

## FIRESMART PROGRAM GRANT

### RECOMMENDATION

That Administration proceed with the FireSmart Program grant application, as outlined in Attachment 1 of the July 4, 2023, City Operations report CO01916.

<b>Requested Council Action</b>	Decision required		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>		
<b>CONNECTED</b>	<b>Climate Resilience</b>		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	THRIVE. PRESERVE.		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	Greener as we grow	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	Climate adaptation and energy transition
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Serving Edmontonians		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>		

### Executive Summary

- The Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta is offering a grant through the FireSmart program to develop a Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment.
- The development of a Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment and a future citywide wildfire strategy supports Edmonton's goal of climate resilience and strengthens the City's response to climate change by helping to mitigate the risks of increasingly frequent and intense wildfires.
- Administration has submitted an expression of interest for the FireSmart grant program and has been invited to submit a full project proposal (grant application), which requires written support from City Council. If Council approves the recommendation directing Administration to

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proceed with the application as outlined in Attachment 1, that will be considered Council's written support.

- Pending Council and the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta's approval, the FireSmart grant would fully fund the development of a pilot Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment for the Whitemud planning district, which would support Administration in the future development of a citywide strategy to manage wildfire risk.

## **REPORT**

The increased frequency and intensity of wildfires in recent years, as well as the growth of extreme weather events and a drier climate, have highlighted the need for comprehensive risk mitigation planning. Administration receives and responds to numerous inquiries a year regarding wildfire risk in the City's natural and naturalized areas.

The Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta is offering a grant to develop a Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment. The development of this type of assessment and a future citywide wildfire strategy would improve Edmonton's response to climate change. This aligns with the Climate Resilient Edmonton: Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan's goal of ensuring that Edmontonians and regional partners are informed, prepared for, can respond to and recover from increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather. Learnings from this pilot project could further support the plan's action item of undertaking a wildfire vulnerability and risk study under future climate conditions. A wildfire risk assessment would have a range of positive impacts on public safety, urban forest, climate resilience and biodiversity efforts, should an urban wildfire occur.

In February 2023, Administration submitted an expression of interest to the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta for a FireSmart Program grant. In total, \$40,000 was requested, which would cover the full assessment cost. The Association approved the expression of interest and the City was asked to move forward with a full project proposal (Attachment 1). The full proposal requires written support from City Council to demonstrate that Council is aware and committed to the project. If Council approves the recommendation directing Administration to proceed with the application as outlined in Attachment 1 of this report, that will satisfy this requirement.

### **Current Wildfire Risk Mitigation**

Administration is leading projects to ensure that management practices are in place to minimize the probability and severity of wildland fires in Edmonton, in alignment with the National Research Council's National Guide for Wildland Urban Interface Fires. This involves understanding wildfire risk in Edmonton and identifying higher risk areas, as well as assessment and removal of excessive build-up of organic material in natural areas that could fuel wildfires.

In addition to managing risk in wildland and urban areas, Administration focuses on communicating risk to residents through burning restrictions and fire bans. Firefighters are prepared to respond to wildfires through internal training programs and special wildland firefighting resources and equipment. Using industry standard best practices, the Emergency

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Operations Centre can be mobilized to coordinate resources and support response and recovery activities.

### **Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment Pilot**

Administration's grant application focuses on a pilot Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment specifically for the Whitemud District, which is one of the fifteen districts in Edmonton's District Network as outlined in The City Plan. Using funding from the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, this district was selected as the ideal location for the pilot because it contains a large amount of forested, natural areas and has a higher wildfire risk than other districts. Previous fire risk studies that have been completed in the area will provide additional insight. This pilot is a starting point for developing a citywide wildfire risk strategy, which will provide much needed direction for managing wildfire risk in Edmonton, including:

- Public education and outreach.
- Creation of a Wildfire Resilience Committee to improve inter-agency coordination and empower communities to become more wildfire resilient.
- Cross-jurisdictional management and understanding of fire risk.

Pending Council and the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta's approval, Administration will deliver a final Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment in Q2 2024.

Administration intends to move forward with the pilot project and future citywide strategy even without grant funding; however, the need to utilize existing budget may impact project plans or timelines.

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

If Council approves the grant application to the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, the City could be the recipient of a \$40,000 grant to fund the development of a pilot Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment.

As an outcome of the pilot, the ongoing annual hazard mitigation assessment can be covered through existing budgets. However, any additional work or expansion of the citywide wildfire risk strategy will be reviewed once the pilot is completed with considerations of potential funding requirements.

### **Legal Implications**

If the City is the recipient of a \$40,000 grant from the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, the City may be required to enter into a grant agreement, which may place certain legal obligations on the City with respect to the use of the grant funding and reporting requirements, among others.

## **COMMUNITY INSIGHT**

The University of Alberta completed a Fire Risk Model for the City of Edmonton in 2021. This analysis was the first step to understanding the Wildland Urban Interface fire risk in Edmonton and how it is projected to change over time as the climate changes. The model indicated that fire risk will increase over time.

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Stakeholders of the pilot Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment include businesses, organizations, Indigenous communities, internal staff, utility and other companies. Development and implementation of the future wildfire risk strategy would involve additional engagement. If the City receives the grant funding, Administration plans to engage with stakeholders during the development of the assessment for the pilot, specifically those involved with land-use planning, emergency response, and land management. Communications with other stakeholders may occur during the implementation phase of the assessment to ensure that the community understands the importance of wildfire resiliency.

## **GBA+**

The City of Edmonton has a high potential for large scale wildfires, in part due to the vast amount of forested and grassland within City limits. Wildfire risk disproportionately affects individuals living near or in these areas. Exposure to wildfire smoke also poses greater health risks to those with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions, seniors and those who work outside.

The development of the Wildfire Hazard and Risk Assessment and future citywide wildfire risk strategy will include input from various stakeholder groups to help identify and mitigate wildfire risks to different populations.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. FireSmart Program Grant Application
2. Fire Rescue Services Letter of Support