

STAFF REPORT

Date: May 21, 2025

To: Mayor and City Council

Through: Jackie Bryant, City Manager

Subject: Joint presentation by the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District, Reno Fire Department, and Sparks Fire Department on current and future regional fire collaboration efforts, including an update from the Reno Fire Department on City-wide fire emergency evacuation planning. (For Discussion Only)

From: Dave Cochran, Fire Chief

Department: Fire Department

Summary:

At the February 6, 2025 special concurrent meeting of all four regional governing bodies, elected officials directed staff to work together on enhanced regional fire service collaboration. The joint directive emphasized the goals of improved coordination, efficiency, and transparency, while exploring the full continuum of regional fire options including greater use of automatic aid and other forms of shared service delivery.

In response, an interagency working group was formed, composed of executive fire staff and City and County leadership. Since its inception, this group has met regularly to assess current conditions, identify opportunities, and chart a practical course forward. Simultaneously, the City of Reno and regional partners continue to work on wildfire evacuation preparedness efforts, which are advancing in partnership with regional agencies but outside the scope of the February 6, 2025 regional fire collaboration directive. Efforts include public preparedness education, implementation of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), evacuation route risk assessments, and participation in a countywide evacuation study funded through a private donation.

A detailed overview of progress on both initiatives to date will be presented, along with a joint update from the three fire departments highlighting key operational, legislative, and policy-related efforts.

Alignment with Strategic Plan:

Public Safety

Previous Council Action:

February 6, 2025 - Direction from the Washoe County Commissioners, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District Board of Fire Commissioners, and Reno City Council Members to the City Managers/County Manager/Truckee Meadows Fire Protection Chief to work together to gather additional information to assess needs, costs, and impacts to help guide the process of determining options for enhanced regional fire services.

Background:

The Washoe County region has long benefited from a collaborative approach to fire and emergency medical services through mutual aid, shared dispatch platforms, and cooperative training programs. However, ongoing gaps in service alignment, dispatch inefficiencies, and staffing inconsistencies have continued to limit the region's ability to fully optimize service delivery.

At the February 6 special concurrent meeting, elected officials called for a coordinated exploration of the full continuum of regionalization options from improved operational coordination to potential full-service consolidation. This initiative builds on existing partnerships and the recognition that a more unified approach can yield faster responses, more cost-effective deployment of resources, and a better experience for constituents.

As an additional initiative, given the increasing risk of catastrophic wildfire events in the region, the City of Reno has prioritized wildfire evacuation preparedness as a standalone initiative. While these efforts align with broader public safety strategies and benefit from regional coordination, they represent a distinct line of work led by the Reno Fire Department and Emergency Management. Recent focus areas include development of the CWPP, enhancing community readiness, and investing in data-driven evacuation planning tools.

Discussion:**Fire Regionalization Efforts:**

Since February, the regional working group has advanced several key milestones. The group clarified that regionalization, in this context, is not synonymous with consolidation into a single district. Rather, it refers to the coordination of services among existing departments to achieve shared operational goals while preserving agency flexibility. This shared understanding now guides all planning and communications efforts.

One of the efforts of the group was to form a focused operations chiefs subgroup, composed of fire leadership from each jurisdiction. This subgroup has made notable progress on aligning emergency response models. One of the main focus areas has been how to create an efficient,

equitable response model that takes into account the varied staffing levels between the jurisdictions. This approach will balance cost considerations with public safety outcomes and consider flexibility across the region.

In terms of dispatch operations, the chiefs confirmed that technical infrastructure is in place, but operational refinements are needed to eliminate call transfers and ensure that the closest and most appropriate unit is dispatched using automatic vehicle location (AVL) data. These improvements are being integrated into the Hexagon CAD system buildout, with real-time data monitoring being planned to support deployment accuracy. Geofencing has also been identified as a future opportunity to enhance deployment boundaries.

The subgroup placed an emphasis on regional standardization of operating procedures and training protocols. To this end, five of the most common call types are being prioritized for standard operating guidelines (SOG) development. Cross-agency training will follow, requiring executive support for overtime authorization and coordination around labor agreements.

Concurrent with operational progress, the group has worked closely to analyze Senate Bill 319 (SB319), which creates a framework for forming a regional fire protection district. While the current collaboration effort is focused on operational alignment, the working group recognized the value of engaging with SB319 as enabling legislation. Participating jurisdictions collaboratively developed amendment language to preserve local flexibility, address fiscal equity—particularly around inherited debt and asset sharing—and ensure appropriate governance. The bill, if ultimately passed and signed into law, mandates a commissioned study to evaluate the impact of regionalization on cost, response times, readiness, and legal structure, with findings due by December 2026. The three jurisdictions will have joint oversight on the commissioned study.

A major upcoming priority is the development and release of a request for proposals (RFP) to engage a third-party consultant to conduct a comprehensive feasibility and efficiency business plan/study as supported by SB319. This study will explore governance models, legal structures, fiscal scenarios, and operational readiness across all three agencies. The RFP is being informed by past CAD regionalization procurement documents and will include learnings from peer regions such as Sacramento.

The working group also agreed that labor and public engagement are essential. The labor groups have been included to assist with development of the evolving staffing and response model, with the goal of creating shared understanding and minimizing potential friction. Future deliverables of this group include the release of the RFP, continuing labor briefings to discuss staffing models, and refinement of joint public messaging.

Wildfire Evacuation Preparedness:

The City of Reno continues to prioritize wildfire evacuation preparedness as a standalone effort separate from the February 6 regional fire directive. These efforts focus on both community education and data-driven planning strategies, with an emphasis on reaching residents in high wildfire hazard areas.

Residents are encouraged to prepare early by signing up for emergency alerts through platforms like RAVE-Smart911. In addition, residents can sign up for the Perimeter app which is used by regional agencies to coordinate and publish evacuation areas and instructions to the public in real time. The City promotes the assembly of go-bags and disaster supply kits, encourages completion of evacuation checklists, and shares information on how to prepare homes and families in advance of an emergency. Public outreach is taking place through community tabling events, public presentations, media campaigns, and community forums. A wildfire evacuation video has also been developed to support personal preparedness messaging.

Reno also plays an active role in the Regional Integrated Preparedness Plan, which uses the Planning, Operations, Equipment, Training, and Exercises (POETE) model to identify and close capability gaps. Key activities under this model have included wildfire, earthquake, and shelter operations exercises; coordination on hazard mitigation planning; and delivery of cross-agency training sessions.

Five months into development, the City is continuing work on the CWPP in partnership with SWCA Environmental Consultants. Scheduled for completion in early 2026, the CWPP will include a comprehensive risk assessment, vegetation mitigation strategies, and public outreach recommendations. Importantly, the plan will also feature evacuation analyses to help identify vulnerable neighborhoods and guide investment in evacuation planning.

As part of the CWPP process, two GIS-based studies are currently underway. The first, a route risk analysis, evaluates characteristics such as road curvature, grade, surface material, connectivity, and structure density. The second, an entrapment risk analysis, assesses adjacent fuel loads and likely fire behavior along key corridors. Together, these analyses will support more effective evacuation route planning and identify areas for mitigation.

In a related but separate effort, Washoe County has accepted a private donation to support a countywide evacuation study. The study will assess risk across jurisdictions, incorporate advanced fire and traffic modeling software, and inform evacuation planning efforts in both the incorporated cities and unincorporated areas. Although this initiative operates independently of the fire regionalization working group, it significantly enhances regional preparedness and supports data-informed decision making for safe evacuations.

Financial Implications:

To date, the financial impact of both the regional fire collaboration and wildfire evacuation preparedness efforts has been largely limited to staff time and grant-funded partnerships. However, costs are expected to increase with the completion and implementation of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), expanded public outreach and education efforts, and consultant-supported data modeling for the countywide evacuation study. Similarly, the upcoming launch of the regional business plan study, consultant procurement, and regional training implementation will require additional investment. Future phases may also carry funding needs. These costs will be evaluated as part of the business plan and evacuation studies, with potential opportunities for long-term savings and outside funding support through FEMA grants and regional partnerships.

Legal Implications:

Legal review completed for compliance with City procedures and Nevada law.

Recommendation:

This item is for discussion only. Staff recommends that elected officials receive the presentation and provide feedback to inform the working group's continued efforts and current wildfire evacuation preparedness activities. Comments received will help guide the scope of the feasibility study, labor engagement strategy, and public communication approach.

Proposed Motion:

No motion required. For discussion only.

Attachments: