



COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

Date: March 12, 2024

From: Ron Mattiussi, Interim CAO

Subject: **2024 FireSmart Grant and Wildfire Mitigation Update**

Report Prepared by: Jason Brolund, Fire Chief

RECOMMENDATION to Consider and Resolve:

THAT Council direct staff to apply to the Community Resiliency Investment Program requesting the maximum grant contribution of \$300,000 to conduct community FireSmart activities and support wildfire mitigation operations in 2024;

AND THAT Council authorize the Mayor and the Interim Chief Administrative Officer to execute the agreement;

AND THAT Council direct staff to allocate funding as generally outlined in the report titled “2024 FireSmart Grant and Wildfire Mitigation Update”, dated March 12, 2024, from the Fire Chief;

AND FURTHER THAT Council authorize staff to include \$300,000 in the 2024 Operating Budget for FireSmart activities and wildfire mitigation operations, subject to funding from the Community Resiliency Investment Program.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Foster Safety and Well-Being – We will pursue through direct action, advocacy, and collaboration with local and regional service providers, investments in community health, needs-based housing, emergency preparedness, policing, and other services that foster safety and well-being in West Kelowna.

BACKGROUND

This report continues the series of updates that staff provides to Council on activities and progress to reduce wildfire impacts in the City of West Kelowna and seeks approval to apply for a grant under the 2024 Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) Program.

Mitigation through forest fire fuel reduction is an important annual activity involving City staff, contractors, and the general public. Mitigation activities are driven by scientific

direction outlined in the 2018 West Kelowna Community Wildfire Protection Plan Update, which Council adopted in December 2018. The plan will be updated in 2024. To view the current plan, visit:

westkelownacity.ca/en/city-hall/resources/Documents/CWPPUpdate-26OCT2018.pdf

Since 2019, the Province of BC has provided support funding through the Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) and FireSmart Community Funding and Supports Programs, and Council has invested budgeted City funds.

In late 2023, the CRI grant program was improved. In response to advocacy from CWK and other jurisdictions (including our successful SILGA and UBCM resolutions) the following improvements were announced:

1. Funding for FireSmart activities moved to an “allocation based” model. This move reduced red tape for activities not related to FTE’s or prescriptions and mitigation works. (September 2023)
2. Allowance of \$100,000 to exceed the base funding maximum to support incremental FireSmart Activities due to increased local demand for wildfire risk reduction in communities that we impacted by wildfires. (November 2023)

Staff propose to continue to depart from complex prescription and treatment works and instead suggest that 2024 grant funding be requested to fully support a term FTE FireSmart Community Coordinator and associated public education activities.

The 2 successful FireSmart Labourer positions will continue and be funded from the existing 2024 operating budget allocation.

DISCUSSION

Under the CWK FireSmart and Wildfire Mitigation program, duties are split between the Parks Department and WKFR teams. FireSmart activities (including public education and public grants) are coordinated by WKFR. Mitigation activities (treatments and prescriptions) are carried out by Parks. A committee manages the program overall.

2023 Mitigation Activities (Public Land)

Two FireSmart Labourers were employed by the City from May to the end of August. This initiative was deemed highly successful and was funded as part of the City’s Wildfire Mitigation Budget. These term staff undertook hands-on fire mitigation work including clearing, limbing, chipping, trimming, raking, pruning and raising of the forest canopy on 22 different City owned properties including parks and road right of ways. Each site was assessed as part of a larger 44 property inspection, which was then prioritized and directed a work plan. Additional inspections and work plans were developed throughout the year based on resident complaints of fire hazards on City owned lands.

Approx 1.03ha of forest on the northeast side of Mt Boucherie was treated by a contractor in early 2023 and was 100% funded by the 2022 Fire Smart Grant.

2023 FireSmart Activities (Private Land)

Local governments have limited statutory authority to enforce fuel mitigation and fire prevention activities on private land. Consequently, public education and awareness of FireSmart principles remain the primary focus of our public wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts.

In 2023, the McDougall Creek Fire response impacted the delivery of our FireSmart program. While public interest increased and every opportunity to promote FireSmart was undertaken, our ability to deliver the full breadth of the program was impacted. However, the following successes took place:

- Our TV commercials, in partnership with Global Okanagan, continued to be successful in raising awareness. In 2023 we were able to significantly increase the reach and frequency of our commercials by partnering with local governments throughout the Okanagan.
- Also, in partnership across our region, WKFR coordinated the delivery and implementation of the ‘Ember the FireSmart Fox’ costume. This costume was a hit with children and their families at numerous public events in West Kelowna and across the region.
- In 2023, 15 FireSmart public grants were approved, representing \$6,152 in funds. The 2023 grant program was delayed due to CRI grant approval.
- Neighborhood FireSmart Plans were renewed for 2 neighborhoods (Casa Loma and Rock Ridge) and 1 new FireSmart neighbourhood was added (Sunview).
- Debris disposal bins were placed in 3 neighborhoods and 109 yards of debris was removed from high fire hazard areas. Casa Loma, Rockridge, and Sunview.
- WKFR staff worked with Byland’s Nursery to carry on the FireSmart plant tagging program. Plants that are recommended as FireSmart are visibly identified at the nursery, helping the public make safer choices when selecting their landscaping.
- The 2023 FireSmart Family Day was a success. Nearly 1000 residents visited Fire Station #31 in May. Staff also participated in several other activities including Westside Daze, to promote the FireSmart message.
- 2023 was the first full year for our Wildfire Mitigation and FireSmart Specialist. The full-time, term position is 100 per cent grant funded. The position takes the lead on all FireSmart activities throughout the City and coordinates fuels management and public education work being completed under outstanding and future FireSmart grants. The position liaises with other levels of government such as BC Wildfire Service and with UBCM to ensure opportunities to complete FireSmart projects are maximized and seek new FireSmart and fuels management grant opportunities.
- In 2023, Chief Brolund continued as the Chair of the Fire Chief’s Association of BC province wide FireSmart and Mitigation Committee. Chief Brolund was appointed in June to serve on the board of FireSmart BC.

2023 Public Communications

The Communications Department assisted getting word out to the public about FireSmart initiatives in 2022. These efforts resulted in:

- 2,380 unique page views for the FireSmart main page on the city website
- 7,514 email impressions promoting FireSmart Family Day and public grants
- 9,702 social media (Facebook, Instagram, X) views for FireSmart Family Day and public grants

2024 Planned Mitigation Activities (Public Land)

The FireSmart Labourer term positions have been filled for the 2024 season, and work will begin in early May. These staff will continue to focus on public lands identified in the CWPP, including parks and road right of way, and areas of public concern.

The ongoing operational budget allocation of \$50,000 for mitigation activities will support these FTE's as they undertake fuel mitigation work on city owned lands.

2024 Planned FireSmart Activities (Private Land)

The 100% grant funded Wildfire Mitigation and FireSmart specialist position will continue in 2024.

Our Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan is now overdue for an update. This work was planned for 2023 but was delayed due to the McDougall Creek fire. An extension was granted to allow the update of the CWPP into a Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan in 2024.

The position and updated plan are mandatory criteria for future grant applications.

In 2024, the following FireSmart activities will be undertaken:

- TV Commercials
 - FireSmart Family Day
 - Plant Tagging
 - Neighbourhood Recognition
 - Residential Grants/Rebates
 - Debris Collection/Disposal
- We will seek new neighborhoods to pursue their FireSmart Neighbourhood recognition in 2024.
 - West Kelowna will continue to lead a regional partnership between Okanagan cities in 2024. This partnership will continue to include Vernon, Lake Country, Kelowna, RDCO, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland and Penticton jointly submit grant requests for a FireSmart Media Campaign and a shared FireSmart "Ember" mascot costume.
 - We will ensure continued support for Westbank First Nation and activities in the community forest surrounding the community.
 - Our internal committee consisting of CWK staff from Parks, WKFR, Communications, Finance and WFN staff will continue to meet regularly.

- Staff from WKFR will attend, teach and lecture at the BC FireSmart 2024 Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit in Prince George. The Summit consists of two days of hands-on training, followed by a three-day conference where we will share and explore the lessons learned from 2023, along with the latest research, technologies, best practices and other information to help regions and communities prepare for the upcoming wildfire season.
- WKFR will also continue participation in an Okanagan-wide FireSmart coordination committee. Chief Brolund is the co-chair of the Fire Chief’s Association of BC province wide FireSmart and Mitigation Committee and will continue to serve on the board of FireSmart BC.

In November 2023, the CRI grant program was expanded to allow eligible applicants with an existing FireSmart program that were directly impacted by the 2023 wildfire season to apply above the base funding maximum (\$200,000) to support incremental FireSmart Activities due to increased local demand for wildfire risk reduction. As a qualifying community, West Kelowna is eligible to apply for up to \$100,000 in additional funding to be used in 2024 or 2025.

It is proposed that an additional FireSmart specialist term FTE be added to meet an increase in demand for FireSmart activities since the McDougall Creek fire. The addition of this position will be subject to creation of a new classification under the existing collective agreement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

While subject to change, staff anticipates allocating the 2024 grant funding as follows:

2024 CRI Grant Application	
\$121,697	FireSmart Coordinator FTE (mandatory coordinator component)
\$4,000	FireSmart Family Day (mandatory public education component)
\$30,000	Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan Update (mandatory plan component)
\$27,000	Public Grant Program
\$8,000	FireSmart BC Conference; four staff @ \$2,000 each
\$5,000	Regional Media Campaign (\$40,000 total)
\$4,000	Public debris removal
\$199,697	Total 2024 CRI Grant Application

2024 CRI Additional Funding for Wildfire Communities	
\$100,000	Proposed FireSmart Specialist FTE

2024 CWK Operating Budget Funding	
\$50,000	Mitigation and prescriptions (Parks Dept.)

Grant funding is listed in the Five-Year Financial Plan as revenue with the corresponding spending listed as expenses. Therefore, no net effect on the budget.

REVIEWED BY

Bryce Stirling, FireSmart/Wildfire Prevention Specialist

Mark Roberts, Parks Manager

Warren Everton, Chief Financial Officer

Allen Fillion, Director of Engineering and Operations

Corinne Boback, Legislative Services Manager / Corporate Officer

Trevor Seibel, Deputy CAO

APPROVED FOR THE AGENDA BY

Ron Mattiussi, Interim CAO

PowerPoint: Yes No