



STAFF REPORT

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Trevor Atashkarian, Accountant
Andrew Poster, Director of Public Works
Chris Tubbs, Fire Chief
Tom Welch, Deputy Fire Chief

SUBJECT: Municipal Service Tax Annual Report

DATE: October 5, 2020

Approved for Forwarding:

Alan E. Piombo, Jr., City Manager

1 **Issue:** Municipal Service Tax Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2019/2020.

2

3 **Recommendation:** Receive Report.

4

5 **Background:** In the 1980s, the Mill Valley City Council determined that existing City revenues
6 could not adequately fund street repairs and decided on a Municipal Service Tax (MST) as a source
7 of additional funds. Voters approved the MST with required two-thirds support at \$145 per parcel
8 in 1987. Voters renewed the MST in 1997 at \$145 per parcel and again in 2006 at a maximum of
9 \$195 per parcel.

10

11 In 2016, Mill Valley voters approved the formation of Community Facilities District No. 2016-1
12 to levy a Special Tax to provide funding for fire prevention and street rehabilitation services. The
13 Special Tax was set at \$266 per occupied single-family residential unit. The tax has a 2% annual
14 inflator and a 10-year lifespan, which expires following FY2026/27.

15

16 The funds generated by the MST are to be used to improve the condition of City streets, to reduce
17 fire hazards, or to shorten emergency response times. MST funds cannot be used for general

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18 government purposes. The money collected is restricted and may only be used to maintain roads
19 and fire prevention activities.

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21 **Discussion:** The City Resolution forming the Community Facilities District notes that the City
22 Manager, or his or her designee, acting for and on behalf of the District, shall annually file a report
23 with the City Council as required pursuant to Government Code Section 50075.3. In compliance
24 with this provision, staff reports that the tax proceeds are applied only to the specific purposes of
25 the tax. A separate account has been created into which the proceeds of the tax are deposited.

26
27 In FY2019/20, the MST generated \$1,703,809.76 in revenue, and \$1,448,651.26 was spent on
28 street improvement and vegetation management programs.

2019/2020 MST Expenditures	
Administration (MST Postcard)	\$5,230.20
Vegetation Management	\$506,664.92
Street Improvement Projects	\$936,756.14
Total	\$1,448,651.26

30
31 **Street Improvement Projects**

32 The following street reconstruction and repaving projects were completed in FY2019/20 using
33 MST funds:

34	35 Street Name	36 Begin	37 End
38	Sycamore Dr.	La Goma St	Camino Alto
39	Forrest Ave	Presidio Ave	E. Blithedale
40	Hill St	Presidio Ave	E. Blithedale
41	Eton Way	Vasco Dr.	Vasco Dr
42	Cottage Way	W. Blithedale	Eldridge Ave
43	Corte Madera Ave	Throckmorton Ave	Gardner Ave
44	W. Blithedale Ave	Throckmorton Ave	Gardner Ave
45	E. Blithedale Ave	Sunnyside Ave	Throckmorton Ave

46 **Fire Prevention and Vegetation Management**

47 With the passing of the MST, the funding for Mill Valley's Vegetation Management Program
48 increased from a one-time budget allocation of \$73,000 in 1997 to regular annual funding of
49 \$300,000. The increase has allowed for a substantially larger number of projects to benefit the
50 City following guidelines set forth in Resolution 16-39. Approximately \$1,000,000 was allocated
51 for FY2017/18 and FY2018/19 towards the Fire Prevention & Vegetation Management Program
52 due to the devastating wildfires in Sonoma, Napa, Butte, and Lake Counties. These funds were
53 applied to preventing wildfires by removing brush and vegetation, creating fire breaks, and
54 removing approximately 505.2 tons of fire fuel from Mill Valley during the last fiscal year.

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58 Since 1996, the City of Mill Valley's Vegetation Management Program has maintained original
59 vegetation projects and expanded into other projects to enhance community safety. Vegetation
60 management examples include:

- 61
- 62 • Large neighborhood chipper projects
- 63 • Wide area fuel breaks in Open Space preserves that surround Mill Valley
- 64 • Fire resistive demonstration garden
- 65 • Defensible space DVD played throughout the year at the Sequoia Theater
- 66 • Strategic removal of Eucalyptus trees. The Eucalyptus is then recycled and milled for
- 67 treads on Steps, Lanes, and Paths projects
- 68 • Strategic removal of Pines, Acacia, Bay, and other invasive trees on public lands
- 69 • Vegetation reduction along the fire roads surrounding Mill Valley
- 70 • Creation and installation of fire road signage for mutual aid resources, hikers, and mountain
- 71 bikers on all fire roads surrounding Mill Valley
- 72 • Development and delivery of public educational materials, poster boards, newsletters, and
- 73 informational pieces
- 74 • Vegetation removed during monthly paved road fuel reduction projects
- 75 • Hazard Assessment Program is designed to assist residents who are threatened with fire
- 76 insurance cancellations. Approximately half of all insurance cancellations have been
- 77 reversed
- 78 • Partnerships in fire fuel reduction with external stakeholders such as Cal Trans, PG&E,
- 79 Marin County Open Space, Marin Municipal Water District, Marin County Fire
- 80 Department, and the Union Pacific Railroad
- 81 • Clearing of City-owned property
- 82 • Delivery of regular and frequent National Fire Protection Association's Hazard
- 83 Recognition in the Wildland Urban Interface class for residents
- 84 • Developed a defensible space internet-based mobile phone application allowing residents
- 85 to determine defensible space zones on their property
- 86 • Creation of five nationally recognized Firewise Communities with more in the works
- 87 • Construction of a mid-slope fuel break on Fern Canyon, Corte Madera, and Blithedale
- 88 ridges, among other locations
- 89 • Partnerships with Homeowner Associations to create Firewise Communities
- 90 • Vegetation management of Steps, Lanes, and Paths (SLP) throughout the community. All
- 91 improved SLP's are cleared twice a year to enable swift evacuation by foot.
- 92

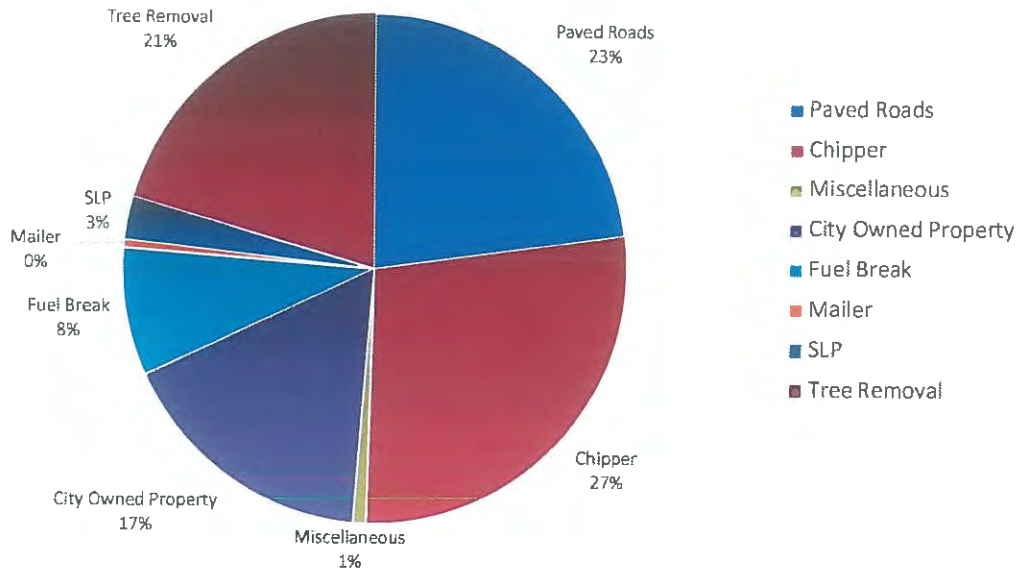
2019/2020 Fire Prevention and Vegetation Management Activities	
Streets Participated in Chipper Projects	100
Streets Cleared of Encroaching Flammable Vegetation	123
Hazard Assessments Performed	237
Tons of Vegetation Chipped	505

93
94 In addition, multiple City-owned properties were cleared of flammable vegetation. The City's
95 historical network of Steps, Lanes, and Paths (SLPs) were cleared on a semi-annual basis, and
96 work crews continued clearing the ridgetop fuel break on Blithedale Ridge. Fire Department staff
97 also hosted Firewise Communities and NFPA Defensible Space classes both in person and
98 remotely hosted on Zoom.

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Figure 1: MST Spending % by Category

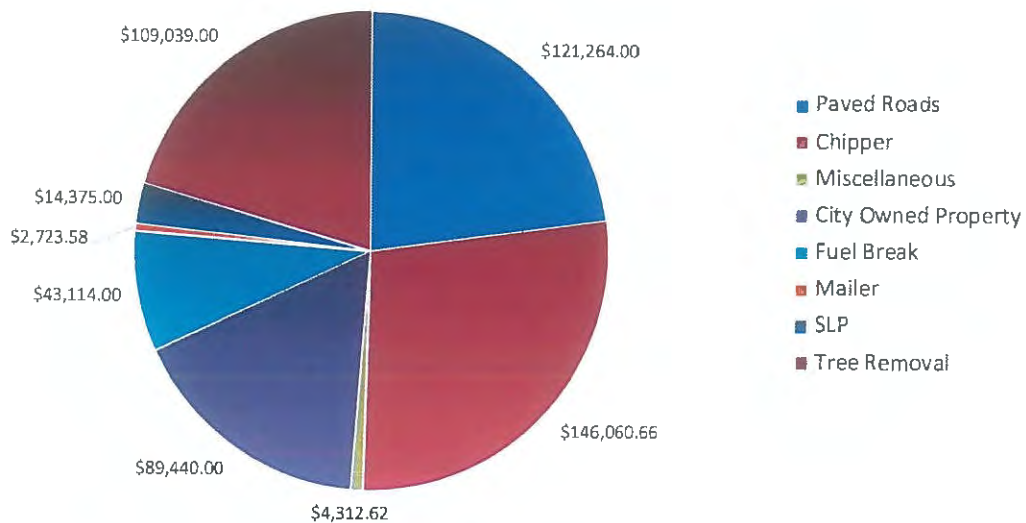
Figure 1. 2019/20 FY Veg Management % Utilization



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Figure 2: MST Spending \$ by Category

Figure 2. 2019/20 FY Veg Management



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Next Steps

City staff will continue to utilize MST funds to improve Mill Valley's roadways and reduce fire hazards exposure. Going into the future, the Fire Department will be using MST dollars to continue the work thus far in addition to the completion of Fire Prevention Initiatives 3, 4 & 5.

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113 Fire Prevention Initiative 3 – Evacuation Concepts:

114 **Currently:** The City of Mill Valley manages vegetation at the edge of pavement on primary and
115 secondary evacuation roads.

116
117 Access and egress routes such as Cascade Ave and W.
118 Blithedale have large clusters of trees that delay emergency
119 response due to the need to negotiate tree obstacles. The trees
120 are growing larger every year, thus creating more challenges.



121
122 The age and design of current infrastructure create challenges
123 for modern-day fire engines. The City Council supports the
124 redesign of problem areas to improve response times.

125
126 **Recommendation:** Continue and expand vegetation removal on City right of way along evacuation
127 routes. Tree crown spacing would be increased to disrupt the canopy's continuity further, thus
128 diminishing the opportunity for sustained crown fires. The recommendations would come to
129 fruition by managing vegetation removal prescriptions along selected corridors key to access and
130 evacuation.

131
132 Accelerate the design and construction of fire access and evacuation route enhancement projects
133 to complete one project a year as funding/logistics allows. Evaluate and develop a community-
134 supported plan to mitigate trees that hinder access/egress on Cascade, W. Blithedale, and other
135 critical routes. This would be done to balance community desires while ensuring and retaining
136 emergency access/egress.

137
138 Throughout Marin County and within the City, fire and
139 police departments have substantial plans/frameworks
140 to conduct community evacuations during an
141 emergency. The City of Mill Valley has practiced
142 these concepts for the last 12 years by hosting
143 neighborhood evacuation drills. For 2020 we were not
144 able to conduct the evacuation drill for COVID
145 concerns, we are evaluating opportunities for 2021.



146
147 **Outcome:** Improved emergency response times and more effective evacuation routes will create
148 larger vegetation buffers on critical routes, thus enhancing our infrastructure capacity during an
149 emergency response or evacuation.

150
151 Fire Prevention Initiative 4 - Public Education:

152 **Currently:** The Fire Department conducts educational opportunities by way of several sources,
153 mediums, and platforms. We have new educational content located on the City's website and have
154 developed several videos that focus on vegetation management and evacuation concepts for all
155 residents. We provide various mailings and have developed a smartphone application that
156 illustrates the processes homeowners can undertake to improve their homes' survivability. Finally,
157 we offer/support several classes for residents throughout the year to include Fire Safety Living
158 Room Chats (Zoom).

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160 **Recommendation:** Continue to publish videos, flyers, mailers, other educational materials, and
161 community engagement opportunities throughout Mill Valley. Separately, the Fire Department
162 will continue to support the classes currently offered through new communication modalities such
163 as zoom or with social distancing in mind. We are developing new materials that focus on
164 structural ignitability and residential survivability.

165
166 We need to continue to work directly with neighborhoods on preparedness, prevention, evacuation,
167 and home survival. This program has been a significant first step towards neighborhood
168 organizing, neighbors-helping-neighbors, and evacuation concepts.

169
170 **Outcome:** An informed and prepared community across all demographics and social structures.

171

172 Fire Prevention Initiative 5 – Communications:

173 **Currently:** The City of Mill Valley has several methods available to reach the affected
174 community in an emergency. These methods include: Alert Marin, reverse 911, Wireless
175 Emergency Alerts (WEA) neighborhood sirens, Facebook, Nixle, Twitter, email, and City News
176 web postings. We use the appropriate methods to notify residents of an actual emergency or
177 provide information about an escalating situation such as Red Flag Warnings.

178

179 **Outcome:** The City of Mill Valley has replaced its aging siren system with the state of the art
180 LRAD system. Since installation, we have discovered underserved areas of the community that
181 could benefit from enhancement at our current sites or the addition of new sites. Enhancements
182 would be done in conjunction with the Southern Marin Fire Protection District's installation of a
183 total of 7 locations. Funding for building out Southern Marin Fire's LRAD system is made possible
184 through local mitigation dollars funding through the MWPA.

185

186 **Recommendation:** At a future City Council meeting, we will present additional enhancements
187 for the Mill Valley LRAD system, timelines for enhancements, and potential funding sources for
188 council consideration.

189

190 **Outcome:** The City of Mill Valley has stepped up community engagement to include four living
191 room chats:

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|--------------|
| 192 | • Cascade Canyon | 20 Residents |
| 193 | • Lovell Ave | 15 Residents |
| 194 | • Alto Sutton/Scott Valley | 11 Residents |
| 195 | • Cascade Canyon | 77 Residents |
| 196 | • Zig Zag Trail Fire | 23 Residents |
| 197 | • CERT's | 23 Residents |

198

199 In conclusion, the Municipal Service Tax, approved by the voters, is working well to support the
200 community's road infrastructure and enhance community fire safety for our residents. The result
201 is an improved quality of life for all, thus making Mill Valley a safe and enjoyable place to live.

202

203 **Fiscal Impacts:** Detailed in the Staff Report.

204

205 **Attachments:** None.