



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: FEBRUARY 24, 2026**

FROM: FIRE DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: DEFENSIBLE SPACE INSPECTION PROGRAM AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH FIREWISE USA

ISSUE:

Receive and file an update on the Riverside Fire Department's upcoming 2026 Defensible Space Inspection Program and community engagement efforts through the Firewise USA program to strengthen wildfire preparedness and resilience citywide.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Receive and provide input on the 2026 Defensible Space Inspection Program and Community Engagement Efforts

DISCUSSION:

The Riverside Fire Department (RFD) remains committed to protecting life, property, and the environment through proactive wildfire preparedness, vegetation management, and public education. Riverside's extensive Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), year-round fire season, Santa Ana wind exposure, and high ignition potential continue to present wildfire risk across multiple wards. Fire Hazard Severity Zones (Moderate, High, and Very High) guide mitigation planning and inspection efforts. The Department's focus is to strengthen community resilience by bringing residents, fire officials, and stakeholders together before a wildfire occurs.

Pursuant to Riverside Municipal Code Chapter 6.16, RFD will initiate its annual Defensible Space Inspection Program for properties located in High and Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. Property owners will receive mailed notifications in late spring or early summer, with inspections occurring 30 or more days later. Non-compliant properties may receive violation notices and referral to Code Compliance when necessary. Property owners are required to maintain defensible space by reducing hazardous vegetation, removing ladder fuels, preventing obstructions to roadways, and managing parcels to reduce fire spread. Defensible space standards include the Immediate Zone (0–5 feet), Intermediate Zone (5–30 feet), and Extended Zone (30–100 feet). In addition, AB 38 requires defensible space compliance during the sale of homes in High and Very High zones.

To support residents, RFD offers a Free Home Assessment Program that provides a personalized risk report, defensible space guidance, and educational resources. Residents may apply through the City's 311 platform. Beyond inspections and enforcement, wildfire resilience requires

neighborhood collaboration. The Firewise USA program provides a nationally recognized framework for communities to work together to reduce wildfire risk. By organizing at the neighborhood level, improving defensible space collectively, and promoting fire-resistant practices, Firewise communities help reduce property loss, operational strain on emergency resources, and potentially support insurance documentation.

Wildfires can occur at any time. With an emergency call received approximately every eleven minutes, proactive risk reduction remains critical to maintaining service delivery and public safety. Through defensible space inspections, community education, Firewise engagement, and home hardening initiatives, Riverside continues to demonstrate leadership in wildfire preparedness and shared community responsibility.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Defensible Space Inspection and Fire Wise Programs are conducted within existing Fire Department resources. There is no additional fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by:	Brian Guzzetta, Deputy Fire Chief
Approved by:	Steve McKinster, Fire Chief
Certified as to availability of funds:	Julie Nemes, Interim Finance Director
Approved by:	Edward Enriquez, Assistant City Manager/Chief Financial Officer
Approved as to form:	Rebecca McKee-Reimbold, Interim City Attorney