



**Mayor Gord Milsom**  
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**Date:** February 27, 2025

**TO:** The Honourable Ravi Parmar,  
Minister of Forests

**FROM:** Mayor Gord Milsom, Mayor of the City of West Kelowna, BC

### **Simplify and Increase Provincial Funding for FireSmart Activities**

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

- 1. Meaningful increase in provincial funding dollars allocated to local government to perform FireSmart Activities.**
- 2. Streamline and simplify the allocation process for these funds via a stable, multi-year allocation.**

#### **Key Points:**

- We continue to face devastating wildfire events year after year and the risk of these events continues to climb. West Kelowna became an international example in the summer of 2023.
- The province spends hundreds of millions of dollars on wildfire suppression, yet the amount dedicated to local governments for wildfire prevention and mitigation via the Community Resiliency Investment Grant is exponentially smaller and does not meet the needs and demands of our provincially mandated Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan.
- Local governments continue to have limited statutory authority, and limited funding supports to enforce fuel mitigation and fire prevention activities on private land. Consequently, public education and awareness of "FireSmart" principles have been the primary focuses of wildfire prevention and mitigation on privately held properties.
- FireSmart principles are proven guidance for living with and managing for wildfire. Becoming wildfire resilient is a shared responsibility across B.C. FireSmart, with its seven disciplines, is an all-encompassing program, extending from the individual homeowner level up to a landscape land

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management level. FireSmart principles have shown that they are effective at reducing the risk to life and property in the most extreme wildfire conditions. The FireSmart program is backed by a vast amount of field, laboratory and wildfire modelling research. Its methods help reduce the risk of losses under even the most extreme fire conditions.

- In April 2024, the Premier’s Expert Task Force on Emergencies called the FireSmart program a “success story” but recommended “building capacity to expedite wildfire risk reduction projects” and “streamline administrative requirements and providing more year-over-year certainty for communities applying for FireSmart funding”.
- Since 2009, the CWK has undertaken several grant-funded projects, public education and FireSmart initiatives. As a proactive and forward-thinking community, the CWK has emerged as a leading organization among local governments in the field of wildland urban interface firefighting operations and hazard mitigation.
- While improvements are being made to existing provincial grant programs, the process remains onerous and resource intensive and does not allow for long-term planning.
- West Kelowna recently completed its provincially mandated “Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan” (CWRP). The primary objective of the plan was to develop achievable and strategic action items. The plan identified and prioritized 28 local action items including:
  - Increase capacity of the FireSmart program, including hiring of a second coordinator/specialist
  - Increased public communications and events with coordinated messaging
  - Ongoing improvements to the FireSmart Home Partners Assessment and FireSmart Plant Tagging programs
  - Implement a FireSmart educational program in local elementary schools
  - Review and evaluation of the existing FireSmart grant program
  - Multi-prong approach to legacy landscaping including bylaw updates and enforcement plan and consideration of restriction and enforcement on sale of certain species of plants
  - Review of the Wildfire Interface Development Permit and covenant process
  - Further engagement and cross training with RDCO and WFN as well as BC Hydro, Fortis Gas, SD #23, MoTT
  - Continued ongoing pre-incident planning (major incidents, one-way neighbourhoods)
  - Establishment of a Cultural and Prescribed Burning Program
  - Incorporation of FireSmart landscaping around Critical Infrastructure
- Given increasing costs for materials and wages, the current funding allocation is not enough to deliver an appropriately resourced FireSmart program in our community. The unstable nature of short-term grant funding does not allow us to hire and retain the expertise needed to guide our community and program forward over the 5-year term of our CWRP.

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**Our Request:**

Increase funding available for direct allocation to local government under the Community Resiliency Initiative (CRI) grant program from the current \$200,000 to at least \$500,000 per year. Increase the term of the allocation to 5-years for local governments with a proven FireSmart program.

Sincerely,



His Worship Gord Milsom  
Mayor of the City of West Kelowna

cc: Macklin McCall, MLA for West Kelowna-Peachland  
West Kelowna Council  
Chief Administrative Officer, Ron Bowles, City of West Kelowna