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Wildfire Recover Public Hearing
The Oregon Legislative Information System (OLIS)

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my story to The Oregon Legislative Information System (OLIS). Below is a letter that I wrote to both Pam Marsh and Jeff Golden as a summary of my story on Sept. 8, 2021, and suggestions for fire prevention and safety moving forward, with a few minor edits. As you can read, we lost our home in Ashland that day. The road to recovery has been long, but we appreciate all the support received by the many helping agencies that have stepped forward.

Thank you very much.
Marnie (Marno) Hancock.

Feb. 18, 2021

Dear Jeff Golden and Pam Marsh:

Today, I am writing to you as a person who is very concerned about **fire safety** in our valley, and especially as someone who **lost their manufactured home in the Bear Creek Mobile Home Park in Ashland, in the Almeda Fire on Sept. 8, 2020.**

I am moving this week, so I believe I have missed the chance to testify: hence this letter. If I can upload it somewhere, please tell me. I hope it will help in making a better fire safety plan for the valley. To make this letter easier to follow, I have bolded key thoughts.

To begin, several months ago my park manager, Kathy Kali, told me that there was a group forming that was going to review what happened that caused the Almeda fire to be so devastating, and which was also going to review and make recommendations and policies about fire safety. I **next** tried to find more out about this, because I was informally elected by several park members to do so. However, it was very difficult initially to find someone who knew anything about it.

As I researched, one trail led to another, almost always ending with the non-answer, **"I don't know what you're talking about"**; starting with the Sheriff's Office, then Jackson County, then the Jackson County

Code Enforcer; then to a woman charged with developing an Emergency Preparedness plan, who I believe has since been fired—she never called me back—and finally to a **fireman at District 5**. He was the one who ultimately gave me some very helpful information. He seemed to know that Pam Marsh was a part of that committee, and possibly yourself.

My question always to this fireman and to all of these groups was, **“Is there a committee forming to review fire safety policies after the Alameda Fire?”** And even more specifically, “Is there a grass cutting ordinance in the County?” Friends who have long lived here thought there was. But the answer from the Jackson County Code Enforcer, who referred me to someone else, was, **“No,”** there wasn’t. The fireman I spoke to said the same; and he added that any changes in that kind of policy would have to be **community driven**, suggesting that maybe if there were a **Fire Marshal**, the grass cutting ordinance might happen. Lastly, before I had to answer the door and hang up with this wonderful fireman, he said, **“We were short staffed that day.”** I answered, “Yes, I know.” I had watched several videos of the firemen and sheriffs recounting what happened that day. I thanked him, and I said good-bye.

Especially, I learned this from the video put out by the firefighters who also said, **“...When we lost the fire at Lowe Road.”** Well, that’s where I lived: **1 Corral Lane, Unit 53, in Ashland, off of Lowe Road.**

So, why did they lose the fire at Lowe Road? I understand that there were many factors involved: exceptionally high winds and, high heat. **But from my experience, and listening to the news and watching videos, there were many more factors that contributed, which are not always common knowledge.**

Back to the fireman I spoke with directly, and my question, **“Is there a grass cutting ordinance in Jackson county?”** Why was I asking this question? **Well, the fire that they lost a Lowe Road came across two plus very large uncut fields of grass before it devoured our home and our park on Lowe Road.**

That fireman I spoke to also said to me, **“We encourage individuals to do their own fire safety remediation.”** **Well, we at the park had been doing that.** But, I must also add, that **our neighbors, the owners of those immediate fields, had not.**

My husband’s and my other special situation was that **we lived at the very corner of the park**, facing the Burger King so to speak, on the Southern, Eastern, top “L” of the park. For the **8 years** we have been at the park, we/I have often asked our park managers and the owner about fire concerns **about the four-foot long grass that bordered our park** to the East of our spot: #53. Always the answer back was, **“We can’t do anything about it.”**

Sometimes the owners of that land to our East would mow, but only a mediocre track of about 10 feet, leaving say another track of 4 foot grass that was 20-30 feet wide. Then to our South, we bordered another field that was privately owned, and the grass there was not as long or unruly. The problem there, over the years, was again a fear of fire, from the grass but even more from the fear of fires started by **the homeless.**

Several of us were so concerned that one of our park residents even took on the task of putting up **No Trespassing** signs on our park borders, when the homeless began to encroach more and more into our areas; and even though she was threatened once with bodily harm by a homeless man while doing this, she used her hammer to threaten back, and the man went away.

The homeless stopped coming by, mostly, but we know that there has been a lot of garbage in that field down by the creek; and at night we would often smell **woodsmoke**, likely coming from that creek area. I made a call to one of the owners again about a year ago, and she told me that she was even afraid as an owner to go onto her own property. Apparently, it was zoned, "Open Space Reserve," for tax purposes, and now the family couldn't get it changed back. Not that we wanted that field to go away: it was so beautiful.

But these are some of the problems we at our park have been trying to solve on our own.

Back to the day of the fire.

I got home from the bank, and having seen the smoke plumb, looking not any smaller, and I turned on the field sprinklers on the corner of our lot, **where we and the owner of the park had been watering and mowing all summer**. I'd say it was green around our corner about 20 feet. The owner of the park and my husband, too, had mowed this and about another 70 feet.

This did not make any difference that day to the firestorm that hit us.

Please let me tell you a bit about my harrowing exit, because there are some helpful points in this description: needless to say, I was lucky to get out in my own car. Because there was no **"universal siren,"** many people in our park and elsewhere did not get out that way. I only did because I had seen it coming, and when I heard the word, "There's flames at the motel," I jumped in, cat and all, and I drove off.

But let me add that while I sat there in the **Dick's Towing** turn around, on **Lowe Road**, wondering if I would burn up if I went through that huge wall of smoke just beyond me, I thought to myself, **"There is no other exit!"** Suddenly, though, the smoke lifted, and I could see my way to **Valley View**. I just drove! No more thinking, as I passed licking flames on my left. —**Only to arrive at gridlock on Valley View!**—that is a whole other issue. Why was there a Sheriff down at **Eagle Mill**, insisting that we all just drive single lane? (I think the freeway was closed.) Soon though, he moved away; traffic at Valley View and the Hwy 99 started moving, and I made my way up the valley to safety with friends.

So, back at unit 53: I have since learned that Kathy and her husband specifically said that **our roof was the first to catch fire**. Kathy's husband tried to put it out with **the water** he had access too, but suddenly **the power went out**. (That power powers the well and the pump that provides water for irrigation and resident's drinking water.)

The rest is history: the stories I've heard! Truly, it's a miracle that so many people got out, and safely. **Thanks to the Sheriff's evacuation strategies, and our park manager's bravery and that of**

others, many people in my park and beyond were saved. Those poor firefighters: so little help, so little assistance. And the ferociousness of those winds that day and the fire were incredible.

So here are my ideas for assisting going forward. First of all, I would like to think that there must **be a grass cutting ordinance for the county**. The fireman I spoke to said he didn't think there was enough money to police it. **Not enough money to police it?** How about even **enough money to hire more firefighters!** That would be second on my list of suggestions. —Or, as he said, the valley could hire a **Fire Marshal**.

A woman I know also sits on a fire board, and she told me that each fire district offers to help another, **but they don't get paid for it!** —Maybe that was one of the reasons why Ashland was told, **"There's no help coming!"** I believe it is also common knowledge that on that day many of our fire fighters had been dispatched to other areas. It's logical now, knowing the situation now, **to keep more firefighters at home!**

Also, I wonder what park owners can do to make sure there is more fire protection. **Perhaps some better infrastructure in terms of water and electrical, that will not fail during a fire, could be researched and included in their redesigns.** Also, while expensive, **two exits rather than just one in a park** might be a very good idea: also in different areas, with access to different main roads.

As a side note, and on the subject of **water**, I'm sure you are aware of the low levels of water in our reservoirs. I've read that **low humidity** that day also led to the fire spreading. I think that whole water situation needs to be revisited: not just **how much is metered to fire hydrants**, but I think **how much is being consumed by agriculture**. Eight to ten large military grade water holding tanks on Voorhees Road, filled just before the TID got turned off, doesn't seem right.

I hope, too, that on a different subject, someone is researching **sirens** and better **road evacuation plans**: I am personally so happy that Phoenix listened to their constituents and put the road through their town back to two lanes.

I hope you found the stories and suggestions helpful as that was my intent. Thank you for all that you do.

Yours sincerely,

Marnie M. Hancock.