

CITY OF COOS BAY CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Staff Report

MEETING DATE	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER
December 16, 2025	5.e

TO: Mayor Benetti, Council President DiNovo and City Councilors

FROM: Jeff Adkins, Fire Chief

THROUGH: Nichole Rutherford, City Manager

ISSUE: Consideration to Approve the John Topits Defensible Space Work Plan

SUMMARY:

The Topits Park Defensible Space Project is supported by a \$75,000 State Fire Marshal grant to reduce wildfire risk around the park perimeter and nearby neighborhoods. Work completed along the north and west sides has focused on removing dense underbrush, and staff has now reviewed the remaining southern areas. Two locations—the area behind the Ackerman Apartments and the southeastern edge near Hull Street—contain significant ladder fuels and sit close to homes, making them appropriate for a slightly expanded buffer within the grant limits. Full selective vegetation removal is not practical with the current equipment, and using different equipment would significantly increase costs. No vegetation removal is planned near the Armory due to existing defensible space created by the parking lot.

About \$25,000 of the grant has been used, and the remaining work likely will not require the full balance. Staff has discussed using leftover funds for equipment that would support long-term maintenance of defensible-space areas, and the State Fire Marshal's Office has indicated preliminary support. This approach improves wildfire resilience while preserving the park's natural character.

ACTION REQUESTED:

If it please Council, approve the John Topits Defensible Space Work Plan as described.

BACKGROUND:

The Topits Park Defensible Space Project is funded by a \$75,000 grant from the State Fire Marshal's Office. The purpose of the grant is to create a defensible space buffer around the park perimeter to reduce wildfire risk and protect adjacent residential neighborhoods. The scope of work includes creating an extended zone of defensible space, typically 30' to 100' depending on terrain and brush density. This work aligns with statewide fire-mitigation standards and was developed in coordination with the Coos Bay Fire Department.

To date, underbrush has been removed along the northern and western boundaries of the park. At the December work session, Council requested a plan for the remaining southern portion of Topits Park.

Following an on-site review, staff determined that two areas would benefit from a buffer greater than 50 feet, but still within the allowable grant range, due to proximity to homes and topography:

1. The park edge directly behind the Ackerman Apartments extending southeast toward Norman
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Avenue.

2. The southeastern perimeter near Hull Street.

These areas contain dense ladder fuels that increase the risk of fire spread. Expanding the buffer slightly will improve safety while still retaining the park's interior forested character. Staff also considered the practical limitations of the project: full selective removal of vegetation is not possible with the equipment being used, and bringing in different equipment would significantly increase cost. As a result, some portions of the proposed work areas may resemble the brush clearing already completed on the northern and western sides of the park. Staff intends to keep this to a minimum while still meeting fire-mitigation needs.

In contrast, the area surrounding the Armory building already has a large asphalt parking lot that functions as existing defensible space; no vegetation removal is proposed in that area.

Approximately \$25,000 of the grant has been used. If Council supports the revised approach, the remaining work is not expected to use the full grant balance. Staff has spoken with the State Fire Marshal's Office about using any remaining funds for equipment purchases that would support ongoing maintenance and long-term preservation of the defensible-space areas, and the grantor has indicated preliminary support.

This project reduces wildfire exposure for nearby neighborhoods while maintaining the natural character of Topits Park. If Council agrees with this approach, staff will continue work carefully and selectively to balance safety, environmental stewardship, and community expectations.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS:

None; all project work is grant funded.

ATTACHMENT(S):

- DefensibleSpace_JohnTopits_SouthBorder_DEC2025.png