COUNCIL REPORT

Date: November 18, 2015
From: Randy Heath, Fire Chief
      Dorit Mason, Director of North Shore Emergency Management Office
      Anne Mooi, Director of Parks, Culture & Community Services
Subject: Community Interface Protection Plan – Strategic Wildfire Protection Plan Grant
File: 2800-01-2015

RECOMMENDATION
THAT the submission of a grant application to the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program to support the development of the first phase of a Community Interface Protection Plan for West Vancouver be approved.

1.0 Purpose
To obtain Council approval for the District to submit a grant application of $15,000 to the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildlife Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program. This grant, which requires matching funding from the District, will support the development of a Community Interface Protection Plan for West Vancouver. A Council resolution is required to accompany the grant application.

2.0 Legislation/Bylaw/Policy
The proposed project applied for through the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildlife Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program is in line with one of Council's seven priorities.

Council’s priority titled ‘Natural Environment and Climate Change’ articulates the commitment to preserve the municipality’s natural capital, and protect watersheds, the foreshore, green spaces, trees and parks.

3.0 Background
The wildland/urban interface is defined as the area where forestland vegetation meets the community. One of West Vancouver’s largest identified risks is the urban interface area. This area extends across the entire municipality while bordering or encompassing the majority of West Vancouver’s high valued housing stock. Wildland/urban interface fires can
be extremely difficult to manage due to fuel loads, wind direction, water supply, available resources and access to areas that may be affected. As these types of incidents may require resources beyond West Vancouver Fire Rescue's capabilities, agencies including the two North Shore Fire Departments, Coast Fire, Metro Fire and our Parks Department are all part of a combined response if and when required.

This past summer, the Province of British Columbia experienced one of the busiest fire seasons on record, with reported fire behavior that has never been seen before. The 2015 summer was a strong indication of what may be a recurring pattern for future weather conditions. Given this trend, it is important that we continue to manage the high level of risk associated with the wildland and urban interface areas of West Vancouver.

3.1 Previous Decisions

Council has been supportive of a coordinated North Shore approach to interface fire issues.

3.2 History

Previous to 2012, wildland fire issues were dealt with almost exclusively by the Parks Department. In 2012, a realignment of responsibilities took place which resulted in West Vancouver Fire & Rescue assuming responsibility as first responder for both wildland and urban interface fire issues, and the Parks Department assuming a supporting role when required. This realignment recognizes the expertise within West Vancouver Fire & Rescue and the important role that the Parks Department provides.

North Shore Emergency Management Office facilitates a North Shore Interface Wildfire Working Group which has representation from the three North Shore Fire Departments, Parks Departments, the Provincial Wildfire Management Branch, Metro Vancouver Parks and watershed groups, and the three mountains. Through this working group, protocols and procedures have been developed to collectively respond to wildfires and support the municipal response to interface fires.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Discussion

In 2014, the District developed a new integrated approach to wildfires. An interdivisional team was established to discuss interface fire issues (those
involving forest lands that border built communities) and ensure that mitigation of interface forest fires in the forested areas of West Vancouver, including the British Pacific Properties and Cypress Mountain, are approached collectively.

The team consists of staff from North Shore Emergency Management (NSEM), West Vancouver Fire & Rescue, West Vancouver Parks Department and West Vancouver Planning Department. Representatives from this team are represented on a North Shore Interface Wildfire Working Group that is facilitated by NSEM. An expectation by this Working Group is that each organization has a full understanding of their internal capacity and resources and how they would respond to an interface wildfire. Knowledge of the interface wildfire risk is also critical as it can help to identify the need for preplanning and equipment and training needs.

In 2015, this staff team recognized that there was a need for a Community Interface Protection Plan (CIPP) specifically for West Vancouver and that the development of this plan would involve two separate phases.

This grant request is to support the first phase of the CIPP which will include a comprehensive third party review of current resources, staffing and policies in place in the District related to wildfire risk mitigation; an assessment and audit of existing District-owned resources; and an assessment of resources available across the North Shore.

The next phase, anticipated to take place in 2017, will include a communication strategy, outreach to stakeholders as part of the consideration in the upcoming OCP review, and analysis of special data and fire type mapping. Completion of both phases will result in the establishment of a comprehensive CIPP for the District of West Vancouver.

4.2 Sustainability

The total cost to complete Phase I of the project is $30,000. The maximum contribution from the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildlife Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan grant is $15,000 with a requirement that the District matches the grant funding.

Staff has included $15,000 in the 2016 draft budget for Council’s consideration, contingent on receiving matching grant funds of $15,000 from the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildlife Prevention Initiative.
5.0 Options

5.1 Recommended Option

That staff be directed to submit a $15,000 grant application to the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program. This grant will support the first phase in the development of a CIPP for West Vancouver. Completion of this phase is a necessary step in the establishment of a CIPP for the District.

5.2 Considered Options

A considered option is to not apply for available funding through the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program. As West Vancouver does not have a CIPP, this is not being recommended.

6.0 Conclusion

This report is seeking Council approval to submit a grant application of $15,000 to the 2015/2016 Strategic Wildlife Prevention Initiative – Community Wildfire Protection Plan Program. This grant, which requires matching funding from the District, will support the development of the first phase of a Community Interface Protection Plan for West Vancouver. The funding agency requires that a Council resolution accompanies the grant application.

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