



## INFORMATION ONLY COUNCIL REPORT

To: Paul Gipps, CAO

Date: January 25, 2022

From: Jason Brolund, Fire Chief

Subject: **Casa Loma Emergency Preparedness**

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### **STRATEGIC AREA(S) OF FOCUS**

Foster Safety and Well-Being – pursue emergency preparedness through direct action.

### **BACKGROUND**

A number of initiatives are underway to better prepare for emergencies, including our ongoing community-wide FireSmart program and wildfire mitigation activities. In 2021, a focus was placed on efforts to improve community emergency preparedness, specifically in the Casa Loma neighbourhood.

### **WILDFIRE MITIGATION**

Within the CWK, a prescription has been developed and approved for 6.78ha of Casa Palmero Park funded under the 2021 grant program. Treatment works are scheduled for the spring of 2022. This will largely complete mitigation of the City owned lands in this area. Updates to our Community Wildfire Protection plan (scheduled for 2023) will identify further opportunities.

The Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) has been aggressively mitigating Kalamo Park since the park management plan was developed in 2005, supported by the RDCO Parks Wildfire Protection Plan that was developed in 2010. This plan was updated in 2021 and identifies a further 18.6ha of high priority, moderate fuel threat to be treated to protect properties in Casa Loma and Lakeview Heights. A CRI grant has been applied for in 2022. If the grant is successful, prescriptions will be prepared in 2022 and treatments are expected to take place in 2022/23.

Westbank First Nation developed prescriptions for 12ha bounded by the WFN Government Office, Sneena Rd, Highway 97 and Campbell Rd during 2021. Mitigation works in this area commenced late in 2021 and continue during the early winter of 2022. This will complete mitigation of the WFN lands in the vicinity of Casa Loma.

## COMMUNITY FIRESMART

The Casa Loma neighbourhood was very active in 2021 towards achieving FireSmart Neighbourhood Recognition. Their application was submitted at the end of the 2021 and we expect to confirm their recognition soon.

The neighbourhood conducted several in-person and zoom education sessions that focused on the FireSmart program, leading up to a 2 week neighborhood FireSmart project. Over 2 tonnes of fuel mitigation debris was collected and removed by the Casa Loma Residents, who volunteered 660 hours to clean up their neighbourhood.

## EVACUATION PLANNING

A planning partnership was established between the City of West Kelowna (CWK), Westbank First Nation (WFN) and various stakeholders in the community who formed the Casa Loma Evacuation Working Group. These stakeholders included representation from:

- West Kelowna Fire Rescue
- Kelowna Fire Department (Regional Emergency Program)
- West Kelowna RCMP
- Westbank First Nation
- Regional District of Central Okanagan
- Casa Loma Community Association
- City of West Kelowna Bylaw
- City of West Kelowna Planning
- City of West Kelowna Engineering
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
- SNC-Lavalin (WRB Bridge)
- BC Ambulance Service
- BC Wildfire Service

Traffic engineering services were provided by Align Engineering and GIS and mapping support was provided by the City GIS team.

There were 5 working group sessions during 2021 and numerous sub-group meetings that reviewed topics ranging from traffic management to dealing with evacuees. The working group completed a 'Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis' that ranked the risks affecting the neighborhood. The working group completed a table-top exercise of a wildfire event.

## PROGRESS

At the core of the process are maps that capture the majority of information assembled during the planning activity. For example, the Resident Evacuation Map (*Attachment #1*) details routes that residents can take to evacuate in the event of an emergency. Intended for distribution to the public in advance of an emergency, this map captures muster points and egress routes via road and path way.

When people know each other in a day-to-day setting, they're better able to work together during an emergency. The most immediate help during and following a disaster will come

from those nearby. The Residents Association has been key in connecting the neighbourhood and working together to get prepared.

- A “Community Emergency Liaison” (CEL) was appointed and became the champion for neighbourhood emergency preparedness.
- A group of Fire Wardens were assembled to help provide FireSmart and Emergency Preparedness information to the residents in advance of an emergency.
- The “Community Association Notification Network” (C.A.N.N.) was created by the neighborhood association. This network consists of a database of phone and email contacts for residents that is kept up to date by the association. It will be made available to Emergency Responders during an incident (via the CEL) to notify residents and provide information regarding the emergency in a timely and efficient manner.

## NEXT STEPS

Work to better prepare this neighbourhood is ongoing and will serve as an example to benefit other areas of the community and region. This includes:

1. Completion of a detailed risk evaluation and wildfire probability map for the neighbourhood. This will take into account fuel types, topography, weather, historic ignition and potential fire behaviour (including rates of spread and fire intensity). Bruce Blackwell, a provincial expert in fire and fuels management, fire risk identification and mitigation has been engaged to complete this work.
2. Validation of recommendations from the planning process including ongoing investigation of alternate access/egress routes.
3. Finalization of Emergency Response Plans capturing the work of the planning process, including:
  - Emergency Response Map: details known hazards, evacuation routes, assembly areas and other points of critical interest. This map is designed for use in an emergency.
  - Evacuation Route Options Map: details evacuation strategies to reduce congestion, keep traffic moving and ensure the public and emergency responders are aware of routes that can be used, depending on a number of factors. This map is designed to be used specifically during an evacuation and outlines the steps to route traffic towards West Kelowna, towards Kelowna or in both directions.
4. Work with developers and planning departments (CWK and WFN) to further progress on recommendations and evaluate impact of future developments

In late 2021, the National Research Council of Canada published the *“National Guide for Wildland-Urban-Interface Fires: guidance on hazard and exposure assessment, property protection, community resilience and emergency planning to minimize the impact of wildland-urban interface fires”*. This guidance document has been evaluated by City staff

for its applicability to our current approach to development and community emergency preparedness. This guidance will continue to shape our processes going forward.

The RDCO has received an evacuation planning grant for 2021/22 and commenced the **“Central Okanagan Evacuation Route Planning Project”**. The vision of the project is to build a regional framework with an operational lens that will facilitate community evacuations. This will be accomplished through a collaborative approach with member municipalities and will include: hazard and risk mapping, development of regional templates, recommendations for continued planning and a tabletop exercise. Much of the process, recommendations and mapping completed during the Casa Loma planning activity has formed the basis for this regional initiative. Upper Glenrosa and West Kelowna Estates have been identified as priority focus areas and Chief Brolund is directly involved with this study. The results from Casa Loma will also be included as a part of this study.

## **CONCLUSION**

Residents are more aware of the risk in their neighbourhood and the actions they can take to be better prepared through FireSmart initiatives. Significant wildfire mitigation activities have taken place and are planned for 2022 within both CWK, Westbank First Nations and RDCO jurisdictions.

Evacuations will be faster and smoother and the residents of Casa Loma are safer because of the planning process. Emergency responders are better coordinated and have better insight into the unique factors present in this area.

## **APPROVED FOR THE AGENDA BY**

Paul Gipps, CAO

Powerpoint: Yes ☒ No ☐

## **Attachments:**

1 – Casa Loma Resident Evacuation Map