

## **Emergency Evacuation Plan:**

The staff report explains that experts recommend not having an emergency evacuation plan because you don't know if the routes will be safe. Then maybe the city needs an emergency evacuation "contingency plan". There are numerous obstacles to getting Sebastopol evacuated safely and all need to be addressed before the evacuation notice is sent.

**First there are just four main ways to get out of Sebastopol.** For about half to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the citizens any one of those will require passing through one or both of the traffic lights at Bodega Highway and 116. During the last evacuation which literally took hours to get out of the city these lights were out of service, likely due to the fact that PGE cut off electricity.

An Evacuation Contingency Plan should prioritize getting a battery backup and perhaps some remote control of the lights to facilitate movement in whatever direction you think is safe at the time. The investment in backup power would help as well, every time PGE turns off the power.

If controlling lights is not considered effective, then who will be designated to direct the traffic? Will they be trained to make it better and not worse? Will there be spotters at various places along the route to let the people direct traffic which ways are backing up more?

Evacuation to the South could be accelerated if both sections of 116 were reversed to allow traffic to flow more easily to the South. Coordination with the county and CHP might even close 116 all the way to Stony point. Something similar could be done for highway 12. This would require planning to coordinate with law enforcement, have barriers and signs ready and to have a provision for emergency responders coming toward Sebastopol. This needs study and coordination and can't be done on the fly in the event an evacuation is ordered.

There are a number of back roads that could divide traffic and allow it to move more quickly. These routes need to be identified, signs prepared, and some process be put in place for CHP, Sheriffs or nearby police that come to help are informed about the routes and the plan. Someone needs to be designated to monitor traffic flow and amend the plan as needed.

Communication will be critical. If you are not going to tell people in advance about planned routes, then how will you communicate when the time comes. There is no local news. Cell service goes down when PGE cuts power. Many of the people coming may be from the West County and not aware of Sebastopol's communication plans. There is the option of having programable signs that can be moved into place. It would help if you had designated routes and could simply put them on the signs. Of course, the issue is what signs, who is going to pay for them and who is going to put them up. There are signs on businesses coming into town. Maybe the city could approve digital advertising signs (probably against our esthetic) and then have a plan to get businesses to put up emergency messages directing evacuees to preferred routes.

West County was much of the problem in the last evacuation. They were evacuated first and the roads were fully congested by the time Sebastopol got the word. There are several ways to get out of the West County. Has Sebastopol ever coordinated with the Sheriff to ensure as much of West County as possible goes around Sebastopol? One of the problems in the last evacuation is a Contra Costa Police Unit that was instructed to block Occidental Rd. They forced all the traffic into intersections with no traffic lights in the middle of Sebastopol. Apparently, they were not on the same frequency as Sebastopol so no one could change the plan on the fly.

Bottom line there needs to be a plan. If you want it to be a secret plan, then it needs to include an effective communications component that will work when cell service is out and there is not any local media to make announcements. Maybe we should have an emergency FM radio station that is activated to communicate in an emergency.

Some of this should probably be included in the EOC plan. The problem is that the plan has been in the works for years and this would be lost in all the bureaucracy in that plan. In the meantime, there is no focus on practical solutions to getting people out of Sebastopol in an emergency.

Now that we have had much of the eastern side of the city designated moderate risk of wildfires the need for a plan to move people quickly becomes a matter of life and death. The residents and businesses along 116 and that downtown would be evacuating under the immediate risk of fire. If the county has issued an evacuation order for the west county prior to a fire breaking out in the laguna, many Sebastopol residents may be unable to get out of the city as traffic will be snarled. It will look like Paradise or LA all over again, but it will be our friends and family trapped in fire.

Someone needs to be in charge of the plan. The plan needs to be rehearsed at least on a tabletop. Many cities have full dress rehearsals with citizens involved. One concern that has come up over others is the fact that Sebastopol now has moderate fire risk areas to the north, east, west and south of Sebastopol.

Red Flag winds from the east and northeast create a particularly acute risk on the east side of the city. If fire moved across the wildland urban boundary south of highway 12 forcing rapid evacuation of residents and businesses as well as the hospital and Apple Valley Rehab. There needs to be a plan to expedite cars moving whichever way on 116 is safe. Further, as we learned from the Kaiser experience there needs to be mass transportation available to move individuals from the Hospital and Apple Valley. There may be individuals in Fircrest that need assistance. There will be buses parked at the High School. Who has the keys, who is trained to drive them? Who is going to assemble there. Who is going to make the decision to get them moving?

Planning can save lives. Even if you decide to keep the plan secret from the public until the last minute. You need a plan. Unlike the EOC plan which has been going on for years now, this plan should be ready for the fire season.

A timeline and budget need to be established, and these issues need to be addressed before the next fire evacuation in Sebastopol.