

Request for Regional council Consideration

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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda Item
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon Thursday) | <input type="checkbox"/> Added Item
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office by Noon Monday) | <input type="checkbox"/> Request from the Floor |
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Date of Meeting: August 22, 2023

Subject: Wildland urban interface preparedness strategies

Motion for Regional Council to Consider:

Halifax Regional Council request the CAO prepare a staff report regarding wildland urban interface preparedness strategies for Halifax, including recommendations on the following:

1. Identify and create a prioritized list of communities within the wildland urban interface and intermix areas requiring addition of emergency evacuation routes and dry hydrants, with Halifax Emergency Management, Halifax Fire & Emergency, and Planning and Development to compile data to complete wildfire risk assessments and identify obstacles to completing these projects;
2. Review development standards and propose requirements for consideration regarding secondary evacuation routes and emergency water sources for all new and expanding large developments;
3. Review and make recommendations regarding improved resilient building codes, land use bylaws, homeowner education and other means that would encourage and require home hardening using low and non-combustible construction material to Fire Smart standards, Fire Smart building designs, defensible space standards for landscaping around homes, appropriate vegetation, tree species, and fire-fuel management program on public land, and public education and community action programs promoting fire risk awareness, and;
4. Present Council with options within its control for immediate action and a list of requests for the Province regarding either requests for additional powers or immediate action on the part of the Provincial Government, and;
5. Establishment of a joint working group with provincial and municipal staff to collaborate on collective action towards wildland fire mitigation and risk reduction in HRM, and;
6. Review of all current large development plans to confirm that secondary evacuation routes and planning for emergencies are incorporated;
7. Explore options for fulsome community wildfire response planning.

Reason:

Other jurisdictions that have seen a marked increase in wildfires or brushfires governments have had to make hard decisions to better protect residents lives and property. In California and Australia, to name two, new standards for construction materials, landscaping, and creating fire breaks or defensible areas around homes are now mandated by law.

In Canada, the Fire Smart standard is maintained by the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. They write: *“Wildland fires are a natural part of our ecosystems. Without them, the landscape loses its diversity. Wildland fires recycle nutrients, help plants reproduce, and create a mosaic of vegetation that provide habitats for a variety of wildlife. By extending our lifestyles and communities further into forested areas, also referred to as the Wildland Urban Interface, we become more exposed to the danger of wildland fire, and this may put your home at risk. It is possible, however, to live safely with this natural event!”*

Utilizing DNRR, HRM EMO and HRFE’s considerable data on fire risk in the wildland urban interface will allow HRM to identify large areas that require remediation, both in terms of emergency secondary egress and dry wells, but also in terms of encouraging or requiring renovation and

If you and your home are well prepared, you stand a better chance of surviving a wildfire. The guide explains ways of making your property less vulnerable to bushfire attack.

On August 8, 2013, HRM’s Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee received a presentation and report by Ellen Whitman, Dalhousie University, “Future Wildfire Risk in the HRM Wildland-Urban Interface Under Climate Change.” This report is one in a series of reports on the wildfire risks in HRM and the need to institute changes to better manage, mitigate and prepare for wildland urban and rural interface (WUI) fires within the changing climate of the Acadian Forest Region (AFR).

<https://www.readyforwildfire.org/prepare-for-wildfire/get-ready/defensible-space/>

<https://firesmartcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Begins-at-Home-Guide-WEB.pdf>

<https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/public/download.jsp?id=72279>

Outcome Sought:

A report with recommendations for consideration by Council

Councillors Waye Mason and Pam Lovelace

District 7 and 13