

To: Chief Administrative Officer **Date:** August 16, 2021
From: Chris Gruenwald, Director of Forestry
Subject: **Steelhead Community Emergency Planning Preparation**

Recommendation(s)

1. That the City provides \$6,525 in funding to the Steelhead Community to cover costs associated with Emergency Planning and Preparation; and
2. That the funding comes from the Forestry Reserve.

Executive Summary

Staff from the Forestry and Fire Departments recommends that the City provides \$6,525 in funding to the Steelhead Community (Community), to cover the costs of radio rentals and electrical upgrades at the Community Hall for backup generator power.

Purpose

This report is intended to provide Council with background and rationale as to why financial assistance to the Steelhead Community for emergency planning is recommended.

Background

The location of the Steelhead Community makes it vulnerable to a variety of natural disasters, including wildfire, wind storms, and earthquakes. With the effects and impacts of climate change becoming more visible in our Community, proper emergency planning is essential – this is particularly important for Steelhead, due to its location to high risk interface forests and access issues into and out of the Community.

Staff has had a number of discussions and meetings with the Community over the summer regarding emergency planning, which was spurred by the recent wildfire issues in the Province, particularly the devastation in Lytton. Community members are extremely worried about wildfire starting in the area, and are working hard to be better prepared to deal with such a scenario.

There are two main areas of concern in terms of emergency planning that have been identified for the Community at this time:

1. Communication systems – cellular phone coverage is limited to non-existent in Steelhead and there is a risk of phone lines being disrupted in the event of natural disaster
2. Hydro Power – the Steelhead Community Hall would be utilized as a staging area and command centre for the Community and emergency response personnel, and is at risk of losing power in the event of a natural disaster.

Based on the concern areas highlighted above, staff has recommended the following for Steelhead at this time:

1. Rental of handheld VHF radios and VHF base station radio for the Community Hall
2. Completion of electrical upgrades at the Community Hall so that it can run on a backup generator

Discussion and Analysis

The Fire Chief has recommended radio rentals for 2021, for several reasons:

1. Need to test and confirm that radio communication is effective in Steelhead, which can be challenging on account of the terrain in the Community; and
2. Rentals provide working, well maintained equipment annually, where purchasing tends to result in maintenance issues, leading to equipment not working properly when needed in an emergency.

The Fire Department has obtained a quote for a monthly rental on 6 – handheld radios, 6 – chargers, and a VHF base radio system for the Community Hall. The total monthly cost for this equipment is \$600/month. The plan is to rent these for the remainder of the Fire Season, which ends at the end of October, so the total cost for rentals is \$1,800. The total cost to purchase this equipment is \$4,431.

The Forestry Department has obtained a quote for electrical upgrades to the Community Hall, including wiring and installation of a transfer switch and plug for generator power. The total cost of this installation is \$4,725.

The total cost for 2021 is \$6,525 and would be paid from the Forestry Reserve.

Staff will work with the Community on testing the radio communication system this year, and if it's effective, will consider a purchase of radios in 2022.

A purchase of a generator is not required, as the City and/or Province has multiple mobile units available that can power the Community Hall in the event of an emergency.

Council Goals/Objectives

This funding is consistent with the following Council Goals and Objectives:

1. Safe, Liveable Community
2. Secure Finances, Assets, and Infrastructure

Financial Implications

The current balance of the Forestry Reserve, to June 30th is \$2,963,565. The Forestry Department is poised to have a record year in 2021, and we anticipate the Forestry Reserve will be at or above \$4 million dollars at year end. In addition, our most recent timber sale, located in the Steelhead Community, will bring in over \$3 million dollars this year. This investment represents a positive means to give back to the Community where harvesting activities are taking place.

Communication

If approved, we will inform the Steelhead Community Association and will work with the vendors to schedule the radio rentals and electrical upgrades for the Community Hall. We will also schedule a cheque ceremony with the Steelhead Community that will be shared to the City's social medial channels, as a means to continue to communicate to residents the benefits of the Municipal Forest.

Summary and Conclusion

Staff is recommending that the City provides \$6,525 in funding to the Steelhead Community to cover the costs of radio rentals and electrical upgrades at the Community Hall for backup generator power. Funding will come from the Forestry Reserve, which the balance is currently forecast to be around \$4 million dollars at the end of 2021. This funding will greatly assist the Steelhead Community in emergency planning and represents a great example of community forestry in action.

Report Prepared by: Chris Gruenwald, Director of Forestry
Reviewed by: Mark Goddard, Fire Chief
Approved for Inclusion: Mike Younie, Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment(s)

Attachment A: Radio Rental Quote
Attachment B: Radio Purchase Quote
Attachment C: Community Hall Electrical Upgrades Quote