

# Chipper Program Proposal

## PROGRAM PLANNING

FIRESafe MARIN (FSM) staff and Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) Executive Officer Mark Brown have formed a planning committee tasked with making a recommendation to the MWPA Board for a coordinated, countywide Curbside Chipper Program. The committee is made up of representatives from each of the five MWPA operational zones, the MWPA Executive Officer, and FSM staff. This committee was further tasked to create a midyear funding proposal to cover chipping activities for the two month period of May and June 2021 and a second budget proposal to cover all chipping activities for the fiscal year 2021-2022.

As described in the FSM 2020 Chipper Program report, that first year program was designed to provide curbside pickup to each Marin Firewise site with additional days of chipper service to each of the 17 agencies that constitute the MWPA. When the MWPA provided increased funding for the program, service was extended to many non-Firewise communities. During the five month long program, FSM made 2,478 curbside pickups and removed 14,766 cubic yards of biomass. The chipper planning committee is recommending that the next chipping program should again be managed by FSM and provide expanded chipper service to most of Marin with special focus on high fire severity areas. Allowable volume per pickup should be increased and the program should coordinate with existing local chipper programs by utilizing the Fire Aside chipper management software.

In order to start the chipping program by May 1, we propose the following timeline:

1. Chipper Program submitted to MWPA Operations Committee for mid February meeting
2. MWPA reviews and submits to full MWPA Board for mid March meeting
3. FSM releases RFP for chipper services as soon as MWPA Board approves proposal
4. FSM works with MWPA agencies and Firewise sites to advertise chipper schedule and chipperday.com is opened for signups in early April.
5. Chipper Planning committee reviews vendor proposals and selects contractors mid April
6. Training provided to contractors
7. Curbside chipping starts mid May.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Chipper Program planning committee recognizes that curbside chipper programs are extremely popular with the public. Based on the 2020 chipper report, curbside chipper programs represent a good return on investment for taxpayer dollars. That report included a significant amount of data which was used to create metrics of success. A countywide program has an economy of scale that is more cost efficient and the FSM software has proven to be an effective management tool. The committee proposes to use the existing Mutual Threat Zone maps to schedule and coordinate the program. These maps cover much of the County and are easily imported to the chipper software program. Areas of high fire risk that are not covered by these maps will be mapped separately and added to the program. FSM already mapped most of these areas for the 2020 program.

Each area included in the program will be offered two curbside pickups. Whenever possible, chipping services will be scheduled to follow the Defensible Space Inspection program. It is logistically challenging to schedule chipping around the D-space program and so we recommend utilization of pilot programs in several smaller areas this year to determine whether this type of service and scheduling can be expanded in future years. Some Marin agencies have been utilizing non MWPA local vegetation management funds to provide community chipper services in previous years. These agencies may

choose to continue to provide these additional services utilizing non MWPA local funds or choose to divert some of this local funding to other fuel management projects. FSM is available to assist in the management of all local chipping programs utilizing the Fire Aside management program.

The 2020 program showed that participation rate is directly related to community engagement. It is critical to publish the chipping schedule well in advance utilizing multiple forms of media. We recommend an ambitious communication strategy to get the word out through Chipperday.com, FSM newsletters, the Firewise program, Town/City newsletters, agency websites, social media (Nextdoor Neighbor, etc.), West Marin radio, IJ articles, etc.

In 2020 we placed a limit on the size of a pile of chipped material. This was done in an effort to manage resources and schedules. In practice, we picked up all eligible material. This year we propose to eliminate the limit on pile size. Residents with large piles will need to utilize a new feature on the website registration page alerting us to a request for oversize pile support. We will reserve the right to approve/decline large piles but attempt to support as many as possible. However, we will still need to define what can go into the chipper such as tree limbs up to 8" in diameter, shrubs, brush, limbs, woody bushes, pampas grass, scotch broom, cypress, juniper, bamboo, etc. Trash, poison oak, blackberry brambles, firewood, construction materials, lumber, regular yard waste, leaves, lawn clippings, roots and contaminated material are not eligible for chipping. Bamboo and palm fronds will be taken, but need to be separated because they damage the chipper.

The 2020 Chipper Program occasionally utilized the curbside chipping contractors for what the program described as "jobs." On days when a crew had finished their routes early they were directed to local pre-determined projects. In anticipation of potential crew down time, cities, towns, and fire departments identified "neighborhood" vegetation mitigation projects that needed immediate attention and had relevant permits, permissions, and CEQA requirements in place before work began. Both fire departments and local agencies chose highly visible projects with a history of citizen complaints and requests for mitigation. The planning committee recommends that we continue to offer this option in order to maximize contractor efficiency.

### **ADMINISTRATION AND CONTRACTOR SELECTION**

The program will be administered by FSM staff. The management team will require one (1) FTE program manager, one half time (½) FTE administrative assistant and one half time (½) FTE bookkeeper/financial assistant. The FSM scheduling and reporting software will need to be updated and there are fees associated with the software tools for managing and capturing data related to the execution of community chipper programs.

Four requests for proposal will be released soliciting bids from contractors. Marin will be divided into four zones that will each have its own chipping schedule coordinated through the chipperday.com website. Contractors can bid to provide service in one or more zones. Contractors will need to demonstrate their past experience, capacity to provide services, adequate insurance, and a history of reliability. Contractors need to be large enough to have backup equipment to avoid scheduling problems due to equipment breakdowns. Multiple size trucks are often needed to service small roads. Other requirements will be included in the RFP evaluation process.

### **SCHEDULE**

Marin County has 124 Mutual Threat Zones (MTZ). These zones are mapped in a way that facilitates their use to create chipping route schedules. In addition to these zones, there are other high fire risk areas in various parts of the County that have been mapped by FSM and are included in the chipping

schedule. For purposes of scheduling and budget, we are proposing a 3 phase program. Phase 1 curbside chipping is scheduled to last 11 weeks starting on May 17 and lasting until July 30, 2021. This will require a mid year supplemental budget request for FY 2020-2021. Phase 1 would include up to 176 days of chipping. Each resident in the 124 MTZ zones and the additional high fire risk mapped areas will receive one curbside pickup in Phase 1. Most curbside chipping will be scheduled Monday through Thursday with open days to pick up missed piles or address problems that arose during the week. Four crews will be working each day in different parts of the county. A draft schedule is attached.

The 11 week Phase 2 chipping schedule would start August 16 and end on October 29, 2021. When completed, all eligible Marin residents will have been offered two curbside pickups during this year's chipping season. Phase 3 would also be an 11 week program scheduled for May/July 2022. The Phase 2 and Phase 3 program request will be submitted as part of the FY 2021-2022 budget.

## **BUDGET**

It is extremely difficult to make an accurate budget projection at this time because we do not know what price will be submitted by contractors utilizing the competitive RFP process. We also can only estimate participation rates and the amount of material that will need to be processed. Administrative costs should be similar to last year at approximately 8% of the overall budget. For Phase 1 of this program (FY 2020-2021), we estimate the cost of chipping services will not exceed \$400,000. We will be able to more accurately forecast the budget when we have received the responses to the RFPs. We have been asked to provide a budget estimate for FY 2021-2022 (Phase 2 & 3). Our projected curbside chipper budget for that fiscal year is \$1,200,000. A more accurate estimate can be made after we receive the responses to the RFP's and gain more experience with the program through Phase 1.