

**CONEJO OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION AGENCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS SPECIAL MEETING**

**October 29, 2025
Civic Arts Plaza Board Room
2100 East Thousand Oaks Boulevard**

SUMMARY MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER AND FLAG SALUTE:

Chair Huffer called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Flag Salute.

2. ROLL CALL:

Director Engler, Director Newman, Director Nickles, Director Sullivan, and Chair Huffer were present.

Also present were: CRPD General Manager Friedl, Deputy City Manager Alikhan, Assistant Attorney Brick, COSCA Administrator Stark, COSCA Analyst Huber, CRPD Supervising Park Ranger Prindle, Maintenance Superintendent, Wilson, Senior Recording Secretary Goor, and via Zoom was Records Management Specialist Preston. Representing Ventura County Fire Department were: Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) Wildland Battalion Chief Williams, VCFD Fire Prevention Bureau Assistant Fire Marshall Worford, VCFD Vegetation Management Program (VMP) Captain Matheson, and VCFD Fire Behavior Captain Heath.

3. PRESENTATIONS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

A. None

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS: None

5. CONSENT CALENDAR:

A. None

6. ACTION ITEMS:

A. None

7. INFORMATION ITEMS:

A. Fuels Management Presentation – COSCA and Ventura County Fire Department Wildlands Division

- i. Find that this action is not a project as defined under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- ii. Receive presentations by COSCA and Ventura County Fire Department staff regarding fire fuels management policies and strategies and provide feedback, if applicable.

COSCA Administrator Stark presented the informational report on behalf of COSCA to bring the public up-to-date on COSCA's wildfire safety programs and how they relate to public policies including the COSCA Strategic Plan, the City's General Plan Safety Element, and other agencies' codes. He discussed COSCA's land management principles and the science behind them. COSCA aims for consistency with a number of other regional and statewide plans and policies with a primary goal of aligning with the Ventura County Fire Department's goal of protecting lives and property and compliance with the Ventura County Fire Code.

COSCA Administrator Stark also commented on COSCA's fire safety programming with emphasis on COSCA's direction to make science-based management decisions. Included in the presentation were the Defensible Space Program, science-based Enhanced Fuel Management Program, and public outreach and education, including direct mail, webinars, community meetings, free chipper days, home-hardening assistance to seniors, promotion of defensible space on private properties, and community-level fire prevention through programs such as FireWise USA and Ventura Regional Fire Safe Council's home wildfire assessment program. He noted fire is a natural part of the Conejo Valley landscape, and discussed historic fire statistics, home losses during severe wind-driven fires, climate change, and the difference in fire behavior in chaparral vs. forested areas. A focus on home hardening and 100-foot defensible space was noted as was invasive species management with strategically placed fuel breaks near communities or access routes. Links to further resources can be found at www.conejoopenspace.gov, <https://fire.venturacounty.gov/fire-hazard-reduction-program-fhrp/>, and <https://venturafiresafe.org/>.

Ventura County Fire Department (VCFD) Wildland Battalion Chief Joe Williams introduced his staff below.

VCFD Fire Prevention Bureau Assistant Fire Marshall Mike Worford of the Community Wildfire Preparedness Division discussed the Fire Hazard Reduction Program (FHRP) with regard to defensible space between homes and 100 feet out for 19,093 parcels in the County which has been in place for over 30 years. The program sends brush clearance notices in April with a June 1st deadline when they start inspections. He stated they

have very good working relationships with the City of Thousand Oaks, COSCA, and the Conejo Recreation and Park District, which combined have several hundred parcels in the FHRP Program. Overall, the FHRP has a 99% compliance rate, with a contractor through the County handling non-compliance after contact and education. This year to date, there are approximately 10 non-compliant parcels. Construction Codes have become more robust. VCFD follows State and local codes through Ordinance 32, which requires a landscape plan review for new homes. The 100-foot defensible space is now divided into Zones 1 – 3, which FHRP program staff inspect prior to occupancy. In addition, they respond to vegetation complaints, and handle AB 38 real estate transactions that require anyone selling within a high or very high fire zone to obtain a fire disclosure report and inspection. He noted they are involved in the Ventura Regional Firesafe Council, and educational programs to become part of the Firewise Program (of which there are currently 41 approved neighborhoods countywide), which could result in reduced insurance costs, including assessments and recommendations.

VCFD Vegetation Management Program (VMP) Captain Ryan Matheson explained that the VMP Program is in the area beyond the 100-foot defensible space around homes. He noted projects across the County to reduce fuel loads, and described the hazardous fuel modification methods they use, including mowing/masticating, cut and chip to maintain roadways, and prescribed fire to remove hazardous fuels under controlled conditions which promotes healthier ecosystems and diversified wildlife habitat and creates different age classes in fuels which slows fire progression. He reviewed the Adams Canyon and Ventura Motorway projects, and the Santa Monica Mountains Project for Long Canyon and Crummer Canyon.

VCFD Fire Behavior Captain Brian Heath discussed further hazardous fuel modification methods including cut, stack, and pile burning used in biologically and culturally sensitive areas; and prescribed grazing for invasive species and grasses which is an environmentally-friendly, sustainable management method. He explained fire run behavior modeling, noting the goal of vegetation management is to reduce ignition potential, limit fire behavior in the event of a wildfire, and maintain access. Computer modeling systems include FS Pro using WFDSS and Wildfire Analyst by Technosylva. Fire behavior is based on fuel, weather, and topography. Models are run, and boots on the ground verify.

Speakers: Bonnie Clarfield-Bylin, Thousand Oaks, stated she is speaking as a member of the Wildwood community and as a Boardmember of the Conejo Valley Audubon Society. She commented on the area's rich biodiversity vital to wildlife conservation. She stated large-scale vegetation

removal conflicts with COSCA's mission to protect, preserve, and manage open space for the benefit of wildlife, native plants, and people. Extending brush removal beyond 100 feet from homes would destroy nesting areas, would not stop Santa Ana Wind-driven fires, and would invite non-native species.

Janet Miller Wall, Thousand Oaks, stated as a near-40 year resident, she is aware that wildfire is and will continue to be part of our history. She stated that while we all wish to ensure homes are not burned, protection of local wildlife habitat and native plant communities must be included. Ms. Wall stated she sees a disturbing trend in steering COSCA away from their primary function. She noted that she has replaced her wood-shake roof with asphalt tiles, and added fire-safe vent screens, but does not believe removing additional live vegetation will protect her property from wind-driven embers and that trees have a cooling effect. She discussed past fires and hopes that COSCA continues to acquire and preserve ecologically important habitat.

Written Statement Cards: None; there were 4 items of written statements from members of the public in a Supplemental Packet that was published on the website and distributed on October 28, 2025: 2 pro wildlife habitat protection, and 2 pro increased fire protection.

VCFD staff responded to Directors' questions as follows. Fire behavior modeling is being used for both wildfires and prescribed fires. Basic fire models take only the fire into account - with zero suppression efforts. There is no proposed law at the State or other levels to expand the 100-foot defensible space area. There are laws regarding landscape for new homes within that area, not existing homes, but that could change. When asked whether having additional paths or fire breaks around the perimeter of the City would be helpful for fire prevention, the answer was yes, that could potentially be beneficial. When asked if those could then be used as bike or hiking trails, the response was that those paths generally branch off their fire roads and are for access to get ahead of a fire.

COSCA Administrator Stark responded to Directors' questions as follows. Links to scientific articles regarding fire can be posted on the COSCA website. He responded that in some strategic spaces, additional work may have value and that is why they have projects such as Arundo removal, and a grassland project next year will involve some prescribed grazing. However, COSCA is looking at methodologies that apply to home protection during wind-driven fires, not projects in the middle of open space. He commented on historic fire breaks that never recovered from initial removal of native vegetation and are now like a wick that can carry fire into the open space interior.

The Board provided further feedback as follows: the Santa Ana winds during the Los Angeles fires were the strongest some have seen; embers travel a long distance. Insurance issues and power safety shutoffs have increased. 100-foot defensible space is still a good model. There were comments that a review of policies along with continued work with the Fire Department and the FireSafe Council is an option. It was stated that of the largest California fires, all 20 were since 1991 and 15 of those occurred since 2017.

Upon Director inquiry, VCFD staff stated they have suggestions for further fuel reduction based on fire modeling and energy release components (ERGs). They responded affirmatively that they have identified areas in the urban wildlife interface that could use further remediation, such as thinning with hand-crews, goats, etc., following CEQA rules and those have been shared with COSCA. They responded to questions regarding the science behind fuel modification and they have been in discussions with COSCA on the subject.

COSCA Administrator Stark cited studies that show clearing of chaparral can cause type conversion from chaparral to weedy grasses that are more easily ignited and burn faster than chaparral. He added that once chaparral stand reaches 15 years of age, it won't accumulate much more dead material than a 50-year-old stand, and clearing chaparral would result in exchanging a fuel that is slower to burn and harder to ignite with material that is faster to burn and easier to ignite. He would want to see scientific evidence that more fuel treatment would make a home safer, as this is contrary to prevailing science. He responded to questions regarding education, such as early funding of the FireSafe Council.

There was a suggestion that a report be brought back at a future COSCA Agenda with regard to VCFP and COSCA staff opinions on whether additional things can be done with regard to increased fuel management in open space.

8. **ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m. to the Special Meeting on Wednesday, December 10, 2025.



Chuck Huffer, Chairperson

Minutes Approved: December 10, 2025