

LeisureTowne Association, Inc.

Firewise Community Plan

Approved by Firewise Committee June 1, 2014

Carrie Poster-
6/1/2014

FIREWISE COMMUNITY PLAN
LEISURETOWNE
SOUTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP, BURLINGTON COUNTY
NEW JERSEY

Firewise Communities/USA Enrollment
Prepared: October 2013
Updated: January 2014

The Firewise Communities/USA program is designed to provide an effective management approach for preserving wildland living aesthetics. This wildfire safety action plan is a cooperative effort between LeisureTowne and Southampton Township to guide wildfire protection activities from 2014-2019 in selected areas of LeisureTowne in Southampton Township and are appropriate to meet stated objectives to reduce the risk from wildfire. This plan is voluntary and, where possible, a guide to increase public safety in LeisureTowne.

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Community Wildfire Protection Goals & Objectives:

- Obtain National Firewise Communities/USA program recognition.
- Promote awareness and increase knowledge among the residents of LeisureTowne concerning wildfire and need for forest fire management and wildfire mitigation.
- Implement a wildfire safety action plan.
- Maintain fuel breaks around the perimeter of the community.
- Develop defensible space around high risk homes.
- Develop an Emergency Evacuation Plan in conjunction with the Southampton Township Emergency Management Coordinator and Volunteer Fire Department personnel.

Community Description:

LeisureTowne is a 55+ community located within Southampton Township, Burlington County, New Jersey. LeisureTowne was initially developed in 1970 and now has 2,255 homes, approximately 3,300 residents, and covers 2,000 acres. It is significant to note that LeisureTowne is located within a classic Wildland/Urban Interface area that is part of the Pine lands National Reserve. This creates a risk of wildfire that could threaten the homes and residents of this community.

It is well documented that the Pine Barrens are highly flammable. The New Jersey Pine Barrens are 1.1 million acres in size and occupy 22% of New Jersey. Since 1924 major fires (those comprising more than 100 acres in size) generally occur between April and June because of low relative humidity, higher temperatures and gusty winds. Although fire frequency since 1950 has been reduced, it has contributed to the accumulation of standing fuel materials and the risk of more catastrophic fire incidents. On the average, there are approximately 15-20 small fires in Southampton Township each season which primarily occur at the interface of backyards.

Home Ignition Zone(Defined as the home and its immediate surroundings up to 200 feet)

Homes become vulnerable to wildfire based on the interrelationship with everything, especially the vegetation in its surroundings. To prevent a home ignition, a homeowner must eliminate the wildfire's potential to spread with his/her home. This can be accomplished by interrupting the natural path a fire takes by removing flammable items such as dead vegetation from the area immediately around the structure and reducing the volume of live vegetation. Both tasks will affect the intensity of the wildfire as it enters the Home Ignition Zone.

Forest Description

The current forest area surrounding LeisureTowne is comprised primarily of pine trees (4-8 inches in diameter) and approximately 35-40 feet high. There are also oak trees interspersed with the pines that are approximately the same height and thickness, along with mixed lowland pines along with hardwood swamp in areas. A variety of understory shrubs are also present

underneath these trees. In most sections of the forest these shrubs are dense and provide a significant ladder fuel. In general, the forest is healthy; however, there has been a periodic infestation of gypsy moth, which has caused mortality in the oaks. More recently, there has been an increase in the incidence of pine mortality as a result of southern pine beetle infestations.

Wildland/Urban Interface Community Hazard Assessment (WUI- the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels)

One of the most important elements of an effective Firewise Community Plan is the implementation of a Wildland/Urban Interface Community Hazard Assessment. This is an assessment of fire risk to homes and structures within the community when such structures are located immediately adjacent to forested areas and homes with trees and shrubs that may be of a flammable variety that pose a more significant threat during a fire incident. A preliminary hazard assessment of the general area was conducted in 2013 by the Forest Fire Service, which was based on fuels and past fire history. A more detailed evaluation of the risks to structures will be conducted of the perimeter and most threatened areas of LeisureTowne by fire professionals from the New Jersey Fire Service, assisted by trained volunteers, during 2014. Information collected using the fire assessment form will be uploaded into a database that will determine the risk and threat levels targeted areas.

Fuel Break Implementation Plan

A primary goal of the LeisureTowne Firewise Community Plan is to reduce the density, distribution, and arrangement of vegetation to prevent the spread and intensity of wildfire in the firebreaks immediately adjacent to homes and structures in the targeted areas.

Recommendations:

- Remove dead trees and logs from targeted areas (identifying, assessing, and selecting areas to be treated will be on ongoing process throughout implementation of this plan).
- Treat understory shrubs by moving/and or cutting to minimize the presence of ladder fuels.

Plans:

- Identify trees (dead, diseased, fallen) on private property that are deemed as being a threat to spreading any potential fire that may occur in LeisureTowne.
- Meet with NJ Natural Lands (Martin Rapp) to discuss fuel break development on adjacent property.
- Cut and remove all shrubs in the fuel break areas that are immediately adjacent to homes/structures in targeted areas in the community.

Follow-up Maintenance:

- Future Maintenance should consist of reducing understory shrub growth at regular intervals. Treatments such as mowing or prescribed burning (if applicable and feasible) should be applied every 2 to 3 years. The goal is to prevent the existing vegetation from developing at a density and height that will contribute to wildfire intensity and spread. Repeated treatments over time should help reduce the density of vegetation and gradually change the species composition to

more desirable lower growing shrubs.

Firewise Awareness Activities

The success of the Firewise Community Plan requires the involvement and support of the residents in LeisureTowne. Efforts must be made to make the community aware of the program and the work that is being done to ensure the safety of their homes.

Firewise Activities: Completed/Planned

Members of the LeisureTowne Association, ST CERT members, and interested residents met with state and regional officials from the New Jersey Fire Service to obtain information about the state and national Firewise programs. In response to that meeting, a Firewise Committee was established and volunteered to assist in developing an action plan for a Firewise Community Plan. Following is a brief summary of the activities completed and planned.

COMPLETED

- **2013:**
- LeisureTowne Association members, 4 LT residents and Hampton Lakes Fire Chief met with local and state representatives from the NJ Forest Fire Service in October, 2013 to obtain information about Firewise programs.
- Required paperwork completed and submitted to obtain Firewise/USA Community Recognition for LeisureTowne.
- LeisureTowne received certificate and signage designating community as part of the National Firewise Communities/USA program.
- Clean up and removal of dead wood and vegetation to reduce wildfire risk.
- Formation of Firewise Committee and selection of Committee Chair.
- Firewise web page added to LeisureTowne website that contains awareness materials and links to Firewise-related websites.
- **2014**
- Firewise Committee members met with the local fire warden to address the fire threat in forest areas adjacent to homes in the community.
- Recognition of LeisureTowne as a Firewise Community/USA by Southampton Township by Resolution 2014-49.

PLANNED: 2014-2019

- A Fire Hazard Assessment will be conducted of targeted perimeter areas of LeisureTowne and high risk homes/structures within the community. This will be done by fire professionals, accompanied and assisted by members of Firewise Committee, ST CERT, and possibly HLFDD Explorers. All volunteers assisting the fire professionals will receive instructions on how to conduct a fire hazard assessment.
- A documented Firewise Community Plan will be finalized by members of the Firewise Committee and distributed to all committee members and ST EM Coordinator for comment and suggestions. This plan will be distributed to state and local fire wardens and Southampton

Township for their input. Sources used in creating the plan included “A Guide to Developing a Firewise Community Plan” and another community plan from New Jersey.

- Firewise Committee will meet with the Southampton Township Emergency Management Coordinator to review the responsibilities of his department and the local volunteer fire departments.
- A Firewise email account will be established that will allow residents to send questions and communicate with the Firewise Committee.
- A Firewise Community Day will be held to increase participation and awareness among LeisureTowne residents.
- Articles in Trustees Corner and Watchdog publications explaining Firewise/USA, activities, and introducing members of Firewise Committee to residents
- Completed Firewise Plan will be added to LeisureTowne website and be available for distribution in the Association Office.
- Brochures/Pamphlets available from www.firewise.org, www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/fire will be obtained and distributed to residents.
- Firewise Committee to meet with New Jersey Natural Lands representative Martin Rapp to discuss areas around LeisureTowne that are located in the Natural Lands section.
- Modify existing emergency access gate between Hampton Lakes and LeisureTowne to improve accessibility for all emergency service vehicles.
- Install dry-hydrants in LeisureTowne to insure adequate access to water as needed.
- Work with LeisureTowne maintenance staff to identify hazardous trees that contribute to wildfire risk.
- Develop a perimeter fuel break in high risk areas in LeisureTowne. Work with property owners to secure access and permission to complete this task.

Emergency Evacuation Plan

In the event of a wildfire that requires the evacuation of affected residents, an evacuation plan, developed in conjunction with the Southampton Township Emergency Management Coordinator and local volunteer Fire Department Personnel, will be implemented.

The process involving the declaration of an emergency evacuation in the event of a forest fire, storm, or other serious incident begins with the notification of the Southampton Township Coordinator by the appropriate agency. The EM Coordinator then works with the Burlington County OEM Coordinator and local fire officials to evaluate the seriousness of the event and to determine if an emergency evacuation is required. Residents will be notified via a Reverse 911 system from Southampton Township and/or LeisureTowne with information about the evacuation as well as directions to a safe location until the emergency event is over. The LeisureTowne bus, buses from area bus companies, and local EMS can be utilized to assist residents in need or transportation or medical assistance.

To assist residents in preparing for an emergency evacuation event, LeisureTowne has developed a pamphlet entitled “Emergency Preparedness and Evacuation Instructions:”. This pamphlet was attached to the Trustees corner and mailed to all residents. Copies are available in the LeisureTowne Association Office.

Community Wildfire Assessment Map

This map will be included in the LeisureTowne Firewise Community Plan when it becomes available from the New Jersey Fire Service. The map is based on the Fire Hazard Assessment that will be conducted.

Firewise Awareness Resources

Following is a list of online resources that are useful in learning about Firewise Programs.

WEB SITES

www.firewise.org

www.fireplantselector.org

www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/fire

www.Ready.gov/wildfires

www.ReadyForWildfires.org