



COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

Date: May 20, 2025

From: Ron Bowles, Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: **FireSmart and Wildfire Mitigation Update**

Report Prepared by: Jason Brolund, Fire Chief and Mark Roberts, Parks Manager

Report Reviewed by: Ron Bowles, Chief Administrative Officer

PURPOSE

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.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council receive the report titled “FireSmart and Wildfire Mitigation Update” from the Fire Chief and Parks Manager, dated May 20, 2025, for information.

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

Wildfire mitigation through forest fire fuel reduction is an important annual activity involving City staff, contractors, and the public.

In December 2024, Council adopted the [2025 Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan](#) (CWRP). As a part of the CWRP process, Council also adopted an updated policy on Wildfire Mitigation and Prevention (*attached*). This updated policy mandates twice annual updates to Council about Wildfire Mitigation.

Mitigation activities are driven and prioritized by scientific direction outlined in the CWRP.

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 also budgeted City funds.

Staff propose to continue to depart from complex prescription and treatment works under the grant funding and instead suggest that 2025 grant funding continue to support an FTE dedicated primarily to FireSmart, Wildfire Mitigation and associated public education activities.

Wildfire treatments, including the successful term of a 3-person Fuel Mod crew will continue and be funded from the existing 2025 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.

2024 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 41 different City owned properties including parks and road right of way. Each site was assessed as part of a larger 51 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.

2024 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 2024 public interest continued to increase and every opportunity to promote FireSmart was undertaken to meet the demand. The following successes took place:

- In partnership across our region, WKFR continued to coordinate 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.
- 131 homes received FireSmart assessments. A FireSmart assessment examines a property to identify and reduce wildfire risks, primarily focusing on the area around the home, known as the Home Ignition Zone (HIZ). It evaluates the home's vulnerability to embers and surface fires, assesses the condition of structures, and

considers hazards within the HIZ and surrounding areas. The assessment also includes recommendations for improving a property's FireSmart status.

- In 2024, 21 FireSmart public grants were approved, representing \$8,692 in funds. While an increase over 2023, the 2024 grant program was not fully subscribed. The requirement under the provincial grant program to have a home assessment completed presents a drag on this aspect of our strategy.
- Neighborhood recognition FireSmart Plans (3) were renewed for Casa Loma Community, Sunview, & Huntsville Green and a new community – Starlight.
- Provided disposal bin debris collection at Sunview, Rockridge, Casa Loma (spring), and Rockridge, Huntsville Green, Casa Loma x2 (fall).
- The 2024 FireSmart Family Day was a success. More than 1000 residents visited Fire Station #31 in May. Staff also participated in several other activities including Westside Daze, to promote the FireSmart message.
- The Shannon Lake Rd Wildfire Mitigation project was completed in March. The 5-hectare project lies along Shannon Lake Rd in the vicinity of Brookhaven Care Centre and Crystal Springs Mobile Home Park. The work was completed by Ntityix Resources (WFN) crews. It consisted of handwork, chipping and removal offsite of debris. This work has lowered potential fire intensity in the area giving fire crews a better chance to suppress a fire. Work has also opened the site, removing hidden areas and discouraging illegal camping in the area.
- The annual Westside Daze celebration shifted away from a fireworks display in 2024 and moved to a FireSmart Drone show, which was well received by the public. This will continue in 2025 alongside encouragement to limit the use of any fireworks during periods of high fire danger.
- In late 2024, our FireSmart Coordinator (Bryce Stirling) departed WKFR. A dedicated staff member for FireSmart activities proved highly successful in 2024 and a replacement is in the process of being hired.
- In 2024, Chief Brolund continued as the Chair of the Fire Chief's Association of BC province wide FireSmart and Mitigation Committee as well as serving on the Board of FireSmart BC.

2025 Planned Mitigation Activities (Public Land)

The three FireSmart Labourer term positions have been filled for the 2025 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.

As recommended in the CWPP, prescriptions for 10 different sites throughout the community are being prepared to assist with outlining groundwork for the labourers. These reports are designed to meet the criteria of the City's CWPP reporting requirements and have been prepared by a professional forester. In consultation with WKFR, up to two additional sites will be identified for possible prescribed burning.

The ongoing operational budget allocation of \$170,000 for mitigation activities will support these FTE's as they undertake fuel mitigation work on city owned lands, provide additional

funding for tools and equipment, and facilitate larger scale contractor led projects that are beyond the scope of the Fire Smart Labourers.

Since the beginning of May, the three labourers have already removed 26 dump truck loads of cedars from Anders Park / Fire Hall 32 and have been completing the prescription work outlined for portions of Moonbeam Park in Rose Valley.

2025 Planned FireSmart Activities (Private Land)

The 100% grant funded Wildfire Mitigation and FireSmart specialist position will continue in 2025. A replacement staff member is expected to be hired by the end of May.

In 2025, the following FireSmart activities will be undertaken:

- Radio Advertisements
 - FireSmart Family Day
 - Plant Tagging
 - Home Assessments
 - Neighbourhood Recognition
 - Residential Grants/Rebates
 - Debris Collection/Disposal
- For 2025, homes that are identified in the CWRP as high risk will be given priority for assessments.
 - We will seek new neighborhoods to pursue their FireSmart Neighbourhood recognition in 2025.
 - West Kelowna will continue to participate in a regional partnership between Okanagan cities in 2025. This partnership will continue to include Vernon, Lake Country, Kelowna, RDCO, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland in the 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 have attended, taught and lectured at the BC FireSmart 2025 Wildfire Resiliency and Training Summit in Penticton. The Summit consisted of two days of hands-on training, followed by a three-day conference sharing 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.
 - With the hiring of a new staff member responsible for FireSmart and Wildfire Mitigation, an inventory of actions under the new CWRP will take place and an implementation plan and committee will be developed.

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 was awarded \$100,000 in additional funding to be used in 2024 or 2025. We expect the balance of these funds to be spent in 2025.

Lobbying for Increased Grant Funding

Mayor and Council continue to be highly active in lobbying for additional grant funding and simplification of the existing grant programs. See attached for the SILGA resolution which was endorsed at the recent 2025 convention and will be forwarded to UBCM for further consideration. Also attached are the briefing notes that were presented by Mayor Milsom to the Minister of Forests.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Our 2024 UBCM CRI Grant application was approved for 2 years of funding, so no further grant application will be required in 2025. However, UBCM will be updated on our plan as outlined below.

While subject to change, staff anticipates allocating the 2025 grant funding as follows:

2025 CRI Grant (\$200k)	
\$160,273	FireSmart Coordinator FTE (mandatory coordinator component)
\$11,200	FireSmart Vehicle and Decals
\$5,500	FireSmart Family Day (mandatory public education component)
\$2,500	Advertising and Signs
\$5,000	Public Rebate Program
\$5,000	Hand Tools (Fuel Mod Operators)
\$7,000	FireSmart BC Conference attendance (5 staff)
\$1,000	Uniforms and PPE
\$2,000	Community Recognition (FireSmart Branded items)
\$199,473	Total 2025 CRI Spending

24/25 CRI Additional Funding for Wildfire Communities (\$100k)	
\$58,000	Home Assessments (Overtime)
\$7,000	Debris Disposal
\$25,000	Public Rebate Program
\$9,220	Spent in 2024
\$99,220	Total Additional Funding Spending

2025 CWK Operating Budget	
\$170,000	Mitigation and prescriptions (Parks Dept. including Fuel Mod Crew FTE's)

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.

Powerpoint: Yes ☒ No ☐

Attachments:

2025 Council Policy: Wildfire Mitigation, Prevention and Forest Fuel Management – Private Land

2025 SILGA Resolution

2025 Briefing Notes for Minister of Forests – Fire Smart Program Funding

2025 Briefing Notes for Minister of Forests – Wildfire Mitigation