

September 5, 2023

To: Mayor Peake, City council members, Fire Chief Panholzer, Public Works Director Gho.
Fr: Kevin Hanley

RE: George Washington Forest Management Plan and Catastrophic Fire Risk to PG Residents

The Problem

- The two (2) goals of the Forest Management Plan (FMP) – reduce wildfire hazards to the homes surrounding the park; restore healthy forest conditions to the interior of the park – are not being met.
- Residents of PG are prevented from enjoying the park. School children are prevented from learning about nature in this dangerous park. Deer and other wildlife are afraid to enter the park.
- Paralysis by Analysis. The recommendations in the FMP are being ignored. The staff reports that a consensus has been reached between Councilmember Coletti and “stakeholders,” including the Beautification and Natural Resources Commission, to spend \$28,000 for a updated biological assessment and consider any fuel reduction recommendations from the ongoing process to include GW Park in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). When the CWPP will be completed, no one knows. This “consensus” position means that the city will delay taking action to lower the risk of catastrophic fire or restoring tree health in the park.
- Time Not on PG’s Side. It is a huge gamble for the city council to delay protecting the public from catastrophic fire. The Camp Fire started on November 8, 2018 and destroyed the town of Paradise in two (2) days. On November 7th, Paradise residents went to bed thinking there were safe.
- Growing Tinderbox. A 17-acre tinderbox, located in the middle of a dense residential area of many wood homes, with a higher fuel load than the ignition points in Paradise, Napa and Lahaina would be left untouched and get worse as weeds grow and dry wood accumulates. The catastrophic wildland fires in Paradise, Napa and Lahaina occurred through the neglect of elected local officials. In PG, the city has created a tinderbox in the middle of town and doing nothing about it. This is a first.
- Declining Tree Health. Monterey pine death/limited reproduction and oak regeneration only in patches due to insects, disease, climate. Non-native

grasses outcompete tree seedlings and prohibit regeneration on the forest floor. The red turpentine beetle, dwarf mistletoe and pitch canker are in the park and a threat to the trees. Drought and wildfire are major threats. A biological assessment will not reverse this trend.

- Flawed Fire Reduction Hazard Plan. FMP recommends creating a Fire Hazard Reduction Zone, a “U” shaped area of fuel reduction; 30-40 feet wide strip around the perimeter of the park. If the tinderbox in the interior of the park remains untreated, this narrow 30–40-foot strip plus the narrow roads will not give firefighters a chance to stop a raging fire from lighting the nearby homes and with embers traveling up to a mile in high wind conditions spot fires throughout PG will start. From Malibu to Paradise to Lahaina, wildland fires and embers have crossed major freeways. A 100-foot defensible space next to a man-made tinderbox is no protection at all.
- Once a catastrophic fire starts in high wind conditions fire departments can’t stop them.
- Chaos and panic, not orderly evacuations occur with much loss of life.

The Solution

1. City council should appropriate the necessary funds tonight (Sept 6) and direct the public works and fire departments to immediately begin removing dead and dying trees, logs, mowing grass, woody surface vegetation, raking, removing pine needles and leaf litter from the 17 acres of the park.
2. Begin work on those treatments that are categorically exempt from CEQA and then get CEQA compliance for all other treatment methods and then begin work on them.
3. Contract with tree companies to chip branch and wood materials. Weed whack the grasses. Mobilize volunteers on organized workdays (Saturdays) to help drag tree limbs to the chippers. This strategy has worked elsewhere in California.
4. With the will, we can create a healthy and safe forest for PG residents now.