

LA Wildfires: Joint County – State Housing Task Force Meeting

Summary Document | May 14, 2025

This document captures discussion outcomes and action items resulting from the LA Wildfires: Joint County – State Housing Task Force meeting.

Agenda

Time	Topic	Facilitator
5 minutes	Welcome & Meeting Admin <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attendance (Link in Chat)• Introductions (New Participants)	LA County Development Authority (LACDA) Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)
10 minutes	Housing Task Force Updates <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opening Remarks• Announcements<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior Reverse Mortgages Workshop• Section 8 Housing Voucher Program	LA County Development Authority (LACDA) Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD)
15 minutes	County of Sonoma <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing Authority Response During the Fires• Waiver Requests• Homeless Service Providers• CDC Disaster Response Toolkit	Martha Cheever (County of Sonoma)
15 minutes	City of Santa Rosa <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication Strategy• Fire History and Mutual Aid• Keys to Effective Recovery• Community Concerns	Gabe Osburn; Jessica Jones (City of Santa Rosa)

Time	Topic	Facilitator
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Paradigm FEMA Public Assistance Program and Infrastructure Recovery 	
10 minutes	Q&A / Discussion	All Members
5 minutes	Wrap Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action Items & Next Steps 	Task Force Leads

Action Items

#	Task	Status	Date Assigned	Anticipated Due Date	Owner
1	Award 50 Section 8 vouchers from the Housing Voucher Program waitlist.	Pending	04/09/2025	06/30/2025	LACDA
2	Evaluate Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Information Data and Analysis (FIDA) data to identify patterns, flag common barriers to securing permanent housing, and identify missing data to request supplemental information from FEMA and LA County Office of Emergency Management (LA Co OEM).	Pending	04/15/2025	05/23/2025	LACDA; LA Co OEM
3	Develop an Executive Order Fact Sheet that outlines housing-related executive orders due to the wildfires to guide policy recommendations and support survivors.	Pending	04/30/2025	05/23/2025	LA Co OEM; LACDA; DCBA; HCD
4	Develop a Survivor Unique Challenges slide deck and talking points to support targeted funding requests and strengthen federal advocacy efforts.	Pending	04/29/2025	5/19/2025	LACDA; LA Co OEM

Meeting Summary

Announcements

Opening Remarks

- The next Housing Task Force meeting scheduled for 5/21/2025 is cancelled.
- Beginning in June, the Housing Task Force meetings will transition to a bi-weekly schedule.

Senior Reverse Mortgages Workshop

- The Reverse Mortgage Working Group organized a [reverse mortgage workshop](#) for senior citizens on Saturday, 5/10/2025, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM at the MonteCedro Retirement Community.
 - The workshop focused on senior reverse mortgages and drew an attendance of approximately 25-30 participants.
 - Attendees included seniors with reverse mortgages, as well as their children and caregivers.
 - Key topics included insurance questions related to reverse mortgages and available assistance programs.
 - The next workshop is scheduled for 6/28/2025 at 10:00 A.M. at Loma Alta Park, with further details to be shared with the group.
 - For those interested in joining the Reverse Mortgage Working Group, the contact information is:
 - Email: Carolina.romo@lacda.org
 - Phone: 626-296-6298

Section 8 Housing Voucher Program

- There were no updates related to the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program.

County of Sonoma

Housing Authority Response During the Fires

- The [Sonoma County Housing Authority](#) operates under the Community Development Commission, which serves as the Housing & Urban Development's (HUD's) local planning division.
- The primary focus is on managing housing programs and responding to community housing needs.
- In 2017, approximately 53,000 homes were destroyed by wildfires in Sonoma County, severely impacting the housing market.

- The fires destroyed homes indiscriminately, reducing the already low vacancy rate of 1% to nearly zero.
- The Housing Authority, although not designed for emergency response, supported the community by providing resources at local assistance centers.
- Policies and procedures were modified to assist tenants who lost their homes and to address landlords reclaiming properties.
- The agency fast-tracked internal processes to support tenants in securing new rental units.
- The Housing Authority researched best practices and consulted with other housing authorities throughout the nation that had previously managed disaster scenarios.

Waiver Requests

- The Housing Authority worked with HUD's field office to request emergency waivers to assist low-income tenants.
- Many waiver requests were denied due to program limitations, including those for disaster vouchers.
- The experience highlighted that housing authorities are not structured as emergency response organizations.

Homeless Service Providers

- The fires revealed the significant impact on homeless populations, including destruction of encampments.
- The disaster presented an opportunity to connect unhoused individuals to care and housing services.
- The response emphasized the importance of having homeless service providers present at evacuation centers.
- Sonoma County partnered with [Catholic Charities](#) to extend shelter operations by an additional week for unhoused individuals.
- A study was conducted to understand the impact of the disaster on those who were unstably housed.

CDC Disaster Response Toolkit

- In response to the fires, the [Center for Disease Control](#) (CDC) revamped its outreach and has developed disaster programs since 2018. The [CDC toolkit](#) includes documentation such as waiver requests and response strategies used during Sonoma County's wildfire recovery.
- A ["Housing Heroes Program"](#) was launched for landlords, based on Louisiana's initiative post-Hurricane Katrina, offering staff support, incentives, double deposits, minor repairs, and risk mitigation.

- A comprehensive tenant services program was created, including tenant education, one-time deposit assistance, and connections to support services.
- Although these programs were impactful, CDC is actively seeking new funding sources as the funds have been exhausted.
- The Housing Authority also implemented a housing search platform similar to Zillow, with controlled access for tenants and landlords. As of now, 1,930 properties are registered on the platform, with 342 units currently available. Due to the effectiveness of their outreach, the Housing Authority has reached its leasing capacity.

City of Santa Rosa

Communication Strategy

- The County of Sonoma created the [Sonoma Recovers](#) website to centralize and streamline communications during disaster recovery efforts.
- The website served as a platform to provide information and assistance related to housing relocation and community needs.

Fire History and Mutual Aid

- The County of Sonoma has dealt with multiple devastating wildfires, including the 2017 Tubbs and Nuns Fires, the 2019 Kincade Fire, and the 2020 Glass Fire.
- The Tubbs Fire was the most destructive in California's history at the time, destroying 3,043 residential units and causing widespread infrastructure damage.
- Lessons learned from these fires allowed the County of Sonoma to provide mutual aid to other regions, including Maui, Colorado, Oregon, Texas, South Carolina, and cities throughout California.
- At the request of California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), County of Sonoma deployed staff to assist in Los Angeles, sharing recovery knowledge with departments, agencies, and elected officials.

Keys to Effective Recovery

- Time-sensitive insurance assistance and early decision-making were essential to a successful recovery.
- Task Forces met twice daily for months during the fires to ensure real-time coordination under a unified command structure involving the cities, state, and federal agencies.
- Open and consistent communication ensured situational awareness and effective updates to all stakeholders; and coordination across all sectors was crucial.

Community Concerns

- Housing production prior to the fires was limited due to economic constraints and geographic isolation from the rest of the Bay Area.

- Many community members and city officials lacked direct experience in disaster recovery.
- Several residents felt pressured to avoid the regulatory process out of frustration or fear, prompting the City of Santa Rosa to streamline the rebuilding processes. Residents' technical questions required clear, responsive policy adjustments.
- The City of Santa Rosa hired consultants to expedite permit reviews, often completing them within two weeks.
- City leaders prioritized meeting residents where they were to inform policy and planning, from participating in community gatherings, local community centers, and other spaces.
- Rebuild-focused community meetings were consistently held and fully resourced to meet a wide range of recovery needs.

New Paradigm

- The City of Santa Rosa fostered a "find a way to get to yes" culture, prioritizing empathy, problem-solving skills, and human-centered approaches over bureaucratic denial to help residents navigate recovery.
- By September 2020, the Coffey Park neighborhood reached 80% occupancy three years post-disaster.
- Many original homeowners returned, while others sold lots that were redeveloped, accelerating community revitalization.
- The City of Santa Rosa enacted streamlined policies about two weeks post-fire focused on impacted areas: measures included prioritizing permits, waiving fees, allowing temporary housing, permitting faster Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) construction, and replacing board reviews with staff approvals.
- A "[Resilient City Combining District](#)" was created to rezone burned properties with expedited regulations for rebuilding.
- Six (6) months post-fire, the City of Santa Rosa expanded resilience measures citywide to support temporary structures for residents, workers, schools, and offices. Temporary structures were permitted for up to five (5) years, allowing for a significantly longer duration than the standard 12-month allowance.
- Flexibility and adaptability were key components that the City of Santa Rosa identified to resolve new challenges through ongoing council and staff coordination.

FEMA Public Assistance Program and Infrastructure Recovery

- The County of Sonoma experienced major infrastructure damage, including roads, parks, and public utilities, requiring navigating of the complex [FEMA Public Assistance \(PA\) Program](#).

- Documentation from early response stages proved essential for cost recovery and managing FEMA pushback. The City of Santa Rosa had to negotiate eligibility for projects impacted indirectly by recovery activities, such as damage from debris removal operations.
- Bringing in professional services was critical to managing the FEMA PA process to ensure comprehensive recovery beyond housing.
- Settlement funds from utility providers helped bridge financial gaps and accelerate recovery timelines.

Relevant Links

- [Reverse Mortgage Workshop](#)
- [Sonoma County Housing Authority](#)
- [Catholic Charities](#)
- [Center for Disease Control](#)
- [CDC toolkit](#)
- ["Housing Heroes Program"](#)
- [Sonoma Recovers](#)
- ["Resilient City Combining District"](#)
- [FEMA Public Assistance \(PA\) Program](#)