



*City of Arts & Innovation*

# Safety Wellness and Youth Committee Memorandum

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**TO: SAFETY, WELLNESS AND YOUTH COMMITTEE      DATE: MARCH 17, 2021**

**FROM: PARKS, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY      WARDS: ALL**  
**SERVICES AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS**

**SUBJECT: FIREWORKS ENFORCEMENT UPDATE; DISCUSSION OF OPTIONS TO**  
**CANCEL OR PROCEED WITH 2021 FOURTH OF JULY FIREWORK SHOWS;**  
**AND APPROPRIATION OF FUNDING IF NEEDED**

## **ISSUE:**

Approve one of two options for the 2021 Fourth of July firework shows; and, if directed to proceed with hosting a live show, appropriate funding as required and provide any recommendations deemed necessary to the Fireworks Task Force.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That the Safety, Wellness and Youth Committee:

1. Receive an update on fireworks enforcement;
2. Provide direction on one of two options for the 2021 Fourth of July firework shows;
3. If directed to proceed with hosting a live show, recommend City Council appropriate funding as required to procure firework services; and
4. Provide any recommendations deemed necessary to the Fireworks Task Force.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Since 1996, the firework shows have been a staple of Riverside's Fourth of July celebration, with shows at both La Sierra Park and atop Mt. Rubidoux. Over the years, the firework shows have drawn more than 100,000 families each year from all over the Inland Empire.

In early 2020, a Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) quickly spread across the globe, nation and state causing the State of California to shelter-in-place. The effective shutdown and pause on economic activity has wreaked havoc on City operations, causing annual Fourth of July celebrations, as well as many other celebrations, to be cancelled throughout 2020 and into 2021.

On May 19, 2020, in light of the pandemic, underlying fiscal concerns, and for fire safety precautions, City Council deliberated and moved to (1) cancel the 2020 Fourth of July firework shows; (2) direct staff to return with more information on alternative celebration options including

Victoria Avenue closure with possible second locations and a virtual show proposal; and (3) request staff return to City Council in January 2021 with a discussion for future firework shows.

On January 8, 2021, the Finance Performance and Budget Committee received a report to address the General Fund structural deficit and the potential impacts of the pandemic on City finances. The Committee received the report and provided input on the baseline General Fund and Measure Z Budgets, budget development strategies, and potential balancing measures to be incorporated into development of the City's Fiscal Year 2021/22 budget.

Fiscal Year 2020/21 Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department (PRCSD) budget does not include funding for the Fourth of July celebration. Funding would need to be identified and appropriated to procure the services required to proceed with the event. Some additional impacts to consider in discussing the options, include the following:

1. The Department's revenue has been significantly impacted by the pandemic.
2. Rising costs for operations and services.
3. Staff hiring freeze and furloughs have left the Department shorthanded.
4. Ongoing, unknown, and everchanging operational impacts caused by the pandemic response.

In addition to the firework shows, the Fire and Police Departments have increased outreach efforts to make certain Riverside residents understand that fireworks are illegal in the City of Riverside. When most residents think of fireworks, they think of large bottle rockets, roman candles, and firecrackers; however, the ban also includes sparklers, as they can reach up to 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit. Illegal fireworks are the cause of multiple structure, vehicle, and wildland fires annually. Those responsible for the use of fireworks can be held liable for damages as well as fire suppression costs.

## **DISCUSSION:**

### **Summary of Illegal Fireworks Activity**

During the 2020 Fourth of July season, the Fire and Police Departments received 1,156 calls for service due to reported firework activity. 2020's call volume increased by 463 calls for service compared to 2019. The Fire Department responded to 18 fire service calls. One medical aid call was determined to be fireworks related.

The Fireworks Task Force, which includes staff members from Fire, Police and Code Enforcement, issued 108 Administrative Citations and made various warnings to those in violation throughout the City. Approximately 893 pounds of fireworks were confiscated and dropped off at local fire stations for proper disposal.

The fine for the use of illegal fireworks within the City is currently \$1,000. The current collection on the \$1,000 citation has proved to be difficult to procure. For this reason, Riverside Fire Department (RFD) does not recommend increasing the fine amounts.

Year	Calls for Service	Fires	Injuries	Citations	Patrol Contacts	Fireworks Confiscated
2018	599	10	0	70	337	630 pounds
2019	693	16	0	131	314	3,856 pounds
2020	1,156	18	1	108	295	893 pounds

Through the Fireworks Task Force, the City continues to educate the public on the dangers of fireworks. The task force will participate in the following outreach efforts in 2021:

1. Press Conference: Prior to the holiday, the Fireworks Task Force will participate in a press conference regarding the City's stance on fireworks.
2. Enforcement Activities: Riverside Police Department (RPD) and Fire will send out and hand delivered warning letters to persons known of utilizing fireworks to advise that fireworks are illegal and there will be a \$1,000 fine if caught using, selling and/or possessing them.
3. Marketing and Outreach: RFD, RPD, Code Enforcement (Code), and Riverside TV developed new fireworks Public Safety Announcements (PSA's) in addition to airing previously used PSA's. "Fireworks are Illegal" flyers and posters, in both English and Spanish, will be displayed at fire stations and operating local businesses. Electronic billboards will also be showcased on major thoroughfares. City of Riverside, RFD and RPD's social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and the City's website will all have the PSA's.
4. Mobile Application: The 3-1-1 application will continue to be promoted as an additional method for residents to report illegal firework activity not attributed to immediate threats to life or property. The app also allows end users to obtain reports, statistics, pictures, and map development. Additionally, an email tree group will be created for afterhours so task forces could attempt to respond to specific addresses using illegal fireworks.
5. Staffing: RFD, RPD and Code will have dedicated personnel on duty at various times during the holiday season. These personnel will be specifically committed to enforcing the fireworks ordinance.

#### Fourth of July Event Staff Resources

Currently, PRCSD is operating under the City's Flexible Workplace Staffing Order. In addition, the County of Riverside remains in the widespread (purple) tier, which prohibits large social gatherings, requires social distancing, and other measures that would negatively affect a live firework show.

The firework shows include multiple departments combining their efforts to deliver successful shows. This non-essential event will require substantial investment and commitment of staff and financial resources, including pulling essential staff from Fire and Police, PRCSD, Traffic Engineering, Arts and Cultural Affairs, and Code Enforcement. City Departments will be compelled to increase their work volume and reprioritize their COVID-19 commitment and efforts needed to meet the necessary Fourth of July event deadlines within the existing timeframe.

The following coordination efforts are needed to produce this year's firework shows:

1. Traffic Plan – The Traffic Plan is completed by the Traffic Engineering Division usually 3 months in advance. A bid per the traffic plan for road closures signs and barricades must be completed prior to shows, usually two months in advance. RPD assists in directing traffic, road closure coordination, resident notifications, parking, etc.
2. Permits – Special Events, Fire Permits, and pyrotechnics staff list must be submitted 30 days prior to the event.
3. Agreement – Award fireworks bid, route, and execute legal agreement with Pyro Company, procure porta potties, traffic road needs, fencing company and firework Purchase Orders two months prior to shows.
4. Fire Safety Plan and Implementation – Clear fallout zone and weed abatement near and around. Coordination and completion from PRCSD. RFD must survey area and report any findings which need to be completed by PRCSD prior to shows. PRCSD coordinates maintenance with the contractor which takes a three-week scheduling notice. RFD will also be tasked with developing an Event Action Plan to support public safety efforts for the event.
5. Coordination – Coordination of emergency services and response times with RPD for Ryan Bonaminio and La Sierra Parks and surrounding areas. Meetings are held with RPD Area Commanders to discuss high traffic flow areas, traffic flow and exit zones for emergency services a minimum of two months prior to shows.
6. Location – In 2020, consideration was given to exploring relocating a Fireworks Show to the Riverside Municipal Airport. This location was removed from the list of possible locations due to FAA restrictions and many logistical challenges.

#### Fourth of July Event Fiscal Resources

The cost of the two 2021 Fourth of July shows, including fireworks, fire permits, PRCSD, RFD and RPD is as much as \$125,000, depending on the option selected. The cost to PRCSD is approximately \$92,000.

(PRCSD Cost) Fireworks at La Sierra Park	\$25,000
(PRCSD Cost) Fireworks at Mt. Rubidoux	\$35,000
PRCSD Personnel/Non-Personnel Cost	\$32,000
Riverside Police Department	\$18,000
Riverside Fire Department	\$15,000
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$125,000</b>

For the safety of City residents (physical distancing regulations), additional resources must include an increase in safety personnel (RFD, RPD and PRCSD Staff), modifications to traffic plans, evaluation of emergency service priorities and response times, evaluation of “large social gatherings,” and coordination of Mt. Rubidoux fire safety plan. The RFD and Parks Division must survey the area and coordinate the required maintenance/weed abatement to prepare the fallout zone and deem it safe.

The ideal area of weed abatement on Mt. Rubidoux is 22 acres. In 2019, the Parks Division was able to clear 19 acres with a total of 990 hours of staff time. Pre-COVID-19, PRCSD would contract with Cal Fire and California Conservation Corps for much of this work. These two

agencies were not providing support services in 2020 due to COVID-19. Currently, these agencies are still not providing services due to COVID-19 and it is unclear when they would be able to assist.

COVID-19 has resulted in a financial strain on revenue generated by PRCSD. Due to COVID-19 best practices, revenue generating activities such as aquatic programs and facility rentals have been cancelled. PRCSD generates approximately \$3.5 million a year, with most of its revenue generated during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters.

It is important to note in 2017, funding in the amount of \$73,657 for the Firework Shows was removed from PRCSD's budget. In 2017, 2018 and 2019, the Department used salary savings to pay for the shows. The Department would continue to utilize salary savings to produce the Fourth of July shows and a transfer of salary savings would be required.

### Event Options

#### **Option 1 – Cancellation of Shows:**

This option is in response to complying with the current order to comply with COVID-19 best practices. The PRCSD is endorsing cancelling the Fourth of July firework shows because of budget concerns, staffing, essential services priorities, timing constraints, and unknown future COVID-19 impacts.

This recommendation is made in the best interest of public safety, health and welfare of the public, and our inability to foresee when public can safely convene in large groups. In addition, the following criteria was considered:

1. COVID-19 pandemic is still strong in our community. On May 18, 2020 when the Council voted to cancel the 2020 Fireworks Show, the Riverside County the number of new cases per day was 114 over a 14 day average, on March 3, 2021, the daily new case rate per day is 552 over a 14 day average.
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2. While COVID case rates are on a downward trend, there isn't any way to get a true reading of where we will be in 4 months, how many people will be vaccinated by then or if there will be new strains that turn the trend upside-down.
3. At this time, the California Department of Public Health's guidance for the prevention of COVID-19 transmission for gatherings in public spaces is the following: (1) A gathering of no more than three households is permitted in a public park or other outdoor space, even if unrelated gatherings of other groups up to three households are also occurring in the same park or other outdoor space. If multiple such gatherings are occurring, mixing between groups gatherings is not allowed. (2) Additionally, multiple gatherings of three households cannot be jointly organized or coordinated to occur in the same public park or other outdoor space at the same time – this would constitute a gathering exceeding the permitted household limits.
4. It is projected that large public gatherings will not to be allowed until 70% of people receive vaccinations, which according to Dr. Anthony Fauci, may not happen until early Fall 2021. This non-essential event will require a substantial investment and commitment of staff and City financial resources, including reassigning essential staff from the RFD, RPD, PRCSD, Arts and Culture Affairs, and Code. Furthermore, many employees continue to telecommute, and site meetings are discouraged.

In addition, Riverside Fire and Police Departments recommend cancelling the Mt. Rubidoux firework show due to overcrowding on the streets surrounding the event, the inability to evacuate the area in a timely fashion, and potential delays with the request for additional emergency resources if needed.

Until such time in the future that the COVID 19 Pandemic is behind us and the vast fire mitigation issues can be effectively resolved, we do not support a firework show at Mt. Rubidoux.

## **Option 2: Host a show at La Sierra Park**

The second option is for the Fourth of July firework shows to continue only at La Sierra Park. This option would require funding in the amount \$34,000 in pyro expenses, non-personnel expenses, part-time staff, and overtime costs.

The City of Riverside is currently facing existing and future budget challenges. It has been suggested to create a fundraising campaign to raise funds for the firework shows. Administrative Manual Policy 06.001.00, Minor Donation Acceptance Policy, and the Corporate Partnership Policy (both attached) have the potential of generating funds. The time and effort needed to properly market, receive donations, and accept the funds will takes months to complete. Donations would be a great option to offset the high cost in providing firework shows; but, due to the time constraints previously stated, it's not an option this year. This strategy was attempted in 2017 with poor results, as less than \$600 was received from the public. PRCSD does not recommend this strategy, as it will require extensive staff effort and has not proven to be effective. Council may choose to direct staff to begin a private sponsorship campaign to assist with funding for the 2021 Fireworks Show; if directed to host the show in this manner, it will be with the understanding that the balance would need to be provided by the General Fund.

Regardless of which option is chosen, the Fireworks Task Force, which consists of members from Fire, Police and Code Enforcement are committed to patrolling all areas of the city to educate and enforce the City ordinance on the illegal use of fireworks within City limits.

The Police Chief Larry Gonzales, Fire Chief Michael Moore, and General Services Director Carl Carey all concur with the recommendations in this report.

## **FISCAL IMPACT:**

The total fiscal impact to the General Fund will vary based on the option selected and stated above. Funds are not budgeted and would require use of salary savings or allocation from the General Fund Balance.

Prepared by: Adolfo Cruz, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director  
Certified as to  
availability of funds: Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer  
Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager  
Approved as to form: Kristi J. Smith, Interim City Attorney

## **Attachments:**

1. Minor Donation Acceptance Policy

2. Corporate Partnership Policy
3. Presentation