FireSmart Community Assessment Report

Community Name: North Oaks Community. BC Strata plan 23063

Date of Assessment: 2024/ 02/ 26

Assessor Name: Bill Higgs, SCRD Wildfire Mitigation Specialist.

David McIlwraith SCRD FireSmart coordinator

Accompanying personnel: Al Naseth and Karen Foster represented the Strata and attended for the walk about

1) ***Introduction:*** The FireSmart Program is an effective management approach for preserving the aesthetic qualities of wildland living while reducing the potential for wildfire losses. The following report is intended as a resource to be used by the North Oaks Community for creating a FireSmart Community Plan. The plan developed from this information would be implemented in a collaborative manner and updated as needed. The FireSmart Community Assessment Report provides a written evaluation of the wildfire hazard, the prevailing condition of structures, adjacent vegetation and other factors affecting the FireSmart status of the site.

2) ***Situation Overview and Home Ignition Zone Concept***: The North Oaks Community is located in an Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) fire environment. This assessment addresses the wildfire-related characteristics of the existing site and surrounding area. It examines the area's exposure to wildfire as it relates to ignition potential.

A Structure burns because of its relationship with flammable elements within an area called the home ignition zone. It is comprised of the structure and its immediate surroundings. To avoid destruction, a homeowner must reduce the homes susceptibility to fire. This can be accomplished by interrupting the pathways that fire takes to reach a home by changing aspects of the home, nearby vegetation, or local infrastructure. This is commonly done by removing, reducing, or re-arranging vegetation around the home to limit fire intensity and the likelihood of ignition by embers, flames or radiant heat.

Included in this report are observations made during a site visit.

3) ***Possible Wildland Fire scenario*:** Wildfire behaviour depends on the fuel type and fuel conditions, the weather conditions prior to and during the fire, and topography. The following generalizations about fire behaviour, fuel, weather and topography apply to all communities:

Fine fuels ignite more easily and spread fire faster with higher intensities than larger diameter fuels. For a given fuel, the more there is and the more continuous it is, the faster the fire spreads and the higher the intensities. Fine fuels take a shorter time to burn out than coarser fuels.

High temperatures and low relative humidity are the key weather conditions affecting the moisture content of the dead and living forest vegetative fuels. Smaller diameter fuels (needles, dead leaves) dry faster, but over time all fuels dry out and become more flammable. As more fuel dries out, the potential for fire ignitions and extremely intense, fast moving fire increases.

The greater the wind speed, the faster the fire spreads and the greater fire intensity becomes. Higher winds also carry burning embers further towards communities from wildland fires. Topography enhances fire behaviour. Fire spreads faster on slopes than on level ground. Terrain features such as slope, valleys, and small draws channel wind to affect the direction of fire spread. In general, the steeper the slope, the higher the uphill fire spread and intensity.

More specifically, for the North Oaks Community site:

Annual weather exposes your community to periods when a wildland fire could spread quickly, escape initial control actions and threaten the site. There are ample opportunities for human, mechanical or environmentally caused wildfire ignitions in this area that could lead to wildfire threat to the area. Gibsons can be an extremely windy location and as described would affect fire behaviour of fuels both in and around the area.

4) ***Site Description***: The North Oaks Community is situated in the upper part of Gibsons near the base of Elphinstone Mountain. The entire complex is surrounded by residential and some commercial construction. The main entrance is off of North Rd with secondary access off Kiwanis way. The site consists of 10 buildings that contain 26 units of housing. When built in 1991 the buildings were fairly well constructed and feature metal gutters and metal soffits. The roofs are rated asphalt, however the siding is made of vinyl. The site rep states that upgrades are ongoing and that the community is interested in being proactive and establishing a five year plan to improve the wildland fire safety of the site. The site has been beautifully landscaped but this really needs attention since it has now overgrown to a large degree. Bark mulch has been incorporated into the design as has conifer hedging and trees. This was common practice in this era. The main electrical distribution building is located centrally within the site and supplies power to all homes.

It must be noted and acknowledged that the residents obviously share a lot of pride in their community. The homes and property are well cared for. It is also noted that the Gibsons main fire station is very close by. Although this is a significant benefit, it is not a cause for relaxing any fire prevention measures that are suggested within this report.

5) ***Assessment Process***: The property was assessed during a site visit by SCRD FireSmart representatives Bill Higgs and David McIlwraith. They were accompanied by the above-mentioned representatives. Their time and ability to provide local and accurate information was invaluable in this process. A thorough walk about was undertaken with observations made as follows.

6) ***Observations and Issues:***

What we observed was fairly typical for this type of modern residential strata neighbourhood. As mentioned before, this community with the exception of the siding. has been built to fairly high fire resistive standards.

1. All units have fire rated roof materials (Asphalt)

2. All units have non combustible gutters, with clean roof and gutters.

3. None of the units have non combustible fire rated vents and 3mm wire screening.

4. None of the units have non combustible or ignition resistant siding.

5. Approximately 50% of homes have 15 cm (6 inches) non combustible vertical ground to siding clearance.

6. Only a few of the units have combustible decks. Most are concrete.

7. All the units have tempered or multi -paned windows.

8. ***Immediate Zone.*** The area up to 1.5 meters (5 ft) from the ground level exterior footprint of the structure, including any attachments or extensions, must feature a non-combustible surface with no combustible debris, materials, fences or plants present. Having said this, perhaps 10% of the homes have treated non combustible surface in this area. This is seen as significant issue and an area of priority for remediation.

9. ***Intermediate zone.*** The area 1.5 meters to 10 meters from the homes must have no coniferous (evergreen) forest vegetation. It must feature Surface vegetation of grass less than 10 centimetres long or non-combustible surface and low flammability (deciduous) plants. There must be no woodpiles and or other combustible materials, stored vehicles or outbuildings not meeting Firesmart guidelines. It was noted that again, only 10 to 25% homes have treated intermediate zone. In fact the presence of cedar hedging within this intermediate zone is seen as a significant threat and presents a clear and present danger to the complex.

10. ***Extended zone***. The area 10 to 30 meters from the complex is not applicable to this site since it is outside of your area of jurisdiction. However, if cooperation with neighbouring properties is possible then some remediation work could see an overall benefit to the complex. Typically, this area would feature separated coniferous forest vegetation, reduced surface vegetation such as dead branches, long grass etc. All flammable (coniferous) shrubs should be space away from coniferous trees. Low lying coniferous branches must be trimmed up 2 meters from ground.

Additional considerations The Western and Southern boundary of this community have an extended hedge of cedar shrubs, cedar fencing and coniferous trees. In addition to this, the main electrical disbursement building is surrounded by cedar hedging. This is a piece of critical infrastructure and if a fire knocked out this service the effect on the residents would be immediate and prolonged. This is seen as an area that needs remediation as outlined below.

Management plan. Although no management plan is in place it is understood that this assessment will provide direction in this regard. A lot of Strata groups we work with use these recommendations to form up a budget that supports a 5-year landscape improvement plan.

The FireSmart program seeks to create a sustainable balance that allows communities to live safely whilst maintaining environmental harmony and desired aesthetic values. The program aims to provide property owners with the information required to make knowledgeable decisions about landscaping and other aspects of property and structure management on their individual properties. This report provides recommendations for consideration by your group to mitigate the issues identified above and decrease the risk of wildfire loss. ***It is recommended that:***

1. Reduce or eliminate any combustibles within the immediate (5ft) zone. This includes replacing the bark mulch used in garden beds and alcoves against the building, with crushed rock or gravel. There is added benefit to using crushed rock as mulch. For one, you can use a leaf blower to clean off leaves and other combustibles thereby lowering maintenance costs, plus there is the added security that if someone is walking next to your building, say at night, that you can hear them stepping on the stones. The broad leaf shrubbery in this area needs aggressive pruning as well.

2. As much as it may seem excessive, the cedar hedges, trees and shrubs that have been commonly used in landscaping and for privacy for decades, must be aggressively pruned or better yet removed. This is the new reality of climate change and must be addressed with firm conviction towards public safety. This is the case for both the Southern and western flank of the property. An extreme example would be near the main electrical building where the hedges are so overgrown and close to the structure that a fire here would cut power to the entire site. This is a ***significant risk*** to the rest of the complex.

3. The cedar fence panels that create privacy screening at the rear of most units need attention. The panel that attaches to the house should be made of non-combustible material such as hardi plank or expanded metal etc. there are a lot of alternatives on the market now.

4. The exterior vents on the building should have 3mm wire screen installed to keep out embers and flying brands. This is not the case for the dryer vents though, they must not be screened.

I understand that these recommendations might need further explanation or justification to a larger group and I am certainly willing to revisit your site to go over this with the other decision makers. As mentioned, community cooperation is encouraged and vital to accomplish some or all of these recommendations and we offer our services and continued support to your community.

This report was prepared by Bill Higgs (ECFO) SCRD appointed Wildfire Mitigation Specialist.

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Bill Higgs