

PORTOLA VALLEY TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH WOODSIDE TOWN COUNCIL,
NO. 841, MAY 30, 2012

Mayor Derwin called the meeting to order at 7:41 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Hanlon called the roll.

Present: Portola Valley Councilmembers Jeff Aalfs and Ted Driscoll; Vice Mayor John Richards;
Mayor Maryann Derwin

Woodside Councilmembers David Burow, Deborah Gordon, Peter Mason; Ron Romines
and Thomas Shanahan; Mayor David Tanner

Absent: Councilmembers Ann Wengert (Portola Valley) and Anne Kasten (Woodside)

Others: Nick Pegueros, Town Manager
Sharon Hanlon, Town Clerk

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

REGULAR AGENDA [8:02 p.m.]

Welcoming the Woodside representatives present, Mayor Derwin explained that it's been a recent Portola Valley Town Council tradition to devote the fifth Wednesday of applicable months to emergency preparedness. She said she and Mayor Tanner had talked for several years about having a joint meeting, and it took new Woodside Fire Protection District Fire Chief Dan Ghiorso and the Firewise Committee to ultimately make it happen. The Firewise Committee is a collaborative effort between the Fire Protection District, the Town of Woodside and the Town of Portola Valley to raise awareness of the dangers of wildland fires in our wildland/urban interface communities. In the spirit of the idea that regionalism may after all be a good thing and knowing that sharing wisdom, ideas and services between neighboring jurisdictions is simultaneously smart, prudent, enjoyable and community-building, Mayor Derwin said she looks forward to future joint meetings.

(1) Presentation: Overview of CERPP [7:34 p.m.]

Representing CERPP – the Citizens Emergency Response Preparedness Program – were John Carnes, Stephanie Truitt and Gaylynn Mann. Dr. Mark Campbell founded the organization in 1997, and it remains true to its two main objectives – encouraging preparedness and well-rehearsed disaster response, so that resources, plans and trained people are in place and ready to assist after a disaster. The Fire Protection District, with three stations and about 13 firefighters on duty at any given time, is not equipped to deal with a disaster on its own.

Mr. Carnes said he worked with Dr. Campbell and an umbrella group of a number of neighborhoods in CERPP's early days. Ms. Mann, working in the Fire Protection District, served as CERPP's first emergency preparedness coordinator, key contact and organizer. Ms. Truitt's focus has been on post-disaster animal welfare.

As part of many organizations involved in disaster preparedness and response, Mr. Carnes explained that CERPP coordinates with the towns of Woodside and Portola Valley, the Fire Protection District, the Sheriff's Office, the School Districts and various volunteer groups. With so many players involved, he said it can be a struggle making sure everyone knows what everyone else is doing and that their plans mesh.

If a disaster hits, each of CERPP's 25 divisions – individual communities of volunteers within the Fire Protection District – will act independently, responding to needs within their own neighborhoods and reporting to their town's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) with emergency needs (if 9-1-1 is unavailable), status updates, damage assessments, resource requests, etc. At the same time, the organization's animal-rescue volunteers will be working through the Fire District on first aid, evacuation, sheltering, etc.

CERPP has neither a central command nor a hierarchical organizational structure. Each CERPP division has a leadership team whose members serve as point people for neighbors within the division and for the Fire Protection District. The divisions are equipped with emergency medical supplies and a radio communications system to facilitate inter-division communication and contact with their EOCs. Each of the elementary schools also has a radio tie-in to this system. Within the divisions, more than 100 tactical radios are also deployed among CERPP members to facilitate communication with one another.

Acknowledging that the quality of radio communication in some areas is inadequate, Mr. Carnes said some divisions are using repeater systems, and others, such as one in the Old La Honda Road area, are looking into that.

In addition to the divisions, CERPP has nine disaster depots that consist of 40-foot shipping containers holding supplies for logistics and sheltering (e.g., cots, blankets, towels, diapers, water-luggers). More than 150 medical kits also have been distributed throughout the district to support the community volunteers in administering first aid at first-responder level – approximately 40 hours of Red Cross or American Heart Association first-aid training. CERPP volunteers also maintain the organization's physical infrastructure and keep its supply inventory replenished and up-to-date.

Mr. Carnes said CERPP does a considerable amount of training and exercise work, including two citizen-based disaster drills almost every year, one earthquake-oriented and one fire-oriented, because the responses to the two types of disasters differ. CERPP also conducts classes on disaster-preparedness, use of radios, search and rescue, disaster management, CPR, first aid, etc. The most elaborate is citizens' emergency-response training, which is based on a standardized curriculum endorsed by FEMA. Since launching this program in 2008, CERPP has trained more than 200 Portola Valley and Woodside residents. The organization's first-ever advanced CERPP class is scheduled for this fall.

Ms. Truitt explained that after Hurricane Katrina, she and Ms. Mann discussed developing a program that has since become a state mandate that calls for community emergency plans with provisions for animal evacuation. Included under the CERPP umbrella, the program that emerged in December of 2006 is called DART, for Disaster Animal Rescue Team. Its work includes plans to bring both large and small animals – including horses, cattle, llamas, peacocks, dogs, cats, etc. – to a safe place where residents can retrieve them. DART also is called upon for occasional rescues of large animals that get stuck in the mud, fall into pools, etc. Through this service, residents also have access to low-cost microchipping, and DART is in the process of building its own regional database to help reunite animals and their rightful owners without relying solely on a national network, which may well be impossible to query in the event of a disaster.

Fay Brophy, Emerald Hills, said she's interested in learning more about how the animal rescue program works, but doesn't know where to find information about it. The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office doesn't even have information on the program, she said. Ms. Truitt said she's had several meetings with Casey Terribilini, co-leader of the Sheriff's Office Mounted Search and Rescue (SAR) Unit. She said she also receives rescue calls from the Fire Protection District and through the San Mateo County Horsemen's Association. Acknowledging that it's been difficult to get the word out, she said she's open to suggestions to increasing awareness.

Mr. Carnes indicated that in addition to working to improve its web and social media presence, CERPP tries to get its message out via emails. Committed to step up marketing efforts and do a better job of recruiting new volunteers, CERPP has engaged the services of a marketing consultant – Linda Popky,

President of Leverage2Market Associates, who had worked with CERPP previously. The organization is shifting to a new tag line, "Be Ready Today."

CERPP's two major challenges lie in getting the word out and getting volunteers in. As Mr. Carnes explained, CERPP is especially struggling in terms of maintaining the corps of leadership-level volunteers who oversee day-to-day operations. This is why, he said, CERPP has missed some of its twice-yearly disaster drills, and hasn't been able to keep up with its quarterly radio-check program. He said existing volunteers need to be re-engaged and new ones recruited. In the meantime, he pointed out, both Portola Valley and Woodside have new Town Managers, and the Fire Protection District has a new Fire Chief.

One of the Councilmembers asked what the Town Councils can do to support CERPP. They can:

- Bring new people in to division leadership roles. In their capacity as Councilmembers, Mr. Carnes said Councilmembers know people – people who are interested in the community and would be good in CERPP division leadership roles. He said he'd prepare a list of which divisions need help for the Councilmembers' reference. CERPP's founder "knew everybody," Mr. Carnes said, so he had no trouble assembling 25 leaders. Over time, the corps of leaders he marshaled has eroded.
- As a Town Council, continuously broadcast the message that community-based emergency preparedness and response is critical. Portola Valley and Woodside aren't communities with big fire departments standing by to respond to a disaster.
- Participate in CERPP training, drills, exercises and classes, not only to know CERPP better but to better understand what to expect of CERPP volunteers – and in some cases, to be eligible for FEMA assistance.
- Sponsor joint and individual drills on a regular basis, including on weekends from time to time.

In terms of who's responsible for what, Mr. Carnes explained that cities and towns hold legal responsibility for declaring disasters, coordinating disaster response and preparing documentation required by state and federal governments for reimbursement of expenditures or funds to repair public infrastructure damage. The division of responsibilities in terms of disaster response in places such as Portola Valley and Woodside is more complicated than in cities that "own" their police and fire departments. In Woodside and Portola Valley, law enforcement services are contracted, and a special district has been set up for fire protection, so the reporting relationships aren't clear-cut.

Mr. Carnes estimated that even if only 5% to 10% of residents were well-prepared to respond in the event of a disaster, when disaster strikes plenty of others would come forward to help them. At this time, in response to a question from Mayor Derwin, he said that maybe 150 of 6,000 households participate in CERPP, except in certain areas such as Portola Valley Ranch, where the participation rate is about 25%.

He also said that Portola Valley and Woodside need to be prepared to be self-sufficient for a longer period of time than communities that are likely to suffer far more extensive damage in the event of an earthquake, because state and federal resources will go first to areas in greatest need. In the case of a wildfire, more resources would be available, because the mutual-aid system for firefighting is strong one at both county and state levels.

Speaking to preparedness for the two different types of disasters, an audience member pointed out an area in which residents could use help. For example, she said if she wants to replace a skylight, she knows a plastic skylight could melt in a fire and a heavy glass skylight could kill if it crashes down in an earthquake, but she doesn't know which option would make the most sense. She said it's important for staff to advise residents about the pros and cons of various solutions.

As a CERPP volunteer, she credited Mr. Carnes, Ms. Truitt and Ms. Mann as the core group from whom she's learned almost everything she knows about disaster preparedness and response. She said they're excellent teachers who make learning what to do and how to do it interesting, fun and engaging. From them, she said she also learned the importance of thinking ahead and understanding that preparedness is the residents' responsibility – not CERPP's, not the Fire Protection District's, not the towns'.

On behalf of both Councils, Woodside Councilmember Romines applauded Mr. Carnes, Ms. Truitt and Ms. Mann for the countless hours they've volunteered for many years to keep CERPP going, and wanted them to know that their efforts are appreciated.

(2) Presentation: Overview of April 2012 Wildland Fire Evacuation Exercise [8:33 p.m.]

Fire Chief Dan Ghorso said that resuming what had been the practice in the 1990s, this year the Fire Protection District invited firefighters from throughout the county – Redwood City, San Carlos, Belmont, San Mateo, Foster City, Millbrae and San Bruno – to participate in its wildland fire training. It was held the week of April 9-13, 2012, with a final drill involving the Portola Valley EOC on April 19, 2012. Incident commanders plus approximately 50 to 60 engine companies trained during that timeframe, he said.

The scenario was a large wildland fire in hot, windy conditions. Mr. Ghorso said Ms. Powell did a great job controlling and running the EOC that day. Because Redwood City is in joint training with the Woodside Fire Protection District, Redwood City Fire Department Training Chief Dave Pucci and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Christy Adoni were among personnel on hand to help. With the EOC set up early for the drill, it was much more proactive than reactive. Mr. Ghorso said that going forward, if there's any question whether a situation warrants setting up the EOC, set it up. "Instead of asking that question, just start acting," he said. "Open it up. You can always shut it down in half an hour or so if there's nothing going on."

Both in the EOC and out in the field, Mr. Ghorso said the event was extremely successful, from the initial stages on, although the planned evacuation didn't work out as envisioned. It takes hours, not minutes, to move people with their pets. He said the Fire District requests evacuations, but managing and coordinating them are responsibilities of the Town and the Sheriff's Office. In a real situation, he said, the Town probably would not want to bring people to Town Center; Menlo Park's Sharon Heights Country Club would be a much better alternative – provided arrangements have been made in advance.

Mr. Ghorso advised that it's important to provide for staff rotation in the EOC in the event of a prolonged or extended operation, which means training additional personnel. It's also important to have – and inform – designated and trained Public Information Officers (PIOs), so that information given to the media is accurate and timely.

Sharing information from Cal Fire about the upcoming fire season, Mr. Ghorso said that starting in mid-June, the combination of below-average rainfall, vegetation drier than usual due to recent strong winds, and a record low snowpack in the Sierra will make this a busy season in terms of fuel-driven wildland fires. Once these fires get burning, they grow due to the fuel on the ground. Year-to-date as of April 30, 2012, 818 wildland fires have been reported; during the same period last year, there were only 313. The five-year average is 634.

In terms of firefighting resources, Mr. Ghorso discussed both personnel and equipment. For instance, he said it's a big plus that Santa Cruz and San Mateo County Cal Fire units remain intact, but next year's firefighting force is likely to dwindle as a result of losing more prison firefighting hand crews. He also pointed out that three of the Woodside Fire Protection District engine companies, equipped to fight both structural and wildland fires, carry 250 gallons more water than comparable units. The Fire District also has a 3,200-gallon water tender.

The Fire Protection District has prepared time-coded high-fire danger signs that will be distributed to the CERPP divisions within the next month or so, Mr. Ghorso said. Those who have the signs warning of red-

flag conditions will receive emails or text messages about when signs should go up and come down. Mr. Ghiorso emphasized the importance of the signs not only being put out when circumstances warrant, but also taken down in a timely manner so that people can trust the information the signs relay.

He said the Fire Protection District's website also will post information about what it means when there's a high-fire danger or red-flag condition. For example, it's not a good time to fire up the lawnmower or weed-whacker at 2:00 p.m. on a hot, dry, windy afternoon, because a spark from hitting a pebble could flare up into a wildfire a matter of moments.

ADJOURNMENT [9:05 p.m.]

Mayor

Town Clerk