



# STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

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**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

**FROM:** Tabatha Miller, Assistant City Manager

**PREPARER:** Tabatha Miller, Assistant City Manager

**DATE:** February 18, 2026

**TITLE:** **Adopt Resolution No. 256-38 Extending the Local Emergency Caused by the Downtown Fire on January 2, 2026.**

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the Council adopt Resolution No. 256-38 extending the local emergency caused by the downtown fire on January 2, 2026.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

California Government Code section 8630 and Title II, Chapter 6 (Emergency Operations and Functions) of the City of Arcata Municipal Code authorize the City Manager, in his capacity as Director of Emergency Services, to proclaim the existence or threatened existence of a local emergency. The Arcata Municipal Code defines a “local emergency” as the duly proclaimed existence of conditions of disaster or extreme peril to the safety of persons and property within the territorial limits of the City of Arcata, caused by conditions including fire, which require the combined forces of other political subdivisions to combat.

On January 3, 2026, the City Manager, acting as Director of Emergency Services, proclaimed the existence of a local emergency in the City of Arcata. On January 9, 2026, the City Council ratified the emergency proclamation pursuant to Title II, Chapter 6 (Emergency Operations and Functions) of the City of Arcata Municipal Code, section 2703 (Proclamation of Emergency). Section 2703 C. requires that at least once every forty (40) days, the City Council review the continuing need for a Local Emergency and terminate the Local Emergency at the earliest possible date conditions warrant.

## **BACKGROUND:**

At approximately 2:30 p.m. on January 2, 2026, the Arcata Fire District responded to the 800 block of 10th Street following reports of a large volume of smoke originating from the downtown commercial district. Upon arrival, fire personnel encountered a well-established, rapidly spreading fire in a large, two-story commercial structure containing businesses on the ground floor and residential apartments above.

Due to extreme wind and gust conditions, the fire spread rapidly and ultimately engulfed four buildings located between H Street and I Street and extending to the alley between 9th Street and 10th Street.

Mutual aid was requested, and fire suppression resources responded from throughout Humboldt County, including as far away as Weott in Southern Humboldt. Participating agencies included Arcata Fire District, Humboldt Bay Fire, Samoa Fire, Kneeland Fire, Westhaven Fire, Loleta Fire, Ferndale Fire, Fortuna Fire, Fieldbrook Fire, Blue Lake Fire, Rio Dell Fire, Arcata-Mad River Ambulance, CAL FIRE Trinidad, and CAL FIRE Weott. Every ladder truck in Humboldt County was deployed to this incident. Approximately 80 fire suppression personnel and an additional 20 support personnel were involved.

Multiple buildings were destroyed as a result of the fire and emergency response efforts, leaving substantial debris. Ash and other chemicals were released by the burning structures. In addition, paint and other contaminants from the hardware store were likely washed into storm drains and other waterways, ultimately reaching Humboldt Bay. This runoff may negatively impact water quality in Humboldt Bay and pose potential risks to aquaculture operations, fisheries, and other aquatic habitats.

Seven local businesses and eight residential apartments were destroyed. Several nearby buildings sustained minor damage, and others were affected by the fire incident as well as associated power and gas outages.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Staff recommends that the City Council extend the Local Emergency in order to continue to effectively respond to the ongoing impacts of the fire damage, including assessing actual and potential threats to Humboldt Bay, local waterways, public property, the local economy, local businesses, and the environment, which exceed the capacity of City resources.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW (CEQA):**

A city's declaration of a local emergency is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it constitutes immediate governmental action taken to respond to an unforeseen emergency that threatens public health, safety, or property. CEQA expressly exempts emergency actions intended to prevent or mitigate the effects of emergencies, recognizing that environmental review requirements cannot delay urgent response measures.

Specifically, Public Resources Code section 21080(b)(4) and CEQA Guidelines section 15269 exempt actions necessary to respond to emergencies, including declarations of emergency and related response activities. The declaration itself does not commit the City to a specific project or result in a physical change to the environment and therefore does not constitute a "project" subject to CEQA review.

## **BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT:**

The City has incurred costs associated with the initial response to the fire, including water used for fire suppression, staff time devoted to emergency response activities, and equipment and supplies used during the incident. In addition, the City has incurred expenses related to securing the site, evaluating damage, mitigating impacts from debris and runoff, and coordinating ongoing emergency recovery efforts.

Damages estimated in excess of \$20 million were incurred by property owners, tenants, and local businesses impacted directly by the fire.

## **RECOMMENDED COUNCIL ACTION:**

It is recommended that the Council adopt Resolution No. 256-38 extending the local emergency caused by the downtown fire on January 2, 2026. **Consent Calendar vote.**

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Resolution 256-38, Extending the Local Emergency Caused by the Downtown Fire on January 2, 2026.