



**Memo Date:** October 14, 2009  
**Work Session Date:** November 4, 2009

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**TO:** BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
**FROM:** Public Works Department/Land Management Division  
**PRESENTED BY:** Keir Miller, Associate Planner  
**AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** REPORT BACK / Lane County Firewise Incentive Program

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**I. ISSUE**

Report back to the Board regarding the status of the Lane County Firewise Incentive Program.

**II. AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY**

In April 2009, the Land Management Division launched the County's new Firewise Incentive Program. By all accounts the new program has gotten off to a successful start. At the request of the Board LMD has prepared the following status report, which summarizes the progress of the program over its first 6 months and outlines minor programmatic improvements that could be made to enhance efficacy.

**III. DISCUSSION**

**A. Background - Board Action and Other History**

Last year Congress enacted PL 110-343, The Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. Section 601 of the Act is entitled the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Program, and Title III of that program deals with County Funds. Under this renewed SRS legislation counties may expend Title III funding on the following uses:

1. To carry out activities under the *Firewise Communities* program
2. To reimburse the county for search and rescue and other emergency services
3. To develop community wildfire protection plans

On December 12, 2008, the Land Management Division (LMD) submitted an application to the Board of Commissioners for Title III funding to establish a county Firewise Incentives Program.

On January 27, 2009, the Board conducted an initial review of LMD's application and on February 18, 2009, the Board unanimously approved funding for the proposal under Order No. 09-2-18-5. At the February 18<sup>th</sup> meeting staff indicated to the Board that necessary amendments to Lane Manual would be forthcoming, which would codify specific incentive details and program policies.

On March 31, 2009, staff returned to the Board with the proposed program policies. After a lengthy review and revision process, the Board adopted official policy language for the program on April 15, 2009, under Order No. 09-3-31-4. These policies are codified in Lane Manual 4.300 – 4.325.

At the close of the April 15<sup>th</sup> meeting LMD was directed to return to the Board on November 4, 2009, and report back on the status of the new program.

## **B. Program Overview**

The mission of the Lane County Firewise Incentive Program is *to promote home construction and landscaping techniques that will prevent fatalities, injuries, property loss and environmental damage resulting from wildfires.*

To help achieve this mission the program provides funding to partially or wholly reimburse the costs that rural home owners incur for certain types of home and landscaping improvements. These improvements are promoted by the National Firewise Communities Program<sup>1</sup> and if implemented properly have been shown to reduce the probability that a home will be damaged or destroyed in a wildfire.

Currently, grants are offered for the following types of improvements:

1. Replacement of a wood shake roof with a roof consisting of a Class-A covering or Class-A assembly (80% of costs up to \$4,000)
2. Installation of non-combustible exterior siding (80% of costs up to \$4,000)
3. Installation of fire resistant (and energy efficient) exterior windows and skylights made from tempered glass, multi layered glazed panels or glass block (80% of costs up to \$1,500)
4. Installation of non-combustible exterior doors (80% of costs up to \$300)
5. Installation of spark arrestors on chimneys (\$100)
6. Installation of mesh screening on exterior ventilation or deck openings that will prevent the entry of firebrands and the accumulation of flammable debris (\$100)
7. Landscaping improvements that will create a defensible space around habitable structures. Under this category funding is available for brush removal, tree pruning, chipping and the planting of approved fire-resistant plants within a 30' buffer around homes (up to \$1,000 depending on site specific conditions)

In addition to implementing the core strategy of financial assistance, Firewise staff also work closely with other local, state and federal fire protection agencies to help craft and disseminate education and outreach materials that promote Firewise principles.

## **C. Program Implementation**

Over the past 6 months LMD has taken a number of steps to get the Firewise Incentive Program off to a successful start. Specifically, LMD has:

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<sup>1</sup> The National Firewise Communities Program is an interagency effort designed to encourage local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, planners, community leaders, developers, firefighters and others in an effort to protect people and property from the risk of wildfire – before a fire starts. The Firewise approach focuses on planning, landscaping, construction, and home maintenance to help protect people, property, and natural resources. Additional information about the National Firewise Communities Program can be found at: [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

- **Recalled and trained 3 employees to administer the program:** These professionals, which had been laid off in January due to LMD's budget shortfalls possess backgrounds in planning, building and surveying. Because of their past experience and skill sets, recalled staff quickly came up to speed on the fundamental concepts of the new program and within days began to proactively design and flesh-out specific program details and processes.
- **Developed program literature and outreach materials:** Staff created a program website, [www.lanecounty.org/firewise](http://www.lanecounty.org/firewise), and a variety of high quality guidance documents, brochures, program application forms and other materials to explain and promote the program. Attachments "A" and "B" to this memo are examples of these materials.
- **Implemented a successful outreach campaign:** After issuing a press release in July, the program was featured positively in the Register Guard (7/29), the McKenzie River Reflections (7/30) and the Siuslaw News. Several local television and radio news programs also ran positive spots about the program. In addition to working with the media, staff developed a program postcard, which was mailed out to residents living in higher wildfire hazard areas. Finally, staff circulated program brochures and other outreach materials to local area landscaping and building supply businesses.
- **Established grant payment processes:** A core function of LMD is to review proposed development to ensure consistency with applicable local, state and federal law. LMD's traditional business model is to charge fees for this review. In contrast, the Firewise program *provides* funding to residents who voluntarily take responsible actions to reduce the threat of wildfire. Establishing the operational system and processes to pay-out funds to residents required a shift in LMD's day-to-day workflow and required staff to develop a number of new policies and procedures to track payments and ensure that sensitive and confidential tax identification information would be safeguarded.
- **"Reverse engineered" LMD's Permits Plus software tracking program:** Permits Plus was developed and has traditionally been used to track financial transactions related to permits, to monitor permit approval statuses, and to track other permit-related logistics such as onsite inspection scheduling, etc. Working with Information Services, LMD was able to modify the software to create a customized grant tracking module within Permits Plus. This module enables staff to closely monitor and report on: the status of grant applications, the amount of funding requested (including live reports on funding dispersed to-date) and other critical information needed to manage the program.
- **Collaboration with other fire protection/prevention agencies:** Program staff work closely with the Lane County Fire Prevention Cooperative, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and the State Fire Marshall's office to ensure that the wildfire mitigation measures being promoted through the Firewise program are consistent with the ongoing efforts of other agencies.
- **Developed binding grant agreement forms:** LMD worked closely with County Counsel to develop the necessary legal instruments to clarify and establish the responsibilities and obligations of program participants and to help limit any possible liability that the county may be exposed to in the course of administering the program.
- **Processed grant requests and began issuing payments to residents:** Shortly after a press release about the program was issued, LMD was inundated with inquiries and within 1 month nearly 150 grant request

applications were submitted. Early on, it became apparent that grant requests would quickly outstrip available funding. Therefore, LMD stopped accepting applications on September 1. At that time, LMD had received grant requests totaling \$559,700.00 Attachment "C" to this memo is a chart, which illustrates the specific grant requests by category. Staff is currently processing these grant applications. The majority of mitigation projects are still in their early stages but some have been brought to completion. At the date of this memo, 7 grant requests had been funded at some level.

#### **D. Challenges**

Surprisingly, no major problems emerged during the first 6 months of the Firewise program. Perhaps the biggest challenge that staff encountered was that, similar to the federal "Cash for Clunkers program", the Firewise program gained an incredible amount of public interest very quickly - and discussed above, just a few weeks after launching the program all available funding for the fiscal year had been requested.

During the program development stage it was impossible to predict exactly when funds would be fully obligated. It was little surprise to staff that funds went quickly but early assumptions were that requests would come in at a slightly slower pace and perhaps over a longer period of time. Regardless, the speed at which funding was requested caused only temporary headaches for staff and did not impact service delivery.

#### **E. Recommended Program Refinements**

It appears that the current funding levels offered for structural improvements are certainly enough incentivize residents to take action. However, there have been some instances where the \$1,000 amount for landscaping improvements does not go very far in reducing hazardous fuels around some properties. Staff recommends that this amount be increased to \$2,000.

Additionally, at least a dozen applicants have expressed an interest in obtaining funding assistance to help them purchase a water supply tank. The program currently offers funding for the installation of an irrigation system to help maintain a green defensible space but no funding is available to address the problem of water availability. Funding rainwater catchment systems or other storage tank options appears to makes good sense. The exact incentive amount for this improvement is yet to be determined.

#### **F. Board Goals**

The County's Strategic Objective D5 is to: *Develop timber revenue strategies and actions to ensure continuation of County payments from the federal government under public law 106.393.* Efficient use of Title III funds on worthy and qualifying projects will assist in future SRS renewal efforts. The Firewise Incentive Program has been designed and is being implemented to ensure consistency with SRS criteria and provide a valuable benefit to Lane county residents.

Additionally, the 2008-2010 Strategic Goal No.1 is to: *Develop Lane County's economic engine [by] grow[ing] local businesses.* The landscaping and construction incentives offered through this program have been developed in consultation with local area contractors and are designed to stimulate growth in the local landscaping and construction industries – and thus, address the 2008-2010 Strategic Goal No.1.

## **H. Financial and/or Resource Considerations**

The Firewise Incentive Program is financed exclusively through Title III. Pursuant to Public Law 110-343 Title III funding is set to expire in 2012. In order to ensure stability to the Firewise program and other county activities currently subsidized by Title III, the Board has reviewed and begun funding projects based upon a 4 year allocation schedule. Funding for the Firewise program has been calculated as follows:

FY 08-09	\$ 288,463	(awarded)
FY 09-10	\$1,132,250	(awarded and in progress)
FY 10-11	\$1,178,690	
FY 11-12	\$1,199,491	

As currently designed, there is sufficient funding to cover the Firewise program and all other Title III activities through 2012, with a projected Fund balance of approximately \$ 808, 578 at the end of FY 11-12. Based upon the considerable public interest in the program, the Board may be interested in adjusting the scheduled Firewise allocations to make additional grant funding available to interested residents. LMD will continue to monitor program participation to determine if recently requested grant funds are expended in a timely manner and if additional grant funding could be put to beneficial use. If it appears justified, staff will propose budget adjustments to increase the grant incentive fund when the Board reviews all other Title III requests for the FY 10-11.

### **I. Analysis / Summary**

The first 6 months of the Firewise program have run smoothly. The program is on target to distribute all available funding within projected timelines (generally 1 year from the date that applicants finalize an agreement with the county). Minor programmatic adjustments could be made to enhance the incentives currently being offered.

## **IV. ACTION**

This report was provided at the request of the Board for informational purposes only. Therefore, no action is necessary or requested at this time.

## **IV. NEXT STEPS**

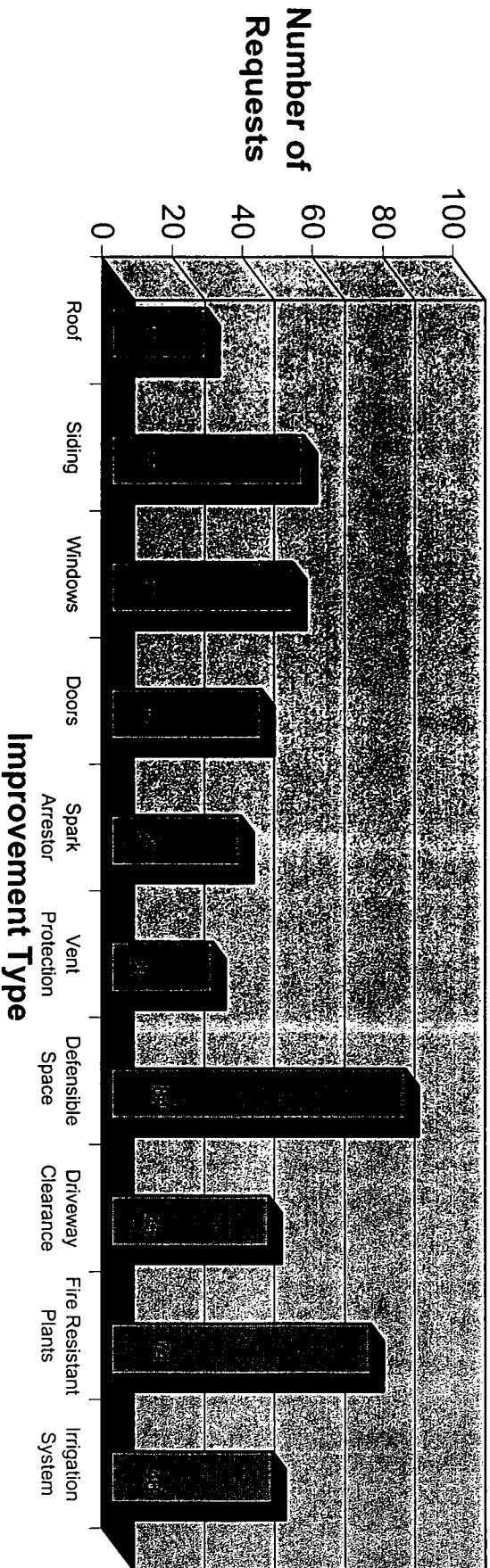
Staff will prepare amendments to Lane Manual reflecting the minor programmatic changes discussed above or any other changes as directed by the Board. It is estimated that the proposed manual amendments will be brought to the Board for consideration in January or February. Also, staff will continue to closely track program participation and expenditures to determine if additional funding for Firewise improvement grants may be warranted. Any proposed adjustments to the current program budget will be presented to the Board for consideration in the FY 10-11.

## **V. ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Program Brochure
- B. Outreach Postcard
- C. Chart depicting requests by type and amount

# Firewise Grant Requests

Attachment "C"



Request Amounts by Type

Roof: \$108,000  
 Siding: \$216,000  
 Windows: \$78,000  
 Doors: \$12,900  
 Spark Arrestor: \$3,700

Vent Protection: \$2,900  
 Defensible Space: \$84,000  
 Driveway Clearance: \$9,000  
 Fire Resistant Plants: \$22,200  
 Irrigation System: \$23,000



## Firewise Incentive Program Overview:

Lane County is offering financial grants to residents who are interested in making landscaping or structural improvements to their properties, which can increase the survivability of their home in the event of a wildfire.

Residents now have the opportunity to apply for thousands of dollars in financial assistance to replace roofs, siding, windows and doors with fire-resistant building materials and to make "Firewise" improvements to their landscaping.

To qualify for financial assistance you must own a home in rural Lane County that is at risk to wildfire -that's it!

This program is administered by the Lane County Land Management Division with funding provided through Title III of the Federal Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Program. To learn more contact us at:

**(541) 682-6522**

**[www.lanecounty.org/firewise](http://www.lanecounty.org/firewise)**

**With adequate planning and cooperation among varying interests, wildfires can occur without disastrous loss of life, property, and resources.**

## Interested? Here's the Process:

1. Fill out a Short Firewise Grant Improvement Application and submit it to the Lane County Land Management Division. (Applications are available online or at our offices located at 125 east 8<sup>th</sup> Ave, Eugene)
2. Staff will contact you to schedule a property risk assessment. The purpose of this assessment is to determine what improvements you may qualify for.
3. After your property has been assessed you will receive a preliminary financial award agreement from the county. Sign and return the agreement.
4. Carry out the agreed upon improvements to your home and landscaping within a specified timeline (generally one year). Please Note: All work reimbursable by the county must be completed by a licensed contractor or professional landscaper.
5. Submit copies of contractor receipts. Staff will revisit your home to verify that work has been completed to the agreed upon standards.
6. Once Staff has verified that the work has been satisfactorily completed Lane County will issue you a reimbursement check.

## A Firewise Home Has...

### • Defensible Space

A "Defensible Space" is an area surrounding your home that extends at least 30 feet in all directions. Within this area vegetation has been modified by pruning, clearing, and/or replanting with more fire-resistant vegetation. The objective of this area is to reduce the threat of wildfire to your home by changing the characteristics of the flammable vegetation that surround it.

### • Fire-Resistant Roof

A roof can be the most vulnerable part of your home in a wildfire. Firewise roof materials include: composition asphalt shingles or metal, slate, clay and concrete-based products. Additionally, the inclusion of a fire-resistant sub-roof adds protection. Roofs and gutters should be clear of pine needles and leaves.

### • Fire-Resistant Exterior Construction

Wall materials that resist heat and flames include brick, cement, plaster, stucco, and concrete masonry, as well as cementitious siding products such as Hardi-plank. Tempered and double pane windows, doors and skylights can also make a home more resistant to a wildfire.

### • Emergency Access

Vegetation along your driveway should be well pruned to enable emergency vehicles clear and safe access to your home.

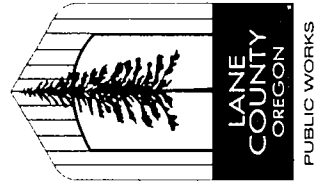
## Available Financial Incentives for Firewise Home Improvements:

Improvement:	Available Incentive:
Roof Covering (Wood shake replaced with Noncombustible)	80% of construction costs up to \$4,000*
Exterior Siding (Noncombustible)	80% of construction costs up to \$4,000*
Fire Resistant Windows, Skylights	80% of construction cost up to \$1,500*
Fire Resistant Exterior Doors	80% of const. cost up to \$300*
Spark Arrestor Installation	\$100
Vent Protection	\$100
Defensible Space Development	\$500 (base) up to \$1,000
Driveway Access	\$200*
Fire Resistant Plants	\$300*
Irrigation System	25% of installation & system costs up to \$500*

\* Work must be done in conjunction with Defensible Space Development.

## What is Firewise?

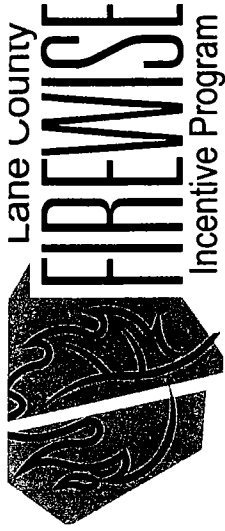
The National Firewise Communities Program is an interagency effort designed to encourage local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, planners, community leaders, developers, firefighters and others in an effort to protect people and property from the risk of wildfire - before a fire starts. The Firewise approach focuses on planning, landscaping, construction, and home maintenance to help protect people, property, and natural resources. To learn more about the National Firewise Communities Program visit: [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org)



This program is a service of the Lane County Land Management Division.

Lane county: **working** for you

## Attachment "A"



Financial assistance for landscaping & building improvements that can help your home survive a wildfire





## Native Plants

**Western red cedar:** Grows up to 200' tall and to 10' in diameter. Will survive in shady spots. Found on moist sites along river bottoms.

**Douglas fir:** Grows to 250' tall and 6' in diameter. Fast growing conifer. Will grow on a wide variety of soils. Needs a sunny spot. Does not do well in wet sites.

**Western hemlock:** Grows to 200' tall and 4' in diameter. Shade tolerant. Does best on deep, moist, well-drained soils.

**Sitka spruce:** Grows to 180' tall and 6' in diameter. Prefers moist well-drained sites near the Coast. Generally less tasty to elk and deer than other conifers.

**Red alder:** Can grow to 120' tall and 3' in diameter. Occurs along streams and in moist bottoms. Nitrogen fixing.

**Big leaf maple:** Grows to 100' tall on moist sites. Once mature, this tree hosts more moss than any other tree in the region.

**Black cottonwood:** Can grow to 200'. Likes moist gravelly sites and can tolerate flooding.

**Oregon ash:** Grows to 80'. Grows on moist to wet sites. Will tolerate seasonal flooding.

**Sitka willow:** Small tree grows up to 27'. Broad leaves. Prefers moist to wet soils. Seedlings. May have willow stakes of other varieties too.

**Douglas spiraea:** Shrub growing up to 7' tall. Pink flowers, woolly leaves. Prefers moist sites.

**Red osier dogwood:** Grows to 3' to 36' tall. Freely spreading shrub. Often bright red after a frost. Small white to greenish flowers.

**Nootka rose:** Shrub grows up to 10' tall. Pink flowers. Prefers full to partial sun.

**Pacific Ninebark:** Shrub up to 12'. Clusters of white flowers, shredding bark. Prefers moist open sites.

**Vine maple:** Grows up to 20' tall. Prefers part shade on moist to wet sites. Red fall color.

◀ **Indian plum:** Grows to 5' to 17'. Not self-fertile. Produces small bitter fruit. Can handle dry to moist soils.



[www.co.houston.wa.us](http://www.co.houston.wa.us)

**Mock orange:** Grows to 6' tall in a variety of habitats from open forest and forest edges on moist rich sites to open brushy areas on dry, rocky soils.

### Difficult to Establish Plants (Available in Limited Numbers):

**Soft rush:** Grass-like and grows in clusters up to 3 1/2' tall. Stems are dark green, soft, round, and have a pointed tip.

**Camas:** Purple flower. Grows up to 26" in grassy slopes and meadows.

**Lady fern:** Grows about 24" to 36" tall. Its leaves are about 24" to 30" long and 6" to 9" wide and tapered at both ends. Prefer shaded areas.

**Match plants to your site conditions. We can provide assistance with recommending plants for your site. Let us know which of these plants are on your 'wish list'!**

### Get your requests in ASAP!

Learn more about these plants in *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast* by Pojar and MacKinnon.

Please Note: Due to circumstances beyond our control specific plants or quantities may not be available as planned. The NPD must follow Best Management Practices, i.e. distribute plants in recommended zones & to riparian sites.

Plants provided through a Siuslaw Watershed Council project funded by the Coast Range Stewardship Fund and private individual donations.

**Spread the word—**  
**If you are not a riparian landowner,**  
**please pass this along**  
**to one of your neighbors that**  
**is a riparian landowner.**  
**Thanks!**

### Siuslaw Watershed Council

#### Mission Statement

*The Siuslaw Watershed Council supports sound economic, social and environmental uses of natural and human resources in the Siuslaw River Basin. The Council encourages cooperation among public and private watershed entities to promote awareness and understanding of watershed functions by adopting and implementing a total watershed approach to natural resource management and production.*

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