

Priorities Committee Meeting_Mar12_2019

REPORT FOR INFORMATION**FireSmart Program Update****Report Purpose**

To provide Priorities Committee an update on participation in the FireSmart and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) Program as well as next steps for the program.

Our Prioritized Strategic Goals

Goal 7 - Provide opportunities for public engagement and communication

Goal 8 - Foster an environment for safe communities

Continuously improving the way we work, as one organization, in an agile and sustainable manner

Council and Committee History

December 6, 2018 Council directed Administration to provide a report by the end of the first quarter of 2019 that included an update on participation in the FireSmart Program as well as recommendations for increasing awareness of and participation in the program.

Report

Strathcona County has a significant rural population and wildfire is a risk to our community. Preparing for wildfire is a shared responsibility. To address this risk, Emergency Services (SCES), in partnership with Recreation, Parks & Culture (RPC) and Transportation & Agriculture Services (TAS), have implemented a strategy to reduce the risk from wildfire to our residents and County infrastructure, entitled the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) program. These efforts will safeguard our residents' homes and reduce the dangers faced by our first responders.

The definition of wildland urban interface (WUI) is the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. Through our WUI Program, Strathcona County is demonstrating leadership and, through the partnering with our residents, has lessened the potential impacts from wildfire.

*Strategy 1: Private Property Mitigation –**Rural Residential Wildfire Risk Reduction Program (FireSmart)*County Department Involvement

- SCES: Community Safety Education (CSE) / Fire Prevention & Investigation (FPI) – Program champion / public education / assessments
- TAS – Vegetation treatments
- RPC – Public education

Implemented in 2014

- Annually, SCES identifies 4-6 rural subdivisions where all residences are offered a free wildfire risk assessment on their structure. The information collected from these residential assessments is used to develop a Community Risk Assessment for the subdivision.

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- Where a subdivision is threatened by wildfire, residential and community assessments are provided to aid in the recovery of the community as part of a full cycle response. To date, four subdivisions have been assessed within these criteria.
- The primary recommendation is for residents to implement FireSmart risk reduction steps on their property, particularly within 10 metres of buildings. Relying on public land acting as the firebreak has been found to offer little benefit to protecting rural residences. If concerns exist, an inspection will be done to determine need of mitigating efforts, such as mowing or clearing, public lands.
- Subdivisions that want to take collective action and reduce the community's risk to wildfire are offered additional supports, including education (SCES – wildfire, RPC – arborists) and chipping services (TAS) where a chipper will remove deadfall piles from the community after the residents have pulled the materials onto a public access. In order to receive a chipping event in a community, they must be seeking FireSmart Community Recognition status.

Timelines

April/May: Residential and community assessments

June: Community education events

June-September: Community lead activities

Successes

- To date, over 1,000 individual residential and 50 subdivision assessments have been completed. In 2015, Midway Estates became the first community outside the Forest Protection Area (FPA) to be awarded Community Recognition status and Strathcona County was awarded FireSmart Community Achievement.
- Community Engagement – Due to our increased visibility in the rural areas, SCES is available to connect with residents and provide additional fire-related education, i.e. permitting, rural preparedness, and SC Alerts. In 2019, registration for WUI-based education was moved onto the Click-it platform to increase awareness of scheduled programming.
- Response into a community – Observations on property access, fire pit locations, and civic addressing is also shared with residents that will aid in a more effective response by our crews.

Challenges

- At the individual residential level, the feedback from the program is very positive; however, at the community level, the ability to organize and take collective action to reduce the community's risk has been a challenge.

Summary

Strategy is a low cost/low impact activity for SCES that leads to high impact results.

*Strategy 2: County Property Mitigation –
Parks and Reserve Land (Previously Urban FireSmart)*

County Department Involvement (WUI Working Group)

- SCES: Community Safety Educators (CSE) / Fire Prevention and Investigation – Program champion / public education / assessments
- Planning & Development Services (Environmental Planning) – Assessments
- TAS – Vegetation treatments (Rural)
- RPC – Vegetation treatments (Urban)

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- Information Technology Services (ITS) Geographic Information Systems (GIS) – Interactive map

Implemented in 2016

- WUI Working Group was established with a goal of identifying and mitigating any County parks or reserve land that may impact adjacent private property during a wildfire event.

Timelines

2016 – 50+ parks in the urban area were assessed. Six parks were identified as High Risk with recommendations for mitigation; actions have been completed.

2017 – Sampling of rural parks and reserve land were assessed. Overall, these areas did not pose a significant risk to adjacent properties.

2018 – Three-year assessment cycle was established and expanded to include all parks and community halls in Strathcona County. The interactive ArcGIS WUI map for residents was launched.

2019 – Ongoing assessment and reporting. Assessments are completed annually over July/August.

ArcGIS Interactive WUI Map

Tool was developed as a means to communicate assessment results and ongoing mitigation plans to residents. Residents can also report fire risk observations to SCES.

Successes

- Safety of the community – improved understanding of wildfire risks and mitigation of high risk areas.

Challenges

- None observed.

Summary

Strategy is a low cost/low impact activity for Strathcona County that leads to high impact results.

Next Steps

The County's WUI program has reached maturity. The focus remains on hazard identification and residential education. Awareness of the program remains a challenge. Emergency Services is continuing to work with other departments to promote an internal awareness of the WUI program that we can leverage to our residents. Further promotion of the WUI GIS application to residents would also increase awareness of the County's WUI activities and a means for residents to report any WUI issues.

Other Impacts

Policy: N/A

Legislative/Legal: N/A

Interdepartmental: Emergency Services continues as the leader for the overall WUI strategies in close partnership with Planning & Development Services (PDS), Information Technology Services (ITS), Transportation & Agriculture Services (TAS) and Recreation, Parks & Culture (RPC).

Master Plan/Framework: N/A