



Subject: Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee Recommendation - Request for Interim Housing

Wood Buffalo Recovery Committee Recommendation:

THAT Administration be directed to submit a request to the Government of Alberta for interim, pet-friendly housing units with three or more bedrooms to be made available to residents affected by the wildfire; and

THAT all associated costs be included in the Municipality's request for funding from the Government of Alberta's Disaster Recovery Fund to compensate for extraordinary costs arising from the wildfire.

Summary:

Interim housing serves as a bridge for residents requiring accommodation between the time of re-entry to the region and when their destroyed or damaged homes can be occupied or rebuilt. Considering the experiences of the 2011 Slave Lake wildfire, this type of housing is expected to be needed for up to three years. Based on current information, the existing rental units available in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo will not meet demand; transitional units that have three or more bedrooms and are pet-friendly would fill the gap.

Background:

The wildfire that forced the evacuation of Fort McMurray on May 3, 2016, destroyed approximately 2,400 structures, of which 1,928 were residential. As well, 119 residential buildings are identified as restricted use, 46 are unsafe to enter/occupy or evaluate, and 700 are in restricted areas. That brings the total number of destroyed or damaged buildings (including those with apartment or condo units) to 2,793. A total of 3,200 units cannot be occupied (not including apartments that are being cleaned and will be habitable in the near future). During reconstruction, the displaced residents of those units will require interim housing.

Budget/Financial Implications:

Administration is to be directed to include all costs associated with its request to the Government of Alberta for funding to compensate for extraordinary costs arising from the wildfire.

Rationale for Recommendations:

A preliminary Red Cross survey conducted in May 2016 found a need for accommodation with three or more bedrooms, with 29.6 percent of respondents (466 households) requesting such units. A subsequent survey conducted by Syncrude in June 2016 shows this trend continuing with 32 percent of respondents (82 employees) requiring units with three or more bedrooms.

Information from the Oil Sands Community Alliance also indicates demand for three- to four-bedroom units before the September 2016 school year begins.

There is a limited number of three- to four-bedroom units in the Municipality. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, there were only 154 three- to four-bedroom units (5% of private apartment units) in October 2015.

The Red Cross survey found that 30% of respondents who need housing (468 households) require pet-friendly accommodation. The number of such units in the Municipality is unknown, but anecdotal reports suggest that few are available.

Another Syncrude survey conducted in June 2016 found that 723 employees (24% of respondents) are being prevented from returning to the region for various reasons, a leading one – cited by 214 – being residences that cannot be occupied. Similarly, according to information collected by the Red Cross from clients currently in temporary emergency lodging, 23% (21 respondents) are having issues finding new rentals.

Strategic Plan Linkages:

Pillar 1 – Building Responsible Government

Pillar 4 – Building an Effective Land Strategy