



City of Malibu News

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City Receives FEMA Grant for Emergency Siren System Meant to Improve Preparedness and Response to Wildfires and Other Disasters

(Malibu, CA) – The City of Malibu has received a hazard mitigation grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to fund the majority of the cost to develop the City’s proposed outdoor emergency siren system, meant to improve preparedness and response to wildfires and other disasters and provide additional communication tools when others may not be available.

“Wildfire has always been Malibu’s number-one public safety threat, but the size, duration and severity of the Woolsey Fire was unprecedented, and showed us the dangerous new normal of drought, climate change and California mega-fires,” said Mayor Mikke Pierson. “I am proud of the progress we have made in developing strategies to be even more prepared for disasters, including this siren system, which could be a powerful step toward community-wide preparedness.”

The FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant will cover costs associated with the design, permitting and environmental compliance of the outdoor warning siren system that the City has been developing since 2019, following recommendations made after the devastating 2018 Woolsey Fire. The design and environmental phase of the project is estimated to cost up to \$951,633. The grant will cover 75% of the total costs approximately \$713,724.75 and requires a local funding match of at least 25%, or approximately \$237,908.

The City contracted with Mission Critical Partners to conduct a sound study to determine the best quantity and locations for an effective outdoor emergency warning siren system that could be used during wildfires, earthquakes, biohazards, tsunamis, floods, terrorist attacks or other disasters.

The sound study, completed in June 2020, thoroughly examined environmental factors including ambient temperature and humidity, wind speed and direction, building height, terrain and the impacts on sound based on whether someone is inside a building or outdoors. The study focused particular attention to environmental factors present during Red Flag fire conditions and understanding the effects of the Santa Ana winds.

The outdoor siren system is part of the City’s Zero Power Plan, which the City developed following the Woolsey Fire, when infrastructure was destroyed or damaged and power and cell phone service was lost citywide creating a dangerous obstacle to providing timely emergency information to the community.

An outdoor siren system would be one of several tools for communicating when systems are down, including Emergency Information Stations at locations such as shopping centers, Changeable Message Signs to be placed on PCH and canyon roads, and Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA – similar to Amber Alerts, which can reach all cell phones within a certain area without subscriptions, including visitors as well as residents). The sirens could also be used when other communications systems are functioning. They add to the City’s existing tools, including

subscription-based emergency alerts, Everbridge Disaster Notifications (like Reverse 911), the website, social media, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and the phone hotline.

For more information, see the staff report:

<https://www.malibucity.org/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/4512?fileID=16801>.

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