

# ACONA Meeting Notes

May 27, 2025

## CAPTAIN ETHAN MARQUEZ – ALTADENA SHERIFF'S STATION

### Introduction:

- Captain Ethan Marquez is serving as the acting captain, temporarily replacing Captain Jabari Williams (now Commander Williams).
- Has served with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) for nearly 26 years.
- Previous assignments included patrol roles in Carson, Lost Hills, Lancaster, and Santa Clarita.
- Was personally recruited by Commander Williams to come to Altadena, described as a "beautiful community" with a reputation for quiet and safety.
- Developed a deep appreciation for the community upon arrival, but acknowledged everything changed after the January 7th fire, which has had a lasting impact on his work and the town itself.

### Key Points on Crime & Community Safety:

#### Burglaries:

- Acknowledged that burglaries spiked, but emphasized that Altadena had historically low crime in 2024.
- Due to the low baseline, even small increases in crime appeared as major spikes in percentage terms—creating a potentially misleading impression in the media.

#### Security Enhancements:

- **Extra Deputies Deployed:** LASD is staffing 5 to 15 additional deputies per shift for proactive crime suppression.
- **Undercover Operations:** Plainclothes deputies are operating in the area, blending in; even Captain Marquez says he often can't identify them unless he knows the individual.
- **Use of Surveillance Tools:**
  - Fixed surveillance cameras placed in key areas.
  - **Home Check Program:** Offers checks on vacant homes undergoing smoke remediation or other services.
    - Sign up via [altadenahomechecks@lasd.org](mailto:altadenahomechecks@lasd.org)

- **Suspicious Activity Tipline:** Residents can report tips via:
  - altadenatips@lasd.org
  - Or submit anonymously to LA CrimeStoppers.

### **Community Collaboration:**

- Emphasized public cooperation as essential: “The community is our eyes and ears.”
- Reiterated support for relaunching the Block Captain Program in collaboration with Altadena Town Council.
- Highlighted successful joint operations with:
  - California Highway Patrol (CHP) – aiding in traffic enforcement and crime suppression.
  - Commercial Vehicle Enforcement: Multiple vehicles, especially those used by private contractors, were found in violation and removed from service.

### **Trespassing & Squatter Mitigation Strategy:**

#### **Problem Identified:**

- Some vacant lots and homes are being targeted by squatters, especially where RVs are parked.
- Although RV parking is allowed during rebuilds with permits, it's being exploited by unauthorized individuals.

#### **Solution Measures:**

1. **Orange Construction Fencing:**
  - Inexpensive, physical boundary installed every 6–12 feet with metal stakes.
  - Example shown: LASD deputies installing it for demonstration only—not a service LASD will provide.
2. **No Trespassing Signage:**
  - Posted signs signal legal intent to keep property private.
3. **Solar Landscape Lighting:**
  - Used to illuminate signs at night.
4. **Letter of Agency:**
  - Property owner signs a document granting LASD legal authority to arrest for trespassing without needing the owner present.
  - This removes legal obstacles for D.A. prosecution.
  - Forms are available through the Sheriff's Department.

## Security During Rebuild:

- **Camera Systems Recommended:**
  - **Ring Cameras:** Good for internet-connected properties; alert via smartphone.
  - **Trail/Game Cameras:** No internet needed; can operate via cellular network. Ideal for remote or burned-out lots.
    - Record in 4K, night-vision capable.
- **Monitored Systems:** Some security companies offer motion-activated systems with 24/7 monitoring—widely used at construction sites.

## Q&A WITH CAPTAIN MARQUEZ

### Will orange fencing be provided for all properties? Who pays?

Property owners are responsible. The orange fencing is an effective, low-cost way to secure your property. It doesn't need to be placed right on the property line—it just needs to serve as a barrier. LASD will not install it, but nonprofits and donors (like Home Depot and Lowe's) may help. Efforts are underway, but not guaranteed.

### Is outreach to Home Depot or Lowe's ongoing?

Some community members and possibly the Supervisor's Office are reaching out. LASD can't lead those efforts due to its role as a government agency.

### What are your thoughts on private security for rebuild sites?

Supportive of this option, especially during rebuild phases. Construction sites are high-risk targets. Many already use cutting-edge cameras with remote surveillance.

### If the orange fencing is easy to breach, is it still useful legally?

Yes. While the fencing won't stop determined intruders, it is crucial for legal enforcement. It creates a visible and defined boundary that supports prosecution by the District Attorney.

# JOHN MAYO – ALTAGETHER BLOCK CAPTAIN PROGRAM

## Overview & Purpose:

- John Mayo introduced himself as a representative of Altgether, a grassroots organization formed in direct response to the Eaton Fire.
- Altgether is focused on:
  1. Sustaining the bonds of community while people are displaced.
  2. Supporting residents through all stages of recovery, including the rebuilding process.

## Personal Background:

- John lives between Sacramento and Woodbury.
- Did not lose his home, but is still undergoing remediation.
- Has a deep emotional investment in the town and the recovery effort.

## How the Block Captain Program Works:

- Currently over 140 neighborhood captains signed up townwide.
- Each captain oversees communication and support for about 40 doors/households.
- Captains are:
  - Either long-time local organizers (e.g., ran the potluck or group text thread for years), or
  - New volunteers stepping into leadership roles.

## Structure & Approach:

- **Two central goals:**
  - Strengthen neighbor-to-neighbor support.
  - Build a collaborative network of captains learning and working together.
- Altgether holds biweekly meetings for captains to:
  - Share strategies.
  - Coordinate on issues like rebuilding.
  - Learn from one another.

## Philosophy:

- No hierarchy or top-down directives.
- Captains are encouraged to define what their leadership looks like locally.

- Open to incorporating and supporting existing neighborhood efforts like Map Your Neighborhood or CERT.

### **Technical Tools:**

- Interactive coverage map is available on [altagether.org](https://altagether.org) (self-described as a “crummy website with a good map”).
- Interest form available online for people wanting to volunteer.

## **Q&A WITH JOHN MAYO**

### **Will you have full coverage in Altadena?**

That’s the goal. Captains sign up for their own defined “neighborhood,” but so far, it aligns well with census tracts. The organization is working to bring in Town Council members to act as liaisons between captains and formal government structures.

### **How do you work with Map Your Neighborhood and other groups like CERT?**

They’ve had preliminary conversations with MYN. While both groups serve different purposes, there’s mutual respect and open communication. Altogether isn’t formally partnered yet but is open to collaboration.

### **What’s the time commitment and meeting structure for captains?**

Altogether hosts biweekly coordination meetings, but individual captains determine how often they engage with neighbors. Some might organize events or create local group chats.

### **How can people find out if their neighborhood already has a captain?**

Go to [altagether.org](https://altagether.org) and check the coverage map. If your area is unrepresented, fill out the interest form to start a new block.

## **MICHELLE NUOME – UWS (UNIVERSAL WASTE SYSTEMS)**

Michelle Nuome joined to answer specific questions related to waste removal logistics post-fire.

### **Q&A WITH MICHELLE NUOME**

**A homeowner has cleared their lot but still has a lot of dead vegetation that wasn't picked up by the Army Corps. They don't want to restart full trash service yet. What can they do?**

Michelle recommended renting a temporary bin to collect the debris. UWS can arrange pickup of the bin. She also offered to check for any alternative disposal options and asked the moderator to share the resident's contact details for a follow-up.

**When should residents reestablish regular trash service, and is there a fee to do so?**

There is no fee to restart service—only the regular quarterly rates. Residents can resume service whenever they choose, and bins are typically delivered within 24 to 48 hours of request.

**Can residents rent bins or roll-off containers directly through UWS?**

Yes. UWS offers:

- Standard garbage bins for residential use.
  - Large roll-off bins for construction debris or vegetation.
- These are available to anyone doing property clean-up or rebuild-related work.

**MAYOR STEVE CROWDER & KATE ANDERSON – CITY OF PARADISE**

## Introduction & Connection to Altadena

- Victoria Knapp (Altadena Town Council Chair) shared the backstory:
  - On January 8th, the morning after the Eaton Fire, she received a call from a number she didn't recognize.
  - It was Steve Crowder, Mayor of Paradise, reaching out with empathy, advice, and compassion.
  - At the time, she didn't even know her house had been lost.
  - The call was deeply emotional; the Paradise fire had mirrored Altadena's in trauma and scope.
  - Victoria and Nick later traveled to Paradise and were hosted by Steve for a tour; Steve later visited Altadena in return.
- Kate Anderson is the retired Housing Director for Paradise who worked closely with Crowder during the recovery and rebuilding years.
- Mayor Crowder has a personal connection to Altadena—his wife's daughter lived on Mendocino and lost her home in the Eaton Fire.

## PARADISE FIRE VS. EATON FIRE

- **Camp Fire (Paradise) – November 2018**
  - Largest and deadliest wildfire in California history.
  - 153,000 acres burned.
  - 18,000 structures lost (13,900+ residential, 530 commercial).
  - 85 residents perished.
  - Population before fire: 26,000; Median age: 60; Median income: \$67,000; 83% white.
- **Eaton Fire (Altadena) – January 2025**
  - 14,000 acres burned.
  - 10,000 structures lost.
  - 18 residents perished.
  - Population in 2023: ~42,000; Median age: 46; Median income: \$129,000.
  - Racially diverse: 40% white, 18% Black, 21% Hispanic.
- **Evacuation Differences:**
  - Paradise had 1 road in/out (Skyway).
  - Altadena had multiple evacuation routes but suffered emergency alert failures (Genesis Protect, WatchDuty, county).

## MAYOR STEVE CROWDER – Background

- Moved to Paradise in 2012.

- Elected to city council two days before the Camp Fire.
- Has served 6.5 years, 3 of those as Mayor.
- Lost both his home and business, as well as 2 of 3 vehicles.
- Helped evacuate the town before reuniting with his wife in Chico later that night.
- Experienced a second evacuation when the fire jumped Highway 99 and threatened Chico.

## **Q&A & DISCUSSION – MAYOR CROWDER & KATE ANDERSON**

### **How much of Paradise has been rebuilt six and a half years later?**

About 35–40% of residential buildings have been rebuilt. Commercial rebuilding lags significantly due to infrastructure limitations—especially the lack of a sewer system.

### **What was the public safety response during the fire?**

Strong response, but communication breakdowns. Like Altadena, many residents received no or late notifications. Fire spread incredibly fast:

- Started 12 miles away.
- Embers reached town before emergency dispatch even realized it was in town.
- Aircraft couldn't be used due to wind; firefighters couldn't stop it even with more resources.

### **What emergency alert system was installed post-fire?**

21 siren towers were built across town. They:

- Issue sirens and voice commands.
- Can be activated individually or all at once.
- Haven't been used for real emergencies yet, only testing.

### **When did businesses return after the fire?**

Town was closed for five weeks post-fire. Once reopened:

- Surviving businesses began returning slowly.



- Most had at least smoke damage.
- Delays due to:
  - Lack of local contractors and remediators.
  - Distance from major cities (e.g., Sacramento is 1.5 hrs away).
- The town still struggles with shortages of workers and services.

### **How long did debris removal take?**

Took ~9 months, managed by FEMA, with some private contractors involved. That did not include tree removal, which came later under separate programs.

### **How many trees were removed?**

100,000–130,000 trees removed in total.

- Two FEMA programs completed, one more is still delayed by 3 years.
- Trees no longer have each other to block wind, causing new danger.
- Multiple new homes were damaged by falling trees.
- Tree removal is now prioritized to prevent further losses.

### **Is there a tree replanting program?**

Not yet fully implemented. Some giveaways and pilot efforts have occurred, but most replanting is left to property owners.

### **What was your Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG) like?**

Not mandatory but widely used.

- Set up a one-stop shop in a Chico Sears building.
  - Included FEMA, CalOES, DMV, nonprofits, case managers, and more.
  - Allowed residents to manage all needs under one roof.
  - Lasted about 6 weeks before winding down.

## **How did people access nonprofit resources or case managers?**

Through the LTRG and organizations like:

- Camp Fire Collaborative (LTRG).
- Rebuild Paradise Foundation: Master plans, grants, recovery navigation.
- The Town of Paradise played a key communications role, hiring a PR firm to run the Make It Paradise newsletter.

## **Any advice for community engagement during rebuild?**

Kate Anderson: Encourage outreach to property owners, not just current residents. Many were scattered around the U.S. but wanted to return.

## **What role did Paradise play in urban planning post-fire?**

- Brought in Urban Design Associates (UDA) to lead recovery visioning.
- Public meetings held with up to 600 residents.
- Used easels and voting tools to collect community input.
- Top priorities:
  1. Underground utilities.
  2. Emergency alert systems.
- Have updated the plan several times since, as needs evolved.

## **What's changed most in post-fire Paradise?**

- Younger demographic: more families, 4-person households replacing 2-person retiree homes.
- Better schools, updated and remodeled.
- Newer housing stock (most homes pre-fire were built in the 1950s–1970s).
- Fiber optics, underground utilities, and better infrastructure (but still septic-based).

## **How much of your town's utilities are underground now?**

About 90% undergrounded.

- PG&E and telecoms expected to finish in early next year.
- Road repaving will follow.
- Construction fatigue is real, but "it's progress."

## **What percentage of residents now use the FAIR Plan for insurance?**

- Pre-fire: 2% or less.
- Now: Likely ~70%.
- Insurance access is a huge concern.
- Rebuild Paradise was instrumental in convincing Mercury Insurance to visit in person and write 200 new policies.

## **What happened to homeowner insurance after the fire?**

Crowder: Pre-fire, <2% of homeowners were on the FAIR Plan. Post-fire, it's likely closer to 70%.

Many companies pulled out.

Rebuild Paradise Foundation helped bring back Mercury Insurance, which toured the town in person and agreed to write 200 new policies.

Anderson: Convincing insurers required showing mitigation efforts like:

- Weed abatement
- Defensible space
- WUI code enforcement

## **Lessons about legal representation (re: mass torts)?**

Be very careful about law firms.

- Many firms used local attorneys to gain trust and then handed clients off to national firms without disclosure.
- Vet attorneys carefully.
- Fire Victims Trust (from PG&E bankruptcy) took 4.5 years to pay out claims—most received ~70% of awarded amount.

## **Did Paradise implement new building codes or urban redesign?**

Yes. All new homes must meet WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) standards. Paradise added slight enhancements to meet IBHS “Wildfire Prepared Home” certification, which provides insurance discounts.

- ~75% stick-built, 25% manufactured homes—same ratio as pre-fire.
- Solar and fire sprinklers added per state code cycles.

## **Are alternative materials like ICF being used?**

Kate Anderson: Yes. ICF (insulated concrete form) is fire-resistant and energy efficient.

- Kate built two ICF homes herself.
- Now over 50 homes in Paradise use ICF.

### **Did Paradise set a minimum square footage requirement?**

Yes, the town implemented a 750 sq. ft. minimum for the first structure built on any property to prevent an influx of tiny homes that might lower neighboring property values.

Final reflections – what do you wish you had done differently?

Steve Crowder: Would've enforced defensible space pre-fire.

- The town was heavily wooded, and complacency was common.
- Better vegetation management might have saved more homes.

### **Did the town set any limits on tiny homes or minimum build size?**

Anderson: Yes. After concerns from residents about property values, Paradise established a minimum size requirement of 750 square feet for the first structure built on a property. This applies even to ADUs if they are built before the main home.

### **When were businesses able to reopen after the fire?**

**Crowder:** The town was closed for over **five weeks**. When it reopened, surviving businesses returned slowly. Even undestroyed buildings often had **extensive smoke damage**.

The biggest challenges included:

- A shortage of **remediation crews**.
- **Contractors and tradespeople** were overwhelmed.
- Distance from major cities like Sacramento made response times slower.

### **How long did the debris removal process take?**

Crowder: About nine months. It was conducted primarily by FEMA, with some private contractors hired by homeowners.

Important distinction: This timeline does not include tree removal, which was a separate process and took much longer.

## **How many trees were removed, and what lessons did you learn?**

Crowder: They removed between 100,000 and 130,000 trees over multiple years.

They completed two FEMA tree removal programs and are still waiting on the third—which is three years overdue.

A major lesson: After trees were removed, remaining trees had less wind protection and many fell, causing serious damage to rebuilt homes.

Anderson: Reinforced that many trees were structurally compromised, but sentimentality delayed removal. Long-term, proactive removal of hazardous trees is essential to reduce risk.

## **Was there a formal replanting program?**

There's been some replanting, but it's largely on the property owner's shoulders.

The town did do a reforestation plan and survey, and there have been a few tree giveaways, but a large-scale public program hasn't yet been implemented. They expect to focus on this after the final tree removal is complete.

## **What kind of support did residents receive through the Long-Term Recovery Group (LTRG)?**

Crowder: Not everyone worked with case managers, but many did.

Immediately after the fire, they opened a one-stop Local Assistance Center in a former Sears store in Chico, housing:

- FEMA
- CalOES
- DMV
- Case managers
- Nonprofits

It ran for about 6 weeks, helping people navigate insurance, records, aid, and housing.

Anderson: Their LTRG later became a countywide collaborative of government agencies and nonprofits. The largest subcommittee handled disaster recovery assistance. It was optional, but many people—especially renters and low-income residents—benefited.

## **How did residents stay informed during recovery?**

Anderson:

- Rebuild Paradise Foundation and the town hired a communications firm that launched the "Make It Paradise" brand.
- Weekly email newsletters and consistent updates were key.
- Case management and nonprofits also coordinated communication.

She also praised Altadena's block captain program and emphasized the importance of keeping property owners (not just residents) informed.

## **Did Paradise work with professional planners or consultants?**

Crowder: Yes. They brought in Urban Design Associates (UDA), gifted by the Sierra Nevada Brewery's owner.

UDA held a series of large community forums (some with 600+ residents).

Residents voted on priorities by marking up large charts. Top priorities included:

1. Underground utilities.
2. Emergency warning systems.
3. Walkability and future resilience.

The town has revisited and updated the recovery plan multiple times.

## **What's the biggest difference between Paradise before and after the fire?**

Crowder: The demographics changed dramatically:

- Younger families have moved in.
- Larger households (mostly families of 4 now).
- School modernization has drawn in new residents.

Anderson: Echoed that schools were rebuilt or remodeled. The housing stock is now entirely new or modernized, and many residents now work remotely thanks to fiber optic infrastructure that didn't exist pre-fire.