



<i>COUNCIL AGENDA</i>	
Date: <u>February 24, 2025</u>	Item: <u>5.</u>



5.

DISTRICT OF WEST VANCOUVER
750 17TH STREET, WEST VANCOUVER BC V7V 3T3

COUNCIL REPORT

Date:	February 5, 2025
From:	Heather Keith, Senior Manager, Climate Action & Environment
Subject:	Amendment to the Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area Designation
File:	0332-01

RECOMMENDATION

THAT opportunities for consultation on the proposed Official Community Plan amendment, with persons, organizations, and authorities, as outlined in the report dated February 5, 2025, be endorsed as sufficient consultation for purposes of section 475 of the *Local Government Act*.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT proposed “Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018, Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025” be read a first time.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT proposed “Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018, Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025” be presented at a public hearing on March 31, 2025, at 6 p.m. in the Municipal Hall Council Chamber and via electronic communication facilities (WebEx video conferencing software), and that statutory notice be given of the scheduled public hearing.

1.0 Purpose

To amend the spatial extent of the Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area (DPA) designation to include all lands within the District of West Vancouver.

2.0 Legislation/Bylaw/Policy

Legislation

Section 488 of the *Local Government Act* (LGA) indicates that: (1) An official community plan may designate development permit areas for the: (a) protection of the natural environment, its ecosystems, and biological diversity and (b) protection of development from hazardous conditions.

Bylaws

“Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018” is a bylaw that regulates land use and guides development.

“Development Procedures Bylaw No. 4940, 2017” is a bylaw that defines procedures under which an owner of land may apply for the issuance of permits.

3.0 Council Strategic Objective(s)/Official Community Plan

The following sections of the Official Community Plan (OCP) provide policy direction to enable the community to adapt to and manage the risk of wildfire:

- Section 2.2 recommends that Area Development Plans for Future Neighbourhoods in the Upper Lands incorporate an environmental plan that manages wildfire risk.
- Policy 2.6.18 recommends reviewing development requirements to address risks of natural hazards (e.g., landslide, flood, debris flow, forest fires and human-wildlife conflicts).
- Schedule ii (Area-Specific Policies and Guidelines) details the Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area requirements as well as how Future Neighbourhoods incorporate wildland fire management best practices into building and landscaping, including a defensible space at the forest edge and the use of fire-resistant building and roof materials.

Council’s 2024-2025 Strategic Plan includes a goal to “Protect our natural environment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and adapt our community to become more resilient in a changing climate” and includes various objectives to meet this goal, specifically in relation to this report:

- Objective 1.4: Take steps to protect against the threat of wildfires.
 - Deliverable 1.4.1: Implementation of the Community Wildfire Protection Plan is completed.

4.0 Financial Implications

In reviewing building permit data from the last few years, there is anticipated to be an increase in the number of Wildfire Hazard development permit applications with a spatial expansion of lands within the DPA designation resulting in an increase in application fee revenue.

Staff have spent considerable time in the last few years working with wildfire professionals, architects, and contractors to ensure an understanding of the DPA guidelines and provide an efficient permitting

process. Given that much of the work to address Wildfire Development Permit requirements is the responsibility of the applicant and their qualified professional, staff do not anticipate that the increase in permit applications will result in longer permit time waits or additional resource requests.

There are no financial implications with the proposed amendments in this report.

5.0 Background

5.1 Previous Decisions

At its July 8, 2019, regular meeting, Council recognized that climate change constitutes an emergency for West Vancouver.

At its November 18, 2019, regular meeting, Council approved the [Community Wildfire Protection Plan](#) (CWPP), which included recommendations to update the OCP to incorporate a Wildfire Hazard DPA with development guidelines based on [FireSmart](#) principles.

At its December 14, 2020, regular meeting, Council adopted the Wildfire Hazard DPA.

5.2 History

Wildfire events in the province have been increasing, particularly due to prolonged periods of drier summer seasons and drought conditions. In particular, there have been several recent wildfires within the vicinity of West Vancouver, including the Whyte Lake fire (2018), Lions Bay fire (2018), Strip Creek fire (2019), Cypress Falls fire (2022), and the Horseshoe Bay fire (2023). The steep terrain in these locations made these fires difficult to access and control, causing damage to recreational and forested areas. With the proximity of these fires to the community of West Vancouver, there is continued efforts by the District to increase mitigation measures to protect the community from the threat of fires, through the implementation of its CWPP.

To reduce the impact of wildfires to buildings, neighbourhoods, and communities, the District adopted a Wildfire Hazard DPA to establish development guidelines, using FireSmart principles for building materials, landscaping, and spacing between structures and nearby trees and vegetation.

The Wildfire Hazard DPA only designates properties within a 100-metre buffer of the forest interface, where the wildfire hazard rating could potentially be moderate or high. However, with new science and lessons learned from recent fires in the province and other countries, there is a better understanding of how fires spread through a community and how weather conditions that are increasing in severity can contribute to the rapid spread of fire beyond this buffer area.

As an example, in August 2023, the Grouse Complex of wildfires in the Okanagan region burned a total of 15,076 hectares, prompting the

evacuation of about 30,700 people from 12,100 properties and affecting 303 structures. To understand the impact of these fires, how the wildfire spread in communities, and how it continued to move once there, the BC FireSmart Committee and the Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction analyzed the event and found that¹:

- Long-term drought conditions, several weeks of high temperatures, and minimal precipitation preceded the ignition of the wildfires.
- Embers travelled 2.5 km ahead of the main fire front, including across Okanagan Lake.
- The fire entered the impacted neighborhoods almost exclusively via burning embers, rather than direct flame contact, and quickly shifted from being a wildfire to a set of several urban fires burning simultaneously.

An investigation of the 2016 fire in Fort McMurray, Alberta, also found that most home ignitions at the interface (outer edges of urban areas) were attributable to embers alighting on combustible material.

Given the distance that embers can travel, homes across an entire community are vulnerable to embers even if homes are not directly adjacent to a forest interface. The proposed amendment to extend the Wildfire Hazard DPA designation to all lands within the District, as outlined in this report, is in response to these findings and to ensure that over time, all homes and structures are resistant to fire damage, which will in turn minimize the risk of fire spread across West Vancouver.

6.0 Analysis

6.1 Discussion

Embers give any fire a far longer reach, enabling it to move over extensive barriers that might otherwise have stopped the fire due to lack of fuel. It may have been previously assumed that properties that are not near the actual forested edge are not at risk to fires. However, as previously discussed, recent research and findings have concluded that this may no longer be true, particularly due to the changing climate and weather conditions observed in recent years.

Fire spread can impact homes in two distinct ways and therefore, it is important to ensure mitigation measures are responding to both methods of fire spread:

1. From sparks or burning embers carried by the wind that start new fires beyond the zone of direct ignition, that alight on vulnerable

¹ <https://firesmartbc.ca/research/post-fire-case-study-for-the-2023-grouse-complex-bc-2023/>

combustible materials of homes or adjacent flammable landscaping.

2. From direct flame contact along the edge of a burning fire front (e.g., forest interface) or through structure-to-structure or vegetation-to-structure contact (as may also occur from #1, above).

With the increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions such as drought, prolonged hotter temperatures, and winds that lead to an increase in potential fire risk, there is a need to decrease the number of highly ignitable homes (i.e., composed of combustible materials) exposed to embers, thereby minimizing the consequences of multiple structures lost. This can be done through the Wildfire Hazard DPA policy to ensure that over time, as homes are redeveloped, there will be fewer combustible materials to spread fire through the community.

To minimize risk and create resiliency to wildfire impacts for all properties in West Vancouver, the following amendments are proposed for the Wildfire Hazard DPA designation policy NE 1:

- Expanding the DPA to include all dwellings within West Vancouver and removing the map that shows designated lands only within 100 m of a forest interface.
- Updating the Development Permit exemption to include only lands where area-specific DPA guidelines that addresses wildfire hazards under s488 (1) (a) and (b) of the *Local Government Act*. The existing exemption is for parcels of land subject to a covenant registered on title under Section 219 of the *Land Title Act* with Wildland Fire Management Requirements for construction of new buildings. Given that the covenants become out of date as best management practices for wildfire management evolve over time, it is recommended that these covenants are removed over time and new development proposals adhere to the most up-to-date wildfire management guidelines through a development permit.
- Aligning building material requirements for the Lower Caulfeild Heritage Conservation Area with the Wildfire Hazard DPA guidelines.

Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018 Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025 (**Appendix A**) reflects the proposed changes.

6.2 Climate Change & Sustainability

Studies have indicated that the frequency, intensity, severity, and duration of wildfires and other natural disturbances is expected to increase due to changes in climate that have created warmer, drier conditions, and

increased periods of drought. The proposed implementation of the Wildfire Hazard DPA across the entire community will help the District to minimize damage and loss due to fires by increasingly creating resiliency in homes and structures as climate change impacts continue to increase over time.

6.3 Public Engagement and Outreach

A Wildfire Hazard DPA was recommended in both the District's OCP and CWPP as an effective mitigation measure to protect homes from wildfire impacts. Broad public engagement was completed during the 2017-2018 OCP review, and the preparation of the CWPP involved engagement with local, regional and provincial governments, landowner representatives, stakeholders (BC Parks, British Pacific Properties, and BC Hydro), and First Nations.

When the Wildfire Hazard DPA was first proposed in 2020, public notification and a public hearing were completed. In addition, the District held a webinar for the building community and public (April 2022) to review the development guidelines and address any comments or concerns.

Notification for the Public Hearing for this proposed OCP amendment, in addition to a notification to the public, will also include targeted communications to the building community (architects, contractors, developers, etc.) as well as wildfire Qualified Professionals to ensure awareness regarding the proposed amendment to the DPA designation.

6.4 Other Communication, Consultation, and Research

A recommendation in the CWPP is to continually update the DPA to incorporate changes to the wildland urban interface (e.g., expanded urban area) as well as changing climate conditions over time. The District's Fire Department continues to monitor fires that occur in other regions of the Province as well as other countries, most recently, the fires in California, to identify ways to better prepare for a wildfire on the North Shore. Preparedness and prevention are determined to be key tools particularly in relation to the impacts from ember showers in order to provide greater protection to residents and account for current conditions due to increasing climate change impacts.

7.0 Options

7.1 Recommended Option

Council give first reading to the proposed bylaw and set a date for a public hearing.

7.2 Considered Options


- (a) give first reading to the proposed bylaws and set an alternative date (to be specified) for a public hearing; or
- (b) defer consideration of the proposed bylaw amendment upon receipt of additional information (to be specified).

8.0 Conclusion

A Wildfire Hazard DPA is a proactive measure to adapt to climate change and build community resilience overtime to the risk and potential impacts of forest fires. By establishing wildfire hazard management guidelines across all lands in West Vancouver, the District and the community will be better protected from the risk of wildfires and better positioned to minimize loss to properties and structures.

Author: 

Heather Keith, Senior Manager, Climate Action & Environment

Concurrence 

Gord Howard, Fire Chief

Concurrence 

Michelle McGuire, Senior Manager of Current Planning and Urban Design

Appendices:

A-Official Community Plan Bylaw 4985, 2018 Amendment Bylaw 5375, 2025

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District of West Vancouver

**Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018,
Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025**

Effective Date:

District of West Vancouver

Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018, Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025

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District of West Vancouver

Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018 Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025

A bylaw to amend the Official Community Plan to update policy in the “Area-Specific Guidelines” regarding the Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area.

Previous amendments: Amendment bylaws 5008, 5045, 5054, 5057, 5064, 5074, 5076, 5120, 5135, 5128, 5172, 5231, 5222, 5280, 2301, 5335, 5291, and 5362.

WHEREAS the Council of The Corporation of the District of West Vancouver deems it expedient to update area-specific guidelines for the Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area;

NOW THEREFORE, the Council of The Corporation of the District of West Vancouver enacts as follows:

Part 1 Citation

- 1.1 This bylaw may be cited as Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018, Amendment Bylaw No. 5375, 2025.

Part 2 Severability

- 2.1 If a portion of this bylaw is held invalid by a Court of competent jurisdiction, then the invalid portion must be severed and the remainder of this bylaw is deemed to have been adopted without the severed section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, clause or phrase.

Part 3 Amends Schedule ii: Area-Specific Policies and Guidelines

- 3.1 Schedule ii [Area-Specific Policies & Guidelines] of Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 4985, 2018 is amended as follows:

3.1.1 By amending Policy HE6 “Lower Caulfeild Heritage Conservation Area” as follows:

(a) On Page 121 within Policy HE 6, deleting:

“1.2 Healthy trees and vegetation should be retained, taking into account protection of existing views and vistas, and access to sunlight.”

And replacing with:

“1.2 Healthy trees and vegetation should be retained, taking into account protection of existing views and vistas, access to sunlight and professional wildfire hazard protection recommendations.”

(b) “On page 122 within Policy HE 6, deleting:

“2.6 Traditional building materials and exterior finishes should be used – e.g., wood siding, wood-framed windows and doors, natural stone or brick masonry (including chimneys), and cedar shakes and shingles for roofing. Where stucco is proposed, it should be used in combination with other facing materials such as wood, stone, or brick”.

And replacing with:

“2.6 Wildfire resistant building materials and exterior finishes with traditional appearance should be used. Natural stone, brick masonry and/or “wood look” siding (e.g. cementitious, metal, or composite materials) should be used in conjunction with wildfire resistant windows, roofing, and doors. Intermittent use of stucco is preferred and should be used in combination with other fascia materials such as stone, brick or “wood look” siding.”

3.1.2 By amending Policy NE1 “Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area Guidelines” as follows:

(a) On page 89, deleting “All lands shown as shaded yellow in the Wildfire Hazard Development Area Map NE 1 is designated as a Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area”.

(b) On page 89, deleting the exemption clause “New development is exempted from the requirement for a Development Permit if the parcel of land is subject to a

covenant registered on title under Section 219 of the *Land Title Act* with Wildland Fire Management Requirements for construction of new buildings.”

And replacing with:

“New development is exempted from the requirement for a Development Permit under Policy NE 1 if the parcel of land is subject to an area-specific Development Permit Area that addresses wildfire hazards under s488 (1) (a) and (b) of the *Local Government Act*.”

- (c) On page 90, removing the map labelled as “Wildfire Hazard Development Permit Area Designation Map NE 1”

READ A FIRST TIME (MAJORITY VOTE IN THE AFFIRMATIVE) on [Date]

PUBLICATION OF NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING on [Date]

PUBLIC HEARING HELD on [Date]

READ A SECOND TIME (MAJORITY VOTE IN THE AFFIRMATIVE) on [Date]

READ A THIRD TIME (MAJORITY VOTE IN THE AFFIRMATIVE) on [Date]

ADOPTED by the Council (MAJORITY VOTE IN THE AFFIRMATIVE) on [Date].

Mayor

Corporate Officer

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