

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING February 19, 2025

AUTHORED BY GEOFF WHITING, DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF – OPERATIONS

**SUBJECT COMMUNITY RESILIENCY INVESTMENT PROGRAM (FIRESMART
COMMUNITY FUNDING AND SUPPORTS PROGRAM)**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To gain Council's support in applying for funding through UBCM for FireSmart activities in the City of Nanaimo for 2025.

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend Council support the City of Nanaimo's application to the Union of BC Municipalities for the Community Resiliency Investment Program (FireSmart Community Funding and Supports Program) and if successful the 2025-2029 Financial Plan be amended to include this grant.

BACKGROUND

The City has risk for wildland fires in a number of areas particularly at the interface with urban development. Effects of climate change are also contributing to increased fire risk as evidenced by numerous high profile community threatening fires over the past number of years. Extreme wildfire behaviour caused by climate changes can be anticipated to increase in the future. The FireSmart program is a community-based wildland fire prevention initiative that focusses on increasing community resilience to the impacts of wildfire. This initiative is being promoted by the Province to reduce the risk of damage caused by wildfires and grants are available through the UBCM. Staff is making application for a FireSmart Community Funding grant and require a Council resolution supporting this.

DISCUSSION

The current Community Wildfire Protection Plan rates the city as having a "Low with pockets of moderate" fire risk. While the forested areas in the City are decreasing as a result of development, areas of risk remain both within the City boundary and immediately outside the boundary with potential to affect City lands. In addition, there are numerous parks and Crown lands that interface with urban development contributing to interface fire potential. Having the community involved in the application of FireSmart principles to their homes and property will build resiliency in the community and allow property and structures to better withstand a wildland fire event and limit damage.

In 2024 the Community Resiliency Investment grant funded FireSmart weekends in Long Lake Heights in the spring and on Protection Island in the spring and fall. It also supported staff training and development, community engagement events, the purchase of equipment for a Sprinkler

Protection Unit (phase 2), and a new Community Wildfire Resiliency Plan (completion Spring 2025).

Funding for 2025 will support the continued work of these community groups to FireSmart these higher risk areas. In addition to continuing these projects, funding for 2025 will support broader community FireSmart education and training initiatives for Fire Department staff. The Community Resiliency Investment grant will also include phase 3 of a Structural Protection Unit. New initiatives included in the 2025 request include additional FireSmart promotional materials, an expanded Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, participation in the FireSmart BC Plant Program, Indigenous Cultural Safety Training for staff, and planning for a tabletop exercise with mutual aid partners.

The City is requesting grant funding in the amount of \$80,000 which is 100% of project costs. |

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

|The activities are not in the current operating budget and will only be undertaken if the grant application is successful.

If any FireSmart activities are required throughout the year, there will be limited funding available. |

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council support the City of Nanaimo's application to the Union of BC Municipalities for the Community Resiliency Investment Program (FireSmart Community Funding and Supports Program) and if successful the 2025-2029 Financial Plan be amended to include this grant.
 - The advantages of this option: The funding would assist in the further development of the FireSmart program and improve community safety and resiliency by reducing the risk of damage resulting from a wildfire in Nanaimo. Community involvement and environmental protection are also key advantages of accessing the funding grants.
 - The funding will equip a Structural Protection Unit trailer which will be an additional resource for protection of property within the City.
 - The disadvantage of this option is that FireSmart activities are reliant on the successful application.

2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council deny support to apply to the Union of BC Municipalities for the Community Resiliency Investment Program (FireSmart Community Funding and Supports Program).
 - The advantages of this option: No change to current operations or resources.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The lack of funding would result in a severe reduction in the City's FireSmart program and would leave the City more susceptible to the threat of wildfire and at greater risk of property loss.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The FireSmart program is a community-based wildland fire prevention initiative where communities come together as a group and FireSmart their neighborhoods.
- This initiative is being promoted by the Province to reduce the risk of damage caused by wildfires and grants are available through UBCM.
- Staff is requesting a contribution from UBCM for the amount of \$80,000 which is 100% of total project costs.

Submitted by:

Geoff Whiting
Deputy Chief - Operations

Concurrence by:

Tim Doyle
Fire Chief

Richard Harding
General Manager, Community Services &
Deputy CAO

Wendy Fulla
Director, Finance

Laura Mercer
General Manager, Corporate Services