



MENDOCINO COUNTY FIRE SAFE COUNCIL

To inform, empower, and mobilize county residents to survive and thrive in wildfire prone environments.

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Mill Valley City Council
City of Mill Valley
26 Corte Madera Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941

Emailed to: (1) citycouncil@cityofmillvalley.org
(2) Mill Valley City Manager jmccann@cityofmillvalley.org

Subject: City Council Consideration-Roadway Configuration Parkway Room Portion Miller Av.

Dear Gentlepersons:

I am a consulting fire scientist and have worked on wildland and wildland/urban interface (WUI) fire problems since the 1980's. I currently am employed by Berkeley Engineering and Research located in Berkeley. I am also President of the Mendocino County Fire Safe Council which is a pro bono position where we help guide fire safety planning for Mendocino County.

I received a Ph.D., degree from UC Berkeley where I was a member of the research staff of the UC Forest Products Lab and worked extensively with the Fire Research Group there.

My credentials relevant to the subject of this letter include the following:

- Fire Safety Reviewer for Federal Compliance – SMART rail vehicles
- Report co-author – East Bay regional Park District Blue ribbon panel which prepared a report essentially predicting the Oakland hills fire
- Author, as consultant to the office of the California State fire Marshal, of Cost/benefit study and technical review reports supporting the adoption of WUI building code standards accepted by the State Building Standards Commission in the California Building Code
- Reviewer of CEQA mandated environmental impact reports and fire protection plans for projects in the Lake Tahoe basin and San Diego County
- Author of the first fire protection plan submitted to the Pasadena fire department for a private middle school in that community
- Consultant to the city of Long Beach board of education developing evacuation and fire protection plans for a walk-in middle school wildland camp location in the San Gabriel Mountains.



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- Consultant/expert witness to the Oakland City Attorney's office following the Oakland Hills fire.

The plan under consideration by the Mill Valley City council to narrow one quarter mile of Miller Avenue and in the process delete two lanes – one lane in each direction - is an exceedingly bad idea.

Not only will the proposal obviously create bottlenecks in travel flow during normal conditions but under conditions where emergency egress or ingress is required the likelihood of serious foreseeable disruptions of traffic flows is 100%. As such execution of the plan can **and will** create hazardous conditions endangering the safety and welfare of Mill Valley residents.

In support of my "bad idea" designation are following:

1. The plan violates/runs counter to applicable state regulations and FEMA -Federal Emergency Management Agency – Guidelines [shown below]:

California State Fire Code: CFC Section 503.2.1 Dimensions. *Fire apparatus access roads shall have an unobstructed width of not less than 20 feet (6096 mm), except for approved security gates in accordance with Section 503.6, and an unobstructed vertical clearance of 13 feet 6 inches (4115 mm).*

https://qcode.us/codes/sunnyvale/view.php?topic=16-16_52-16_52_503

FEMA Guidelines – These are identical to the State Fire Code regulations and call for a 20' wide roadway minimum as follows:

Guidance for Roads and Driveways Roads should be wide enough to allow evacuation and emergency vehicles simultaneous access. Minimum width is 20 feet for access roads and 12 feet for driveways).

2. **The City must be aware that** Mill Valley includes areas of highest fire hazard in terms of WUI fire risk based on mapping as part of the CAL Fire rating system. As such, it is amazing to me that the plan is sufficiently advanced the the Council is considering approval since it will greatly enhance the fire hazard to its citizens given the fire risk profile for the city.

Hopefully the plan will be reviewed by the Mill Valley FD, since it doesn't appear that has happened. I also recommend (peer) review of the plan by the Marin County Fire Marshal/CAL Fire

3. Mill Valley's fire evacuation plan relies on "controlling all intersections" in a catastrophic event. This is a similar approach to that followed by Paradise in Butte County where that plan



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failed very early in the recent fire and where the terrain is far less challenging than in Mill Valley.

In a serious fire emergency the city of Mill Valley will be seriously challenged. Eliminating 50% of the evacuation capacity counted on for a major transport route for citizen evacuation and first responders would be a grave error.

The current state of knowledge of involving difficulties posed in evacuating citizen populations during wild fire emergencies is exemplified by the deaths in the Tubbs fire in nearby Santa Rosa as well as the Paradise fire. As such should a WUI fire take place in your city with attendant risks to citizens, the increase in liability to the City of Mill Valley would be very great.

Thank you for your attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph B. Zicherman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Joseph B. Zicherman, Ph.D., SFPE