



# City of Sunnyvale

## Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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### REPORT TO COUNCIL

#### **SUBJECT**

Informational Report to Council Regarding Twin Pines Fire

#### **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this Informational Report is to provide the City Council with a summary of the City's response to the Twin Pines Fire. As background, on Friday, April 15 at 12:54 p.m., Sunnyvale Department of Public Safety (DPS) fire apparatus and patrol units responded to the Twin Pines Manor Apartments located at 1066 Sunnyvale-Saratoga Road on the report of smoke coming from the building. Firefighters encountered heavy smoke and heat in the hallways and a partial roof collapse. Public Safety personnel evacuated numerous tenants from their balconies and extinguished the fire approximately an hour and a half after the arrival of the first fire apparatus. Two female tenants were injured; one suffered burns and the other smoke inhalation. Both victims were assisted by fire personnel and transported to area hospitals. While the fire damage was contained to primarily four apartment units, the extensive smoke, heat and water damage made the entire 81-unit complex uninhabitable for the 170 residents and guests.

#### **EXISTING POLICY**

##### **General Plan Chapter 6 - *Safety and Noise***

**Policy SN-2.2** - Provide for the Emergency Management of the City in Order to Respond Effectively and to Assure Life and Property Safety in the Event of a Disaster.

**Policy SN-3.1** - Provide Rapid and Timely Response to All Emergencies.

**Policy SN-3.6** - Aid Those who Cannot Care for Themselves (Intoxicated, Addicted, Mentally Ill, Physically Disabled, The Young, The Old) Provide Rapid and Timely Response to All Emergencies.

**Policy SN-5.4** - Conduct Field Operations and Emergency Scene Management in a Safe, Effective and Efficient Manner.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This is an information report only and no action is being taken by the City Council; no environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act is required.

#### **DISCUSSION**

The following is a summary of events related to the Twin Pines Apartment Fire and subsequent displacement of the residents:

##### **Incident Response (Fire and Evacuation)**

Operations - Sunnyvale DPS personnel from both the Police and Fire Bureaus responded to this fire per protocol. Immediately upon arrival, DPS personnel encountered numerous residents

standing on their individual balconies calling out for help. It was apparent that the active fire and smoke were preventing residents from entering common hallways to safely exit the apartment building. Rescue efforts were immediately put into action with the deployment of multiple ladders and numerous residents were rescued from the exterior balconies. Two residents who were rescued from the interior hallways sustained injuries as a result of the fire and were transported to a local emergency center. The fire and smoke damage to the building was significant and habitation of the entire building was deemed unsafe by City staff. As a result, all of the residents were displaced, with the overwhelming majority in need of immediate emergency housing. It was also determined that many of the residents required special assistance including the need for medications and other essential items located within their apartment units.

**Mutual Aid** - Standard mutual aid procedures were followed for this incident response. The second alarm activation resulted in Mountain View and Santa Clara Fire Department units being dispatched to back-fill two DPS fire stations. A Santa Clara Fire Department rescue unit was also dispatched to the scene to assist with refilling air bottles. Sunnyvale is very appreciative for the assistance from our neighboring cities.

**Media Management** - A primary DPS Public Information Officer (PIO) responded to the scene to handle media inquiries. The PIO handled all media inquiries at the scene. The public messaging was handled via Nixle (DPS' community messaging tool) and the DPS twitter account. Informational messages as well as update messages were sent regularly throughout the incident using both platforms.

### **Short Term Transition and Recovery**

As is customary when displacement is a possibility, staff contacted the American Red Cross (ARC) to request their assistance with care and shelter of the fire victims. Upon arrival, the ARC began to interview tenants to determine the need for, and size of, a shelter facility. The Sunnyvale Office of Emergency Services (OES) Coordinator assisted the ARC as they contacted the residents and performed the initial interviews to identify needs.

After completing the initial contact with residents, the ARC determined that a sizable shelter would be required due to the large number of displaced residents. The previous year, the Sunnyvale OES Coordinator, Library and Community Services (LCS) staff and ARC staff had surveyed the Senior Center as a primary shelter and executed an agreement establishing as such. The ARC contacted LCS staff in order to begin the process of activating the shelter. The ARC also contacted VTA to request their assistance in transporting tenants away from the Fire Bureau's overhaul operations (which include making sure that there are no hot spots). The safe transition of residents from Twin Pines apartment complex to the Senior Center occurred within hours of the ARC's determination.

During overhaul operations, fire personnel retrieved a number of pets from the fire scene. DPS Animal Control was on scene assisting fire personnel. Initially, it was believed that up to 25 cats and dogs would be displaced and that they could not be housed at the Senior Center; however, it was subsequently determined that only five pets needed shelter. Animal Control transported the pets to the County's Animal Shelter.

LCS staff, together with ARC staff, began preparations to establish the Senior Center as the

designated care and shelter facility for the incident. As the Senior Center was being readied, displaced residents began arriving due to the proximity of the designated shelter to the fire scene. This required immediate action to establish sleeping quarters, make arrangements for food and water, showers, security and entertainment for the families. In addition, scheduled activities at the Senior Center had to be cancelled and/or relocated. It became evident that many of the fire victims were non-English speakers. For languages onsite staff was not able to cover, LCS authorized overtime for staff to ensure bilingual language capabilities pending the arrival of ARC staff/volunteers. Once ARC staff/volunteers were oriented, the intake process for the displaced residents was initiated.

Through the intake process, many displaced residents expressed a need for access to the apartment complex in order to retrieve medications. The OES Coordinator, along with fire personnel, facilitated entry into the building to retrieve medications as well as other basic supplies and toiletries.

On Friday night, 53 displaced residents stayed at the established shelter. It was learned that more displaced residents were going to need access to the building to retrieve few personal items. At that point, it was unknown if residents were going to be able to re-occupy the apartment building within the near future. The DPS Incident Commander (IC), along with LCS Management, was in contact with the owner of the building working with access issues as well as potential assistance for the displaced residents. In addition, the OES Coordinator activated the Sunnyvale Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) and requested assistance for Saturday. The plan was to have CERT personnel wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) escort displaced residents into their apartments to retrieve minor items. VTA was asked to supply a bus and assist with shuttling the residents from the shelter to the apartment complex.

On Saturday, ARC staff began the case management stage to determine the longer term needs of the residents. ARC staff began identifying many access and functional needs that the displaced residents had such as transportation, language, mobility, disability, mental health, financial and medical needs. The ARC arranged for mental health counselors to respond to the shelter to assist the residents. In addition, Sunnyvale Community Services (SCS) was contacted for assistance.

The City Manager requested the OES Coordinator send out a notification for Emergency Management Organization (EMO) personnel to stand by in case they were needed throughout the weekend to assist at the shelter. A Nixle message was sent out placing a limited amount of "A shift" city staff (not DPS) on standby, with about a half dozen employees beginning shift assignments.

Throughout the day on Saturday, some of the displaced residents chose to work out other sheltering options. On Saturday night, 40 displaced residents stayed at the shelter. The OES Coordinator activated CERT to cover shifts for Sunday so that residents were able to retrieve items from their apartments.

On Sunday, the OES Coordinator made contact with the primary representative for CADRE (Collaborating Agencies' Disaster Relief Effort), which is the local VOAD (Voluntary Organization Active in Disaster) as it represents a vast network of non-profit organizations that could potentially provide needed resources. The CADRE representative met with the SCS Director in order to start planning for the future needs of the displaced residents. VTA provided the use of two buses on Sunday to shuttle residents to and from the apartment building as CERT continued escorting them

into their units to retrieve items. It was clear at this time that the building was not going to be habitable within the foreseeable future.

Given that the incident occurred on a Friday late afternoon, many public agencies and non-profit organizations that would normally be available were not. This put the City in an unusual situation of having to address many emergent needs on its own. Additionally, staff felt that it was prudent to allow coordination on Monday with these agencies to further ensure a smooth transition to longer-term needs. Therefore, City staff determined that the shelter would remain operational at the Senior Center until Tuesday morning, allowing Monday (a business day) to complete coordination.

The City Manager and other City management personnel concluded that there was a need to fill the gap between the time the shelter would be closed and when transitional/permanent housing would be available for the displaced residents. To assist in the process, City management identified the need to utilize City funding sources to pay for the displaced residents' stay at local motels during the transition and arranged for the residents to stay at various local motels for the following several weeks.

As the residents began receiving motel vouchers from the City, residents began making the transition away from the shelter. Throughout Saturday and Sunday, City staff facilitated regular updates for the residents. A few informational meetings with the owner were also arranged. By Sunday night, only one resident required services at the shelter. While the shelter was officially demobilized on Monday morning (April 18<sup>th</sup>), a couple of informational meetings were facilitated to ensure that the residents understood the housing arrangements and had been connected to Sunnyvale Community Services for further case management.

### EOC Facility and Logistics

Key successes include:

- A completed Memorandum of Understanding was already in place between the City and the American Red Cross (ARC) clearly identifying the Senior Center as a potential shelter location.
- Quick assessment of the situation by staff recognizing the need to establish assistance for the displaced residents.
- Full commitment from the City to actively assist in supporting the displaced residents.
- Staff flexibility and dedication resulted in the quick set-up of a secure shelter facility late on a Friday afternoon.
- Decision-making staff was readily available to assist with shelter operations.
- There was effective and ongoing communication with the displaced residents. This helped to build trust and create stability in an unstable environment.

Action items:

- Identification of additional staff resources to assist with media relations as back-up to the City Communications Officer. **(In Progress)**
- Establishment of a transportation assistance plan. **(In Progress)**
- Development of a shelter operations check list to be used whenever a shelter is opened. **(In Progress)**
- Development of a plan for child care operations as part of the emergency services provided

by the City. **(Planned)**

- Improved training and instincts for City staff when supporting emergency response and when not afforded the opportunity to work in the EOC to manage an event. It became clear that the time required to establish a functional EOC would deprive City staff of providing direct response to residents impacted by the emergency. The absence of an established EOC requires that the City close that gap with additional training and an ability to be more mobile in its EOC response. **(In Progress)**

### Supplies and Equipment

Action items:

- Issuance of position identification vests and name badges to be worn throughout activation. **(In Progress)**
- Development of mobile resource materials for emergency service non-DPS responders to have easy access to information and ensure a thorough response. The City's EOC materials are boxed and packed away, retrieval of them proved difficult during an actual incident. Staff has planned to develop resource materials for ELT members to have available to avoid having to retrieve them at the EOC. **(In Progress)**
- Increased emergency preparedness training for non-safety staff members. **(In Progress)**
- Placement of an ARK supply container with emergency supplies at the Community Center. **(In Progress)**
- Establishment of a master key set for the Senior Center accessible for an event. **(In Progress)**
- Identify through fleet, access to designated city vehicles that can be used as needed during an incident. **(Planned)**
- Streamline the procurement process during large incidents. **(In Progress)**
- Assignment of space to function as an alternate/satellite EOC at the Community Center complex, including identifying specific meeting rooms and storage areas for EOC equipment. **(Planned)**

### Communications and Technology

Action items:

- Establishment of a notification process for additional staffing needs upon partial activation of Emergency Operations Center. **(In-Progress)**
- Improvement of WIFI and cellular coverage at the Community Center complex. **(In Progress)**
- Improved access to printers and copiers. **(Planned)**
- Established templates on incident communication to accelerate public notification of emergencies. **(In Progress)**

### External Support

The ARC was requested to assist with the displaced residents and begin coordination efforts with the Sunnyvale Office of Emergency Services Coordinator. In coordination with Sunnyvale staff the ARC began activation of the Senior Center to operate as the temporary shelter. The Valley Transit

Authority (VTA) was brought in to assist with transportation needs to the shelter. It should be noted that the ARC was called during a time that its volunteers were away at training and there were some delays in their ability to respond in a timely manner. This could not have been avoided, but City staff can develop contingency plan for interim coordination if there is occasion for a delayed ARC response.

### Risk Management

#### Action items:

- The need to formally identify the event as a partial activation of the Emergency Management Organization and establish related procedures. **(In-Progress)**
- The need to clarify the roles of responders at the outset of events requiring partial activation of the Emergency Management Organization. **(In-Progress)**

### Procurement

#### Key successes include:

- The establishment of a donation account coordinated by City Staff through Sunnyvale Community Services was instrumental in raising significant funds for the displaced residents.
- City Council quickly approved housing funds for support of displaced residents and scheduled an action at the next City Council Agenda.
- City Council also appropriated \$30,000 in funding for recreation fee waivers so that displaced residents could take advantage of City summer programs including camps for children.

#### Action items:

- Issuance of purchasing cards to all department directors. **(Completed)**

### **Long Term Transition and Stabilization**

On Monday April 18, the ARC transitioned the case management to SCS as they gathered staff to assist with the task. Due to the high number of cases, SCS relied on staff from other cities' community services non-profit organizations. On April 19<sup>th</sup> an update meeting was hosted at DPS to convene SCS, Challenge Team organizations as well as member organizations of CADRE. The meeting identified on-going needs and potential resources. This marked the beginning of the transition from a City staff led effort to SCS staff effort. Throughout the week and as potential transitional/permanent housing was identified, City staff continued to be involved by facilitating contact with the building owner group.

### Service Coordination

Staff would like to extend its gratitude to the City Council for being available and accessible during the event, including in some cases hands-on assistance. Additionally, staff would like to acknowledge and express the highest level of gratitude to all the organizations listed below for assisting the displaced residents after the fire:

Mountain View FD - Back filled one of the Sunnyvale fire stations while firefighters were handling

the incident.

Santa Clara FD - Back filled another one of Sunnyvale's fire stations and in addition, sent a Rescue unit to assist at the scene.

Red Cross - Administered the shelter and provided initial case management for displaced residents.

Sunnyvale Community Services (SCS) - Took over the long term case management to include the placement of displaced residents into permanent housing. In addition, they administered the donations provided through the Go Fund Me account.

County - Offered assistance through the Santa Clara County Office of Emergency Services and the Social Services Agency. In addition, the County Supervisors approved housing funds to be directed to SCS to support their efforts assisting the fire victims.

Collaborating Agencies' Disaster Relief Effort (CADRE) - This network of non-profit organizations offered guidance and support to SCS as they assisted in the stabilization of the displaced families.

Project Sentinel - Assisted by providing legal information regarding tenant rights.

Business - Staff coordinated with local hotels to provide temporary housing for residents' still needing assistance. Local business also participated by donating to the Go Fund Me account.

Churches - South Bay Church (who meets at the Sunnyvale Community Center) provided meals for the shelter operations throughout the weekend. They offered many other avenues of assistance including transportation and storage of property for the displaced families.

Residents - Participated through a Go Fund Me account that was set up to assist fire victims. In less than a week over \$30,000 was raised.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The fiscal impact from the fire was significant in terms of providing the services discussed above. However the incident itself was well managed and staffed by the Department of Public Safety, incurring minimal costs for overtime.

Subsequent to the fire, Council appropriated \$150,000 from the Housing Fund to assist fire victims. In addition, \$30,000 was appropriated from the General Fund Budget Stabilization Fund to provide recreation fee waivers for the affected residents.

The community provided over \$30,000 in donations through a go fund me account of which approximately \$10,000 was used for hotel expenses and the remaining funds were provided to Sunnyvale Community Services to support their ongoing efforts to support the victims of the fire.

In addition to the direct support provided, as part of the Adopted FY 2016/17 budget, the City Council augmented Sunnyvale OES resources by \$100,000, utilizing one-time funds. OES is staffed by one (1) full time Public Safety Lieutenant. The one-time project funds will be used to further build the

capacity of the OES by facilitating the acquisition of consultant services to assist in training staff and replenishing ARK containers and supplies throughout the City as needed. Funding will also be used to complete all of the identified action items related to the Twin Pines Apartment event.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

No Council action is requested at this time. No staff recommendation.

Prepared by: Vinicio Mata, Lieutenant, Department of Public Safety  
Reviewed by: Jeffrey Hunter, Captain, Department of Public Safety  
Reviewed by: Frank J. Grgurina, Director, Department of Public Safety  
Reviewed by: Kent Steffens, Assistant City Manager  
Approved by: Deanna J. Santana, City Manager