



## City Council News **May 16, 2018**

### **Floods and wildfires – our new normal?**

As I listen to the daily news stories about this season's record setting floods it's easy to forget our forests are experiencing drought and that fire bans are already in effect. Against this backdrop, I read with interest the newly released report on last year's floods and wildfires ([bcfloodfirereview.ca](http://bcfloodfirereview.ca)).

Last fall, Premier Horgan asked former Liberal MLA and Cabinet Minister, George Abbott and Hereditary Chief of the Sq'ewá:lxw (Skawahlook) First Nation, Maureen Chapman to conduct a comprehensive review of last year's flood and wildfire events and make recommendations to the government about any changes the Province should undertake to mitigate the risks associated with these natural disasters, better prepare for future disasters, and better help communities to recover from such events.

Entitled "Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia," Mr. Abbott and Chief Chapman state at the outset of their report that "(t)he challenges faced in 2017 may not have been an anomaly, but a strong indication of a new normal our province and planet now face due to the unpredictable and increasingly volatile impacts of climate change."

Given we are experiencing even more unprecedented flooding this spring before the high snowpack starts to melt off, it certainly looks like our "new normal" is settling in with a vengeance. Consequently, the provincial government needs to act swiftly to implement the recommendations contained in last week's report.

Of note for our community is the recommendation in the report that the Province needs to be more serious about protecting communities from the threat of wildfires and that it should consider giving interface communities area-based tenures (e.g. community forest licenses). The City of Quesnel formally requested an interface community forest tenure over two years ago, but the process of allocating timber rights in the context of a reduce annual allowable cut is a major stumbling block to getting such a tenure, a point the new report fails to address.

The Flood and Wildfire report also states that the Province must undertake significantly more fuel management treatments in our forests to mitigate against catastrophic wildfires. The previous government failed miserably on this front, as noted in

a BC Auditor General's report released earlier this year ("Managing Climate Risks"). Hopefully, the current government will actually undertake a comprehensive fuel treatment strategy in earnest this time.

But, there are other systemic issues last week's report barely touches on or merely makes passing mention of. For example, there is incredible frustration within local government with the process for obtaining funding and approval of community protection and fuel treatment plans under the current Strategic Wildfire Prevention Initiative (SWPI). The City of Quesnel has been trying to get our new Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) approved through this process for over a year now, but, despite continually getting feedback from forest professionals that we have one of the best technical plans ever submitted to the SWPI program, the BC Wildfire Service continues to drag its heels in approving a new CWPP for the Quesnel area.

Without an approved plan we can't get approval for any treatments under that plan, meaning we can't begin the process of actually protecting our community from the very real threats of this year's and future year's wildfire threats.

If climate change induced catastrophic natural disasters are our "new normal," then we desperately need a new normal from government agencies: faster and more courageous decision-making. It's all well and fine to have a new report with new recommendations, but if government agencies are not forced to be more responsive to change then we'll never get the unprecedented response we need to the unprecedented challenges we face.

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