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‘City in a Forest’ tries to prepare for wildfires

By MARY SCHLEY

IN LIGHT of the devastating, ongoing and numerous Southern California wildfires that have destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres, tens of thousands of buildings and numerous lives, the Feb. 3 Carmel City Council meeting, a town hall organized by the City of Monterey, and a Carmel Residents Association session will focus on how the Peninsula is prepared to deal with wildfires.

In the Jan. 17 Friday video, city administrator Chip Rerig said he is preparing a presentation touching on “what we’ve done to prepare for wildfire and fires in general, and what we’re doing on an ongoing basis” in a city that is heavily forested — and staunchly defended as such.

Siren test?

The session will have building official Jermel Laurie, Police Chief Paul Tomasi, Fire Chief Andrew Miller and city forester Justin Ono discussing the community wildfire protection plan completed by the cities of Monterey, Carmel and Pacific Grove last fall, ongoing maintenance of fire hydrants, the city’s evacuation plan, and forest management, among other topics. Carmel’s volunteer emergency response team will also be highlighted.

“And we’re talking about testing our air raid siren again,” Rerig said.

The Carmel Residents Association will be hosting a roundtable on the same topic Feb. 6, and the public will

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Commission approves one metal roof, denies two

By MARY SCHLEY

FOLLOWING A two-hour discussion about whether Carmel residents should be allowed to have metal roofs on their homes, the planning commission last week approved one but denied two others, continuing a trend of inconsistency that has frustrated some homeowners.

“I am dumbfounded that a house literally one block north of me on the northeast corner of Torres and First was approved for a standing-seam roof, and the style is definitely not much different than mine,” said resident Brandi Faia. Her request to replace the failing wood roof that prompted her insurance company to drop her coverage was denied by the planning commission last month. “It’s grossly unfair and wrong.”

Consternation

She was referring to Nathan Smith’s application, which the commission considered at its Jan. 15 meeting alongside those for Russell Barretta’s residence on the southeast

See **METAL** page 12A



PHOTO/CITY OF CARMEL

The planning commission last week told the owner of this house at Junipero and 10th to reroof it with something other than metal.

Moss Landing blaze raises alarm about batteries

■ Officials want plant closed until cause of frightening fire is found

By KELLY NIX

WHILE THE flames are out and smoke from last Thursday’s fire at the Vistra Energy battery storage facility in Moss Landing has dissipated, elected officials this week demanded that the plant remain offline until more information is provided on the cause, public health impacts and how to prevent a similar event from occurring.

At about 3 p.m. Jan. 16, a major fire broke out in a building that houses about 100,000 battery modules adjacent to the familiar twin smokestacks alongside Highway 1.

The fire raged for almost 24 hours, closing the highway, scaring nearby residents and leading county officials to issue an evacuation notice for about 1,200 of them. Monterey County Supervisors held a special meeting in Salinas Tuesday to find out more from Vistra about the fire and listen to residents, some of whom reported health issues related to smoke.

‘Disconnect it’

District 2 Supervisor Glenn Church, who represents the Moss Landing area, recommended that operations at Vistra’s massive battery facilities — including two that were undamaged — remain offline until the cause of the fire is determined. He said a PG&E open-air battery storage facility, which was not affected in last week’s fire, should

be shut down, as well.

The rest of the supervisors agreed and created an ad hoc committee composed of Church and District 5 Supervisor

See **BATTERIES** page 8A



A blackened hole (above) is all that’s left of a Vistra Energy facility in Moss Landing after Thursday’s disastrous fire, which forced evacuations, closed Highway 1 and lit up the sky for miles around (right).

PHOTOS/(ABOVE) HOUSE OF 8 MEDIA, (RIGHT) ELROND LAWRENCE



P.G.’s largest park a ‘tinderbox,’ citizens warn

By KELLY NIX

FEARING THE type of wildfires that have ravaged communities in Southern California in the past several weeks, Pacific Grove residents are urging the city council and officials to undertake measures to prevent the same thing from happening in the coastal town.

At the Jan. 16 Pacific Grove City Council meeting, citizen Kevin Hanley made a plea to councilmembers to

reduce the amount of fuel load — dead dry brush, downed trees, etc. — in George Washington Park, a 20-acre, thickly wooded greenspace. Doing so, Hanley said, would reduce the chances of a fire spreading to nearby houses.

“One cannot believe in climate change and at the same time maintain a tinderbox at George Washington Park,” Hanley told the council. “Because all it takes is high winds and a spark, whether intentional or unintentional, to create a catastrophic fire in Pacific Grove.”

Hanley pointed to the city’s trimming of brush on the edges of the heavily forested open space area.

“I don’t think that any professional believes that merely

See **TINDERBOX** page 17A

WIDESPREAD FAULT IN STATE’S INSURANCE CRISIS

By CAITLIN CONRAD

JANUARY HAS been the month from hell for people who once called the Pacific Palisades home — and the trouble in Los Angeles County isn’t over yet. Fires continue to burn, a major one broke out Wednesday, and many people who’ve been able to return to their properties have found only ash remains of what used to be multimillion-dollar homes.

Worth it?

Now those homeowners are left dealing with insurance, finding out what they’ll receive to rebuild and weighing if it’s worth it to stay in California. One factor in their decision-making will be the cost of insuring new structures on their old lots, as premiums are sure to go up statewide.

See **INSURANCE** page 10A

Sunny skies boost ticket sales for AT&T Pro-Am

By MARY SCHLEY

WHAT’S THE No. 1 lesson he’s learned after being in charge of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am for the past 14 years?

“Never trust Mother Nature,” Steve John, executive director of the nonprofit Monterey Peninsula Foundation that hosts the annual tournament, said Wednesday. “That’s 1 through 100 right there.”

When he was contacted this week by a Pine Cone reporter, John was cruising around the Pebble Beach Golf Links with his operations team and PGA Tour representatives, “just looking at everything to make sure everything

See **PRO-AM** page 16A