



COUNCIL REPORT

To: Mayor and Council

Date: October 21, 2025

From: Ron Bowles, Chief Administrative Officer

Subject: **Plan for Firefighting in Complex Buildings**

Prepared by: Jason Brolund, Fire Chief and General Manager of Protective Services

Reviewed by: Brent Magnan, General Manager of Community Development
Lisa Siavashi, Acting Chief Financial Officer

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the “Plan for Firefighting in Complex Buildings” dated October 21, 2025 as presented by the Fire Chief and attached to this report be approved;

AND THAT staff continue to work with Westbank First Nation (WFN) to secure a revised service agreement, as outlined in this report;

AND FURTHER THAT staff bring forward a request for additional firefighters per timeline option 2 as outlined in this report as part of the 2026 budget process.

STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS

Invest in Infrastructure – We will invest in building, improving and maintaining infrastructure to meet the needs of, and to provide a high quality of life for, current and future generations.

Pursue Economic Growth and Prosperity – We will work with stakeholders throughout the region to advocate for and support efforts aimed at helping West Kelowna businesses prosper. With a focus on the future, we will advance opportunities to expand our economy, increase employment, and develop the community in ways that contribute towards prosperity for all.

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

Fires on higher floors of larger buildings represent an extraordinary challenge to fire departments. These are some of the most complex incidents a fire department will encounter.

Mid-rise buildings (4-6 stories) are constructed of combustible materials. They contain a very high density of residents, often built closely together with limited built-in fire protection. Fires in these buildings can spread quickly and be difficult to contain.

High-rise buildings (> 6 stories) are built primarily of non-combustible construction and contain advanced fire suppression features and systems. However, they may hold hundreds of people above the reach of fire department aerial devices, often at long vertical travel distances, necessitating very different firefighting techniques.

Collectively, these buildings are known as “Complex Buildings”.

In 2023, Council updated the West Kelowna Official Community Plan (OCP). The OCP proposes community growth in the form of more complex buildings. Policies in the plan call for supporting the requirements of the City’s emergency response services necessary to accommodate and increase in density and heights.

At the time the OCP was passed, Council directed the Fire Chief to bring forward a report that outlines how this policy can be met in the context of complex buildings.

The attached plan and supporting documents from the Fire Chief have been in development and revision since that time. The purpose of this plan is to outline West Kelowna Fire Rescue (WKFR) needs as the community continues to grow, and its buildings increase in complexity. West Kelowna is faced with the challenge of providing high quality service as the community grows while creating a safe environment for firefighters and the public, essentially balancing costs with risk.

Costs outlined in this report are estimates and will be further refined as a part of the annual budget review and approval process. The Fire Chief will present the plan, recommendations, needs and deployment analysis as well as the background work and progress made on the plan to date.

DISCUSSION

Community growth represents a dual pronged challenge for the fire service:

- Drastic, rapid increase in number of mid-rise buildings (4-6 stories)
- Potential construction and occupancy of high-rise buildings (>6 stories)

Fires in these types of occupancies are considered “low-frequency, high-risk” events. They don’t happen often, but when they do – the consequences and risk to public and firefighter safety can be severe.

The fire service approach is slightly different for each building type, requiring different tactics, strategies, and equipment. However, both require increased training, equipment, and human resources. WKFR will rely strongly on systems and construction materials in these being newly constructed buildings. This includes meeting all BC Building and Fire Code requirements that govern construction types (non-combustible), as well as special in building systems (firefighter elevators, fire pumps, fire sprinklers and in building announcements).

WKFR has established a 5-pillar framework which will support community growth:

1. Legislation and Agreements
2. Prevention
3. Systems and Equipment
4. Training
5. Human Resources

Each pillar is built upon a series of recommendations to better prepare the fire service and the community as it grows.

The plan contains 23 recommendations plus 7 staffing needs as a part of a framework to prepare WKFR for community growth. Since 2023, significant progress has been made on many of the items outlined in the plan, with many having been completed already.

There are costs associated with the plan to protect the community as it grows. The largest remaining factor is the staffing needs of the fire department and the ability to get the required number of emergency responders to a fire in an acceptable amount of time.

Improving fire response service levels will increase public and firefighter safety by improving the effectiveness of the fire service. A better prepared, equipped, trained, and staffed fire service will benefit the community across many types of emergency incidents and allows us to reciprocate service and better support our mutual aid partners, who we will count on during an emergency of our own.

Progress to Date

The need to ensure our emergency services are well prepared for growth has been a core concept for as long as our community has existed. Mayor and Council have supported increases, new equipment and new facilities as growth continues.

Many initiatives are already in process or have been put in place, including:

- Increased Firefighter Staffing at Station #32 (4 on duty 24/7) – 2018
- Focus and staffing dedicated to preplanning - 2020
- Full time, dedicated Training Officer – 2022
- Increased flexible Firefighter Staffing – 2023/2025
- Training Centre – Phase 1 completed in 2023, Phase 2 ongoing in 2025
- Bylaw changes (access and preplanning) - 2023
- POC Program Enhancements and Wage Increases - 2022/2023/2024/2025
- Mutual Aid Agreement renewed - 2023

- Station #33 Reno – increased staffing capacity – 2025
- Additional Assistant Fire Chief – 2024
- Quint Fire Engine at Station #32 – approved 2025, delivery mid-2026
- High Rise Equipment purchase - 2025
- Personal Transport Vans - 2025
- Additional Administrative support - 2025
- Internal strategies, tactics and training development underway

Future Needs

There are recommendations proposed within the plan (relating to legislation, policy, preventative actions and training) that do not have an associated cost or timeframe, other than staff time. The fire service will be working to implement these recommendations as time permits before the occupancy of complex buildings.

There are recommendations proposed within the plan (relating to human resources) that have future cost implications.

Need	Description	Current Status
3 rd On-Duty Fire Company	2 additional firefighters on-duty 24/7	Options for timing and costs presented below.
Roster Training & Safety Officers	On-call pay evenings, weekends, stat holidays	2027+ budget request
Roster Second Chief Officer	On-call pay evenings, weekends, stat holidays	2027+ budget request
Roster Paid-On-Call Firefighters	On-call pay during times of low historical turnout	2027+ budget request

The recommended addition of a 3rd Company of on-duty firefighters represents the largest cost and implementation component of the plan.

The WKFR resource allocation plan specifies the response of 5 WKFR companies, supported by additional mutual aid companies (2) to provide the required number of firefighters to an event. Currently, WKFR is notionally only able to provide 4 companies – necessitating the need for one to be added.

The primary role of this company will be to perform rescue of occupants – so a timely arrival is critical. To ensure a more rapid response time – it is recommended this company be on duty 24/7 and consist of paid, professional firefighters. Under this option, Ten (10) additional firefighters are required to form a 3rd company with 2 firefighters on duty 24/7 to support the response to complex buildings. Additionally, over time, a further 2 firefighters on duty 24/7 will likely be required in future years as development continues and risk increases.

Two timeline options are presented, based upon two timeframes for eventual construction and occupancy above the 6th storey:

Timeline Option #1 (30-months)

A phased approach for the hiring of 10 additional firefighters could be implemented:

2026	2027	2028
4 firefighters	3 firefighters	3 firefighters

When combined with a need of up to 18 months of internal development, preparation and training would permit issuance of a building permit in mid-2027 and eventual occupancy above the 6th storey in mid 2028, assuming approval in January 2026. (30-month timeline)

	2026	2027	2028
	4 Firefighters	3 Firefighters	3 Firefighters
Firefighters - additional each year	463,172.74	357,800.94	368,534.97
Officers Premium	159,220.13	122,997.55	126,687.48
Total cost	\$ 622,392.87	\$ 480,798.49	\$ 495,222.44

Note: Additional one-time costs for equipment, training and onboarding of approx. \$20,000 per firefighter.

These costs represent a 1% tax increase each year, after WFN Service Agreement contribution.

Timeline Option #2 (18-months)

Detailed examination of the permitting and building process presents another option for the hiring of additional firefighters. Upon issuance of a building permit (“trigger point”), all 10 of the additional firefighters could be hired at once and internal development, preparation and training would commence immediately. This would permit occupancy above the 6th storey at the same time that construction reached that point.

When combined with a need of up to 18 months of internal development, preparation and training would permit construction and eventual occupancy above the 6th storey in mid 2027 (18-month timeline)

	2026	2027	2028
	0 Firefighters	10 Firefighters	0 Firefighters
Firefighters - additional each year		1,192,669.80	-
Officers Premium		409,991.84	-
Total cost	\$ -	\$ 1,604,688.63	\$ -

Note: Additional one-time costs for equipment, training and onboarding of approx. \$20,000 per firefighter.

These costs represent a 3% tax increase in 2027, after WFN Service Agreement contribution.

Timeline Option #2 presents less financial risk to the City, as hiring would not take place until after a building permit for a high building has been issued (“trigger point”).

The additional future needs relating to rostering would be required once construction on a high building progresses beyond the 6th storey.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications of the additional firefighters are outlined above and depend on the timeline option chosen by Council. These could be brought forward during the 2026 budget process.

Additional costs relating to future needs under the plan related to rostering are estimated to be ~\$350,000 and requests will come forward as a part of the annual budget process in future years once high buildings are under construction.

Over time, a further 2 firefighters on duty 24/7 will likely be required in future years as development continues and risk increases.

WFN Service Agreement Funding Model

The Fire Protection Services Agreement has served both the City and WFN well since it was signed in 2016, without any significant issues or concerns. However, our communities continue to grow rapidly, and in some cases in ways that were not anticipated a decade ago.

The funding formula under the agreement is based on a shared cost (Annual Fee) to operate the fire service (WKFR Annual Budget). Each party is responsible for their portion of that cost, based on the assessed values within each jurisdiction. The calculation for the annual fee paid by WFN is as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{WFN Assessed Value})}{(\text{WFN+CWK Assessed Value})} \times \text{WKFR Annual Budget} = \text{ANNUAL FEE}$$

This funding model was created to reflect fairness and apportion costs based on the assessed value protected by the fire service in each jurisdiction. Because assessed value generally does not fluctuate greatly, costs apportionment is relatively stable, with the recent WFN portion representing 21% of the assessed value and sharing that percentage of the operating cost of the fire service.

Service Agreement Changes to Support Implementation

To fairly implement the plan for protecting complex buildings, the City proposes a mutually agreeable amendment of the service agreement prior to the future review date or agreement expiration, consisting of the following:

1. Addition of a new service (“Structural Firefighting in Complex Buildings”)
An expanded additional definition of structural firefighting. This definition would create a new service to be delivered entitled “Structural Firefighting in Complex Buildings” and be essentially defined as “firefighting in buildings greater than 6 stories”.
2. Additional funding formula specific to “Structural Firefighting in Complex Buildings”
The City would isolate new incremental costs that are incurred by the fire service for “Structural Firefighting in Complex Buildings”. Under the “Fire Service Needs for Complex Buildings” plan, these ongoing operating costs relate primarily to additional staffing.

A **second** cost allocation formula is proposed to be included in the amended agreement, to specifically address the incremental costs. The existing formula would remain unchanged for all costs not relating to complex buildings.

$$\frac{\left(\text{WFN Assessed Value} \right)}{\left(\text{WFN+CWK Assessed Value} \right)} \times \text{WKFR Incremental Cost} = \text{ADDITIONAL FEE}$$

High Buildings High Buildings

This formula would fully reflect each jurisdiction’s fair share of costs associated with firefighting in complex buildings. It permits each jurisdiction to grow at its own pace, independent of the other, while still ensuring firefighting capability and apportioning costs fairly across jurisdictions based on their complex building inventory.

PowerPoint: Yes No

Attachments:

- 1 – Fire Service Needs for Complex Buildings Report
- 2 – Fire Service Needs for Complex Buildings – Human Resources and Deployment Analysis Report