



Brent Blackaby
Councilmember District 6

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Special Meeting Item

ACTION CALENDAR
February 11, 2025

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Blackaby (Author), Councilmember Humbert (Co-Sponsor),
Councilmember O'Keefe (Co-Sponsor)

Subject: Request Inter-Departmental Collaboration and Implementation of Safe Passages

RECOMMENDATION

Refer to the City Manager to direct the Departments of Public Works, Police and Fire to work collaboratively to implement Safe Passages Program – EMBER Initiative Phase 1 and 2 and report back to City Council on progress no later than the 2nd week of May 2025. This program will further facilitate responder ingress and community evacuation during wildfires by developing a plan to create and enforce no-parking zones in addition to existing 24/7/365 red curbs and no-parking zones during extreme fire weather conditions and/or the broader fire season.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If these actions cannot be implemented within the budgets of the involved departments, the City Manager will return to Council with a report demonstrating the funding required to complete each phase.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

The recent catastrophic fires in Los Angeles are a sobering reminder of the risk to wildfire that we face here in Berkeley. The parallels these southern California communities share with Berkeley in topography, population density, road configuration, hazardous vegetation fuel loading, proximity to wildland interfaces should be sufficient to spur us to act now to try to make our community more resistant to fire and safer for everyone.

Anyone who has driven in the Berkeley hills knows that parking on narrow streets can impair emergency vehicle access as well as emergency evacuation. The Safe Passages project aims to build on past efforts to mitigate risks by supporting Berkeley's Emergency Evacuation Plan and help to ensure we have safe ingress routes for first responders and safe egress routes for community members.

BACKGROUND

Safe Passages is integrated into the suite of proposals in the 2025 Effective Wildfire Mitigation Measures for Berkeley's EMBER Resilience (EBMER) initiative:

Phase 1

Staff will verify and install the appropriate signage and markings in areas with existing red curbs to enable enforcement and towing of illegally parked vehicles:

- In areas of the city most vulnerable to wildfire, staff will evaluate existing no parking areas for painted red curbs and appropriate signage
- Within the existing budget, staff will update signage to enable towing and paint curbs red
- Staff will develop a cost estimate for painting and installation of additional signage if it cannot be accomplished within the existing budget

Phase 2

Staff will return to Council with an analysis of options and any associated costs to implement programs, policies and laws that would further reduce congestion of streets and offer a proposal for a more wide-spread parking restriction program in the City's Very High Hazard Fire Severity Zone. This should include but is not limited to:

- Designation (with signs, paint or other means) additional critical pinch points and roadway segments where on-street parking will hinder evacuation and responder ingress during a wildfire scenario,
- Potential incentives for homeowners to clear off-street parking such as permit fee reductions for paving new off-street parking areas, or removing clutter in garages to allow parking,
- A program similar to Los Angeles that designates parking restrictions in certain additional areas during the fire season or specifically during periods of heightened risk like Red Flag Weather.

As a reference for how many days there has been Red Flag Weather declared in Berkeley, see the table below.

Number of Red Flag Days NOAA Called		
Year	For the East Bay Hills	For Berkeley
2024	14	7
2023	02	1
2022	0	0
2021	16	2
2020	26	6

The East Bay Hills column shows how many days the National Weather Service put the East Bay Hills Zone (which includes Berkeley) into Red Flag Warning status. This means that on these days, somewhere in the East Bay Hills Zone was expected to have red flag warning weather.

The Berkeley column shows how many of the NOAA-issued Red Flag Warning days for the East Bay Hills zone actually resulted in forecasted Red Flag Weather for Berkeley *specifically* following a department request for a spot forecast for the Berkeley Hills.

Previous Legislation

In an ADU-related item passed by the City Council on January 25, 2022. The City Council directed staff and the Fire Department to undertake additional red curbing in the Berkeley hills. This new item is consistent with and reaffirms the direction from this previous item, which reads in part:

2. Increase “red curbing” in areas of high fire risk

The usable area of Berkeley’s narrow hillside streets is further narrowed by the presence of parked cars, which in some cases park partly on the sidewalk, constricting both vehicle and pedestrian rights-of-way. Not only does on-street parking present a direct risk during an evacuation, it also increases response times for emergency vehicles. It is recommended that the City explore options for increasing red-curbing in areas with high fire risk to: reduce obstructions, encourage use of existing off-street parking, and incentivize alternatives to driving.

While the fire chief currently has the ability to “red curb” narrow streets in the hills, Council wishes to convey its full support of this policy and encourage a robust and streamlined implementation to save as many lives as possible in case of a fire or other natural disaster.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

Wildfires release a tremendous amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change. Safe Passages will increase ingress for firefighter fighters to reach and extinguish fires as quickly as possible, as well as egress for residents to evacuate to safety.

CONTACT PERSON

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