

Report to Council



Date: August 8, 2022
To: Council
From: City Manager
Subject: Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan Update
Department: Parks Services

Recommendation:

THAT Council receives, for information, the report from the Parks Services Department, dated August 8, 2022, with respect to the 2022 Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan;

AND THAT Council endorse the 2022 Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan as attached to the report from the Parks Services Department dated August 8, 2022;

Purpose:

For Council to update the previous Community Wildfire Protection Plan with the Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan for the next 5 years.

Background:

Community Wildfire Protection Plans are strategic five-year documents that define the risk from wildfires in an identified area, identify measures necessary to mitigate those risks, and outline a plan of action to be implemented. Recently, the format and title of these plans has changed to Community Wildfire Resiliency Plans (CWRP) to better reflect that wildfire is both an integral and pervasive event that communities must be able to manage effectively, particularly in the face of climate change.

The first Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Kelowna was completed in 2004, following the devastating 2003 fire season and in response to recommendations made by the FireStorm 2003 Provincial Review. The City of Kelowna undertook updates to the CWPP in 2011 and 2016.

Discussion:

Works Completed from 2016 to 2021

Many of the 47 prioritized recommendations of the 2016 CWPP have been addressed, across categories including:

- enhanced public and elected official awareness and understanding of wildfire risk in our community,
- improved structural planning and protection of critical infrastructure,
- ongoing emergency preparedness for emergency evacuations,
- wildland fire training for Kelowna Fire Department members,
- municipal policy and planning review, and
- fuels management activities on both public and private lands.

Of particular note, in the past five years the City has:

- completed approximately 125 hectares of forest fuel mitigation including all of Knox Mountain Park East,
- completed a review of the Wildfire Development Permit process,
- developed a Total Access Plan for strategic suppression planning, and
- implemented a pilot targeted grazing project near Gallagher's to address grass fuels.

Current Issues:

The City of Kelowna continues to face challenging and pressing wildfire risk due to both the natural environment and development into the wildland urban interface. We are located in a fire-dependent region that has historically relied on frequent, light intensity fires to maintain the health of our ecosystem. Years of suppressed fire and fuel buildup has led to higher risk of severe fires when they occur, resulting in increased impact to landscape and more difficult conditions for suppression. Climate change exacerbates this situation through fluctuating weather patterns that impact fire behaviour, particularly prolonged drought and increased summer temperatures.

With respect to the built environment, the City has a number of interface and intermix neighbourhoods that require comprehensive wildfire mitigation actions. Wildfires pose a risk to homes in these areas directly from adjacent forest or grassland, or through ember showers that can travel up to two kilometers from active fire. Recommendations made within the new CWRP provide guidance on reducing risk and improving conditions for suppression efforts in these existing neighbourhoods and align with the 2040 Official Community Plan that provides foundational strategic direction in limiting growth in interface areas.

Key Actions in the Next Five-Year Plan:

The new CWRP has been developed in accordance with provincial guidelines to provide an updated action plan for proactive protection of our community, infrastructure and natural landscape. The CWRP identifies 16 high priority items, 20 moderate priority items and seven low priority action items, categorized by lead agency and timeframe. Progress has been achieved or is ongoing for several actions, including the development of a dedicated FireSmart webpage (kelowna.ca/firesmart), updating our Urban Forest Management Strategy, interagency collaboration and provision of support to citizens to remove hazardous vegetation from their private properties. Key priority items for completion over the next five years include:

- Completion of a Municipal Evacuation Plan

- Adoption of the Wildfire Development Permit Terms of Reference document
- Completion of FireSmart assessments of critical infrastructure
- Continued multi-agency wildland fire training within the Kelowna Fire Department
- Complete a community water delivery assessment for suppression requirements across all four water purveyors

A full list of the 43 recommendations can be found in Table 1 of the attached 2022 CWRP.

Conclusion:

The next step is to review priority items with associated projected timelines and coordinate resourcing and funding requirements for completion.

Internal Circulation:

Communications
Planning & Development Services
Fire Department
Infrastructure Operations Department
Park Services
Policy and Planning Department
Urban Forestry
Utility Services

Considerations applicable to this report:

Existing Policy:

2016 Community Wildfire Protection Plan

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

Where possible, completion of actions items will be covered through existing internal operating funds. Larger projects and/or activities requiring additional input will be provided for through continued Community Resiliency Investment grant applications, alternative grant applications or capital budget requests.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:
Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:
External Agency/Public Comments:
Communications Comments:

Submitted by: T. Bergeson, Urban Forestry Technician

Approved for inclusion: M. Logan, Infrastructure Delivery General Manager

cc: Acting Divisional Director, Financial Services
City Clerk
Divisional Director, Corporate and Protective Services
Divisional Director, Corporate Strategic Services
Divisional Director, Partnership & Investments
Divisional Director, Planning & Development Services
Fire Chief