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City of Ventura terminates billing associated with Fire Hazard Reduction Program

Ventura, Calif. – The City of Ventura has cancelled the billing program associated with the Fire Hazard Reduction Program (FHRP) effective immediately. During a special meeting on December 19, 2022, the Ventura City Council voted to stop billing charges and refund all fees paid by property owners for the program.

“This period of inflation is impacting the cost of everything, and our community members are feeling the effects of higher prices as well as rising insurance rates for those living in areas of high fire risk,” said Mayor Joe Schroeder. “The City Council unanimously supported the immediate removal of billing fees associated with the Fire Hazard Reduction Program to help alleviate extra costs for over 6,000 property owners. It was timely to make this change now because every day that goes by means more and more people are paying billing fees.”

The Fire Hazard Reduction Program, commonly referred to as FHRP, is the cornerstone of a Wildland Fire Action Plan intended to protect life and property by removing flammable brush, reducing vegetation density, and creating 100 feet of defensible space around structures.

“Removing flammable brush, reducing vegetation density, and creating defensible space around structures is critical to slow or stop the spread of wildfire. It helps safeguard homes, businesses, and valuable property from catching fire caused by direct flame, wind-driven ember cast, or radiant heat,” said Fire Chief David Endaya.

In response to the devastating Thomas Fire, the City expanded its defensible space inspection program from 600 inspections to include more than 6,000 properties in the “High” and “Very High” Fire Hazard Severity Zones as identified by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). These maps are used to assist in determining defensible space requirements, wildland-urban interface building codes, and the State Minimum Fire Safe Regulations.

During its regular meeting on May 24, 2021, the City Council approved the City’s Fiscal Year 2021-22 Master Fee Schedule, which included a fee to property owners for defensible space inspections and authorized the Ventura Fire Department to bill for those inspections. Fire inspections for all affected properties were billable at \$38.97. Fire Recovery USA, a third-party service, was hired to administer all defensible space billing on behalf of the Fire Department.

While the Fire Department will continue to perform defensible space inspections moving forward, billing charges for inspections have been terminated effective immediately. The City will notify affected property owners and implement a process to refund monies already paid. These actions do not limit the Fire Department’s ability to impose fines for non-compliance with the FHRP.

“The Fire Department will continue to work with property owners in creating and maintaining defensible spaces while also educating community members on how to prepare for wildfire,” said Chief Endaya.

For additional information on the Fire Hazard Reduction Program, call the Fire Prevention Division at 805-658-4717 or visit www.CityofVentura.ca.gov/FHRP.

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