM THE WILDFIRE RISK MANAGER FOR THE CITY OF PRESCOTT - VERY INFORMATIVE FOR THOSE OF US WHO LIVE IN PRESCOTT.

For you and your board members, here are some answers to your questions.

The City currently operates under the 2012 International Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fire code.  The code was adopted with some exceptions and amendments that can be referenced on the City’s website.  These codes address building construction materials as well as vegetation management when building in the WUI.  The vegetation component of the code largely mirrors “firewise” vegetation management.

The City’s observance and enforcement of the Firewise concept is most prevalent in the construction of new homes within the WUI areas of town.  In those areas, folks building a new home will go through several vegetation considerations.  The first is that they will submit a vegetation management plan along with all their other plans.  Next, the WUI inspector (that is usually me) will make a site visit and make recommendations regarding management of the vegetation to meet the zones denoted in the WUI code.  We do that so folks can get in there with any needed equipment early in the process.  Then, at the end of construction, the WUI inspector will return for a final inspection and verify that the earlier recommendations have been implemented.  That is the fire department’s greatest strength in enforcement of WUI codes.  A similar process occurs when anyone submits for a permit to do an addition or alteration on their property.  The property will receive a WUI inspection as a part of the permitting process.

The fire department has very little enforcement capacity beyond those construction events.  While there are some community code compliance opportunities with regards to weed abatement and hazard trees, it is very difficult for us to enforce large scale WUI compliance.  Even the code compliance folks are limited in that many homes located in subdivisions are located on private streets instead of public roads.  Code officers cannot go onto private streets for the purpose of enforcing city code compliance.  That is a fourth amendment violation.  As a result, the city refers those complaints to a subdivision’s HOA for enforcement through their CC&Rs.

This brings us around to someone’s comment that, “we do not need to Firewise our properties” was stated by a fire official.  I am going to say this is both a true and false statement.  False in that there isn’t a fire department member that fails to recognize the risk that our community faces from wildland fire.  The City and the department recognize it, want to mitigate it, and that is why my position was created.  My guess is that the speaker reinterpreted the fire officer’s comment which probably resembled, “We cannot make people Firewise their properties and in particular vacant lots.”  It is true that we cannot enforce the vegetation mitigation strategies of Firewise unless they are building a home.  By default, if the property is vacant and no home is being built, there is no Firewise mitigation to be done as Firewise must have a structure present to determine where the “zones” exist.  No house, no zones, no Firewise.

The choice to Firewise your personal home is just that, a personal choice.  Leverage may be applied through an HOA if you are in a subdivision, but the average city property owner doesn’t have to Firewise their property unless they get a building permit for some build, repair, or alteration affecting the exterior of their home.  Vacant lots largely can’t be forced to institute any fuels reduction.  To address this issue is an aspect of my position.  I must do my best to educate our citizens on why they should and encourage them to do so.  The City tries to support homeowners in Firewise communities with offering $500 refunds on projects where the homeowner has paid over $1000 to a landscaper.  The City also offers free chipping services to anyone who drags their freshly cut materials to the curb.  Many folks don’t know about these offerings, so I must get the info out there.  This is why I jump on every opportunity to speak to HOA groups, philanthropic organizations, or other public education opportunities like last week’s Firewise event downtown.  I am also looking at opportunities to encourage folks that don’t live in HOAs and POAs to do fuels mitigation.  I don’t want to see our community be the headline on news for catastrophic wildfire like Lahaina or Paradise City.  These efforts take money, so I am constantly on the hunt for grant opportunities to further support the cause.

Just a last couple things…

Please reach out to Jim Zimmerman of the Pinon Oaks POA as a Firewise Chair contact.  They just wrapped up their submittal to the state and he is expecting to hear from you.  His email is:  n6kzdx@gamil.com.   I know it is a weird address, but that is his Ham radio designation.

Also, in your posted POA minutes you mentioned a video on the changing approach to fuels management.  I would love to know what video that is, so please share where I can find it.  Thank you.

I know that was a long and wordy response to the big question, so I hope you made it this far.  Don’t hesitate to reach out to me with further questions.  I truly appreciate the folks in our community that are pushing to further protect the place we all love.

Best regards,

**Conrad Jackson**

*Wildfire Risk Manager*

*Prescott Fire Department*

1700 Iron Springs Rd., Prescott AZ  86305

Ph: 928-777-1700 ext 7065   Cell: 928-308-7719

conrad.jackson@prescott-az.gov

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