

May 31, 2021

To: District of North Saanich Mayor and Council

cc. Tim Tanton, District of North Saanich Chief Administrative Officer
John Trelford, District of North Saanich Director of Emergency Services
Stephanie Munro, District of North Saanich Director of Financial Services

Re: Feedback on 2021 District of North Saanich Community Wildfire Protection Plan

On behalf of the North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee, we are providing our feedback on the 2021 District of North Saanich Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) that is currently before Council for review and decision.

Background. From 2017 to present, the North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee is a collaboration between the Dean Park Estates Community Association (DPECA), North Saanich Residents' Association (NSRA), and the Property Responsibility on the Waterfront (PROW) on wildfire prevention and risk reduction in the District of North Saanich. Through the creation and implementation of the North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee, representatives from DPECA, NSRA, and PROW are diligently working together to advance outreach and advocacy on the issue of wildfire prevention and risk reduction in the municipality. Our volunteerism to date (working in collaboration with the District of North Saanich Director of Emergency Services John Trelford and the North Saanich Fire Department) resulted in a number of tangible actions for the municipality in 2018 and 2019 that focused on public safety awareness and public education – refer to Appendix A for a summary on same.

Note: It is outside our Committee's scope to advise on municipal bylaw regulation development, revisions, and enforcement on wildfire mitigation and preparedness on private properties in the District of North Saanich. Therefore, we will not be commenting on nor endorsing specific wildfire mitigation and preparedness bylaw regulations in this letter.

General Remarks. Overall, the 2021 District of North Saanich CWPP prepared by B.A. Blackwell & Associates Ltd. is comprehensive and robust in nature - providing the District of North Saanich Council and staff with an opportunity to model and demonstrate leadership in the area of public safety, particularly as it relates to wildfire prevention and risk reduction. The 2021 North Saanich CWPP informed our Committee on the broad and complex scope of the wildfire issue and how the District of North Saanich is planning to engage in wildfire management. The North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee acknowledges that an updated North Saanich CWPP improves community safety and reduces risks of property damage as well as provides access to external funding to advance various recommendations and priority activities referenced in said Plan.

Our Committee's feedback focuses on community engagement, financial considerations and budgeting, strategic communications and CWPP monitoring, and organizational capacity (e.g., skills development and training).

Community Engagement

“It is recognized that, to be successful, all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) and individual landowners need to work together to successfully reduce their risk.” (B.A. Blackwell & Associates Ltd., 2021, p. 55).

The North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee appreciated the above mentioned quote in the 2021 North Saanich CWPP which aligns with our Committee's support of a **proactive comprehensive wildfire prevention program for the District of North Saanich**. Corresponding recommendations from the 2021 North Saanich CWPP that reinforce the importance of a proactive program include (i) wildfire hazard and wildfire prevention public education/awareness (e.g., FireSmart); (ii) fuel and vegetation management/treatment in and around municipal, regional and provincial parks and trails – fuel reduction on public lands, especially Horth Hill Regional Park, ŁÁÚ,WELNEW/John Dean Provincial Park and the District's Sumac Park and Cloake Hill; and (iii) communications with residents and all levels of government (First Nations, municipal, provincial, and federal) on wildfire prevention and risk reduction in North Saanich.

Greater public education (about wildfire hazard and wildfire prevention) and related community-based initiatives (e.g., community chipper program) have the potential of engaging North Saanich residents, landowners, and businesses to galvanize and take **voluntary actions** on their properties. Community engagement and capacity building are important as it takes time to develop and sustain relationships. For example, through external grant submissions (e.g., Union of BC Municipalities – UBCM Community Resiliency Investment Program), it would be advantageous to **hold annual FireSmart forums in North Saanich (preferably during the fall and spring seasons)** to coincide with spring and fall cleaning activities being carried out by many local area residents, landowners, and businesses on their respective properties. Overall, there appears to be interest in increasing opportunities for local area residents, landowners, and businesses to reduce fuel loading of woody debris from their properties by accessing chipping programs readily provided in their respective North Saanich neighbourhoods.

In turn, the **District of North Saanich can lead and coordinate tangible fuel and vegetation management/treatment which includes park lands, trails, ditches, road sides, and boulevards in the municipality**. Our Committee appreciates that the District of North Saanich staff are already enhancing their efforts to reduce fuel loads and vegetation on road sides, right of ways, and municipal trails. As noted in the 2021 North Saanich CWPP, "...maintenance activities such as removing standing dead [trees], reducing surface fuels, or additional thinning (overstorey reduction and thinning suppressed conifers or conifer regeneration) should occur as needed to maintain the effectiveness of these treatments/municipal, regional, and provincial parks." (p. 50). Furthermore, it takes a coordinated approach across all orders of government (First Nations, municipal, provincial, and federal) to work alongside communities in effectively planning and implementing emergency management activities such as wildfire prevention and risk reduction (including emergency planning and evacuation) – note: refer to Appendix B for an excerpt of wildfire hazard areas in the District of North Saanich and surrounding areas. Our Committee has benefited to date in establishing and continuing working relationships with the District of North Saanich (North Saanich Council and Fire Chief John Trelford), MLA Adam Olsen, and MP Elizabeth May.

With regards to fuel reduction on public lands, especially Horth Hill Regional Park, ŁÁÚ,WELNEW/John Dean Provincial Park and the District's Sumac Park and Cloake Hill, we ask the District of North Saanich Council request that the Capital Regional District (CRD) and Government of BC take action on the areas of extreme hazard within their jurisdictions (e.g., Horth Hill for the CRD and ŁÁÚ,WELNEW/John Dean Provincial Park for the BC Parks and the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development). These comments are intended to align with the *2011 North Saanich Community Wildfire Protection Plan* which stated the following:

Prioritise fuel management projects based on values-at-risk. Public parklands serving as suitable candidates for fuel management include: Horth Hill Regional Park (reduce/remove surface/ladder fuels along forested trails, and along boundaries of park bordering homes); John Dean Provincial Park (reduce/remove surface/ladder fuels along

forested trails, and along boundaries of park bordering homes, including the interface with Dean Park subdivision, the southern boundary with Central Saanich homes, and the western boundary above North Saanich's Alec Road); Sumac Park, Cloake Hill (reduce/remove surface fuel in this forested park flanking residences at hilly Cloake Hill. Fuel treatment at this park might serve to encourage homeowners in the area to implement fuel management at residential properties)" (Strathcona Forestry Consulting, 2011, p. 90).

We highlighted the above reference point from the 2011 *District of North Saanich Community Wildfire Protection Plan* as said Plan **emphasized a greater roll of public bodies in wildfire risk reduction rather than shifting responsibility of same primarily to landowners, businesses, and residents.** The current 2021 North Saanich CWPP would benefit from increasing the emphasis on the reduction of fuel loading on both public and private lands in the municipality.

With regards to **First Nations-municipal engagement** (as noted in the 2021 North Saanich CWPP), our Committee is aware of the unique work of the BC First Nations' Emergency Services Society (FNESS) in areas such as forest fuel management, emergency management, and fire services. FNESS may have a potential role in assisting to implement select recommendations from the 2021 North Saanich CWPP that relate to First Nations intergovernmental relations between North Saanich, Tseycum and Pauquachin First Nations, and other orders of government. Furthermore, the [Union of BC Municipalities Community-to-Community Program](#) is currently funding First Nations-municipal engagement events which may potentially apply to discussions pertaining to 2021 North Saanich CWPP implementation.

While it is outside our Committee's scope to specifically comment on details pertaining to wildfire mitigation and preparedness bylaw regulations, we fully recognize that any municipal bylaw regulation development, revisions, and enforcement on wildfire mitigation and preparedness may create tension points that directly impact and influence landowners, residents, and businesses in the District of North Saanich. Therefore, **any District policies that may affect how private citizens manage their properties must involve community-wide consultations within and across the municipality's regulatory framework.** For example, our Committee recognizes that the District of North Saanich passed an updated burn permit bylaw to enhance and encourage backyard waste removal as an option to the District's Green Waste drop-off facility. Also, in general terms, discussions on a proposed new Tree Protection Bylaw and enhancing FireSmart programming in the District of North Saanich would greatly benefit from congruency in policy and practice to (i) not create confusion for private citizens and/or (ii) not create situations where landowners, businesses, and residents are less encouraged to engage in FireSmart best practices (e.g., vegetation management) due to unclear regulatory processes.

Financial Considerations and Budgeting

As previously mentioned, our Committee acknowledged that an updated North Saanich CWPP improves community safety and reduces risks of property damage. This also includes providing access to external grants (e.g., UBCM Community Resiliency Investment – CRI Program). Access to funding such as the CRI Program can aid in advancing various wildfire protection operational activities (e.g., fuel/vegetation management) which is important "on the ground" work that can occur in the municipality - in addition to community engagement, awareness, and public education.

An updated CWPP provides the District of North Saanich with a necessary mechanism to apply for FireSmart planning and related wildfire prevention and risk reduction funding in our municipality to improve our community's resiliency to wildfires. Said funding can support FireSmart planning activities for private lands (includes a local FireSmart Rebate Program), develop or advance local planning efforts to mitigate risk from wildfire on private lands in the wildland urban interface, and consider achieving FireSmart Neighbourhood Recognition status from FireSmart Canada. Of note, the

UBCM CRI Program currently references three streams of funding: FireSmart Community Funding and Supports (administered by UBCM), Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction (administered by the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations & Rural Development), and FireSmart Economic Recovery Fund (administered by UBCM).

From a financial perspective, **a multi-phased, multi-year budget is a necessary component of a 2021 North Saanich CWPP implementation plan to invest, track, prepare, and submit grant proposals and allocate related funding to further the municipality’s commitment to wildfire prevention and risk reduction.**

Strategic Communications and CWPP Monitoring

As noted earlier in this letter, our Committee recognizes that **strategic communications with residents and all levels of government (First Nations, municipal, provincial, and federal) on wildfire prevention and risk reduction in North Saanich is needed** as the municipality considers elements of the 2021 North Saanich CWPP. Having said that, in addition to posting the 2021 North Saanich CWPP and corresponding maps on the District of North Saanich website, there is value in **setting up a dedicated web page on the District of North Saanich website to “house” wildfire prevention and risk reduction documents along with the preparation and circulation of assorted reader-friendly public safety backgrounders, infographics, status reports/updates on the District of North Saanich’s progress on the 2021 CWPP - via the District of North Saanich list-serv, social media, and public meetings.** Also, additional FireSmart sign board advertising at strategic road intersections in and around the municipality encouraging citizens to “do their part” with regards to wildfire prevention and risk reduction would be advantageous.

The **District of North Saanich’s Green Waste Drop Off Program is another tangible way to support vegetation management and the reduction of fuel loads in and around properties in North Saanich** – as an effective practice in wildfire prevention and risk reduction. We respectfully raise this item as the District of North Saanich’s Green Waste Drop Off Program did not appear to be referenced in the 2021 North Saanich CWPP. Through discussions with our Committee, requests from local area residents and feedback at the August 2018 Wildfire Prevention Town Hall Meeting, there is on-going interest to review (i) accessibility of the Green Waste Drop Off Program in terms of hours of operation (i.e., increase weekly accessibility to the Green Waste Drop Off Program facility, expand the Green Waste facility hours of operations from 8:00 am – 12:00 noon to 8:00 am – 3:00 pm); and (ii) review the cost to reduce or eliminate the Green Waste Drop Off fees.

Organizational Capacity

There appears to be a keen interest in enhancing the scope of competencies for the North Saanich Fire Department to **include wildfire suppression skills development and related wildfire-specific training (e.g., Local FireSmart Representative training), particularly based on the interface and wildfire risks in the municipality.**

International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) professional development and certification¹ for designated District of North Saanich staff. The professional development of designated District of North Saanich staff to obtain the ISA certification(s) has the potential of adding specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities in informing multi-year municipal planning and operational activities in soil management, identification and selection of trees, installation and establishment of trees, safe work

¹ ISA certification is a voluntary program that tests and certifies a professional level of knowledge and skill in the field of arboriculture. Refer to the ISA website for further information - <https://www.isa-arbor.com/>.

practices, tree biology, pruning, tree diagnosis and treatment, urban forestry, tree protection, and tree risk management. Also, ISA certified District staff can collaborate with other North Saanich Departments on fire load reduction in terms of implementing wildfire prevention and risk reduction activities such as the annual clearing of municipal right of ways, trails, and parks. The North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee is aware of other jurisdictions (e.g., Town of Sidney) that are recognized (formally and informally) for having an ISA certified arborist on staff with favourable results. Hence, we acknowledge the Town of Sidney's understanding of the value-added benefits associated with the ISA certification.

Concluding Remarks

In closing, we call upon the District of North Saanich Mayor and Council to review and consider our feedback expressed in this letter which pertains to collaboration and program development while you also engage in community-wide consultations on the District's regulatory framework in a manner that addresses tension points and endeavours to balance community public safety with private citizens' needs and concerns across a suite of policy priorities in the municipality.

Respectfully,
 Natasha Caverley and Len Tyrrell
 Co-Chairs
 North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee

We have reviewed and agree with the contents outlined in the North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee's letter. DPECA, NSRA, and PROW are deeply committed to maintaining and protecting North Saanich and our neighbours who reside on the Saanich Peninsula.



Peter Jones, President
 Dean Park Estates
 Community Association
 (DPECA)



John Kafka, President
 North Saanich Residents Association
 (NSRA)



David Tonken,
 President
 Property
 Responsibility on the
 Waterfront (PROW)

Brian Goodman,
 Chair
 FireSmart
 Committee -
 PROW

Appendix A: Summary of North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee Activities

- ✓ Advocacy by the North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee in 2017-2018 for the submission of a FireSmart Planning and Activities grant. This grant was awarded to North Saanich in 2018 by the Union of BC Municipalities Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative Program (UBCM SWPI). This resulted in a collaboration with Fire Chief Trelford and our Committee leading to an initial 25+ complimentary FireSmart property assessments being conducted in North Saanich via a coordinated grassroots level Expression of Interest process. Further funding was awarded to the District of North Saanich in 2019 to continue FireSmart planning and related activities;
- ✓ Delivery by the North Saanich Fire Department of FireSmart resource kits to local commercial areas/businesses, wildland urban interface residential areas deemed "high to extreme" risk, Pauquachin First Nation, and Tseycum First Nation;
- ✓ "No smoking" signs posted throughout North Saanich by North Saanich Wildfire Prevention Committee Co-Chair Len Tyrrell and members of the North Saanich Fire Department - particularly in and around municipal parks, trails, and surrounding areas;
- ✓ Via Canada Post, a "Call for Action on Wildfire Prevention" communique was prepared and designed by our Committee and subsequently circulated to all North Saanich residential properties in summer 2018 which contained pertinent information about wildfire issues, actions, and strategies for all of us to voluntarily consider with regards to wildfire prevention and risk reduction in North Saanich. Funds from the North Saanich FireSmart grant assisted with the District-wide circulation of said communique; and
- ✓ Advancement of intergovernmental relations at the provincial and federal levels of government. As such, an August 15, 2018 Wildfire Prevention Town Hall Meeting was held - co-hosted by Saanich-Gulf Islands MP Elizabeth May and Saanich North and the Islands MLA Adam Olsen. Approximately 150 people attended the Town Hall Meeting which featured speakers who discussed lessons learned and wise practices related to climate change adaptation, emergency planning, and wildfires.

Appendix B: Excerpt – Schedule I – Wildfire Hazard Areas District of North Saanich – Official Community Plan

