

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY – HERE FOR YOU

Prepared by: Jordan Redshaw

**SUBJECT: Firebreak Restoration and Trail Rehabilitation/Encroachments Feedback**

Location: Shell Place

Date Held: 6-8 p.m. on June 21, 2018

Setup: World Café

Staff: Erin O'Neill, Jordan Redshaw, Jenelle Hart, Erin Fleming, Adam Hardiman, Jerry Neville, Matthew Harrison, Cameron Redshaw, Stephen Fudge, Tatiana Moroz, Serena Quinn, Jody Butz, Brad McMurdo, Chris Booth

**Goal:**

Act on Council's direction to meet with residents with properties adjacent to firebreak areas and gather feedback on the project.

**Communications:**

- News Release (picked up by local media)
- McMurray Matters
- Facebook
  - 22,272 people saw the post
  - 60,964 was the number of times the post was viewed
  - 1,004 people engaged with the post
- Twitter
  - 4,583 people saw the post
  - 79 unique people engaged with the post

**Key Metrics:**

- 831 properties are adjacent to firebreak project areas
- 216 were found to be encroaching on municipal land
- 86 residents attended the June 21 Here For You session
- 15 residents submitted a project-related query to [recovery@rmwb.ca](mailto:recovery@rmwb.ca)
- 10 project-related queries came through PULSE dating back to January 1, 2017
- 12 project-specific Here for You sessions were held in 2016/2017
- 23 Here For You sessions included firebreak discussions

## **General Observations:**

- Attendees expressed gratitude for the Here For You event being held
- Many attendees did not understand that, for a variety of reasons, the Municipality is unable to incorporate all resident feedback into projects.
- Many attendees were unaware that they could submit specific questions to PULSE or [recovery@rmwb.ca](mailto:recovery@rmwb.ca), and were not aware that one-on-one meetings can be scheduled with municipal staff

## **What we heard: Commonly-held beliefs**

- The fire was a one-off situation
- This is an overreaction because of the wildfire
- The 30 metre distance won't matter because the wildfire jumped the Athabasca
- A 30 metre firebreak would not stop a fire from leaving the Birchwood trails
- 30 metres is far too excessive because fire would behave differently in Birchwood trails than around city perimeter
- A firetruck will never be able to access the firebreak regardless
- We have to accept risk as a community – we live in the middle of a boreal forest.
- The Municipality is not aware of the project's environmental impacts (water table, slope stability)

## **What we heard: Concerns**

- Primary concerns shared by multiple residents who attended the Here For You session:
  - Loss of privacy
    - Want privacy but don't want to waste space on their own property by planting trees there
    - People walk too close to private property lines
    - Sporadic planting of trees will not provide enough privacy
    - Elevated noise levels
  - Decreased property value
  - Illegal OHV use
    - OHVs operating at excessive speed
    - Lack of enforcement
    - Calling RCMP has had no effect
    - Firebreaks have made a bad situation worse
    - Signage needs to be replaced
    - Firebreaks have easy access for OHVs (example: Falcon Drive access)
  - Drainage/ponding Issues
    - Walnut Crescent
    - Killdeer Way
    - Falcon Drive
    - Non-related: Beacon Hill Drive
  - Area will become an off-leash dog park
  - The RMWB will not be able to maintain firebreaks
  - Pace of rehabilitation project/equipment working in area has been disruptive
  - If a neighbour is allowed to encroach, then other residents will also do the same

## What we heard: Questions

- Encroachments:
  - Why does the firebreak have to be 30 metres wide and not narrower?
  - Wood Buffalo lots are encroaching as well - will they be asked to move sheds etc?
  - Can we purchase the encroachments?
  - Can we adopt the encroachments?
  - If one neighbour is allowed to stay on the encroachment can all the neighbours use the same amount of encroachment?
  - Will we be notified prior to being fined if we need to move back and be given a timeline for trees to be replanted?
  - Does the RMWB even know how much it encroaches on other public land, such as provincial land?
  - I believe Waterways properties had their fences pushed out. Are they getting special treatment?
  - What about all encroachments in the municipality? Shouldn't all encroachments be enforced?
  - What if the encroachment was there when they bought the property?
  - Will the RMWB be making residents move their encroaching fences?
  - We have a house in Dickinsfield and we have an encroachment agreement with the Municipality from the 1980s. What will be done for us?
  - Can residents buy the property behind their place from the RMWB?
  - Would the RMWB consider a variance?
- Trees:
  - What is the plan and schedule for tree planting?
  - Why were some trees left while others were taken down?
  - Would the RMWB consider allowing residents to plant trees up to 3 metres outside of their property line?
  - Why is the firebreak scope inconsistent with its application? Ex. trees left in some areas and not others.
- FireSmart:
  - Unfair application of FireSmart principles; why are other areas not receiving the same treatment?
  - Why was the whole community not FireSmarted before the fire?
- OHVs:
  - Does the RCMP have capacity to safely catch OHVs?
- General:
  - Can HFY hours be adjusted to accommodate shift workers?
  - Will the areas behind Lindstrom Cr that was left unfinished from Timberlea Sewer Upgrade be completed?

## What we heard: Suggestions

- Primary Suggestions:
  - Sporadic trees within the 0-30 metre zone could help with OHVs, wind, stability, privacy, drainage, can still be easily mowed/maintained
  - Trails should be set back
  - Ensure grass is maintained
  - Remediate drainage issues
  - Municipality should negotiate with residents regarding the scope of the project; type of trees, density of planting
- Encroachment:
  - If an encroachment is just a few metres into the 30 metre barrier, just leave it
  - The Municipality should have fixed this issue years ago
  - The Municipality should sell the land to people that are encroaching and conduct yearly inspections to ensure residents are in compliance with fire safety rules
  - Sell and/or tax me for the encroached land
  - Allow people to apply for easements
  - Make a consistent decision; should be the same for everyone (encroachments and firebreaks)
  - Tax me on my shed that's on the encroachment
  - Sell the land (currently being encroached on) to residents and make them maintain it
  - Allow residents to purchase the greenspace behind their homes with obligation they be maintained for fire safety
  - Draft encroachment agreements for residents to use the land if they cannot buy it
  - Allow residents to extend property lines in areas where firebreak is more than 30 metres
  - Don't paint everyone with same brush, use a lot-specific approach
  - Allow residents to plant trees in close proximity to property line (2 metres)
  - We think you should keep properties the same and ask us to maintain properties based on FireSmart principles and guidelines.
- Trees and Vegetation:
  - Plant trees near benches to provide shaded seating
  - Plant trees within the 0-30 metre zone
  - Reduce the 30 metres to 10 metres
  - Decrease width to 20 metres
  - Decrease width to 10 metres
  - Decrease width based on negotiations with residents
  - 30 metres is a good distance
  - Cannot believe that people want trees right up to their property line; huge safety concern and liability
  - Plant trees in small groups
  - Plant trees to absorb the water
  - Consider planting fruit trees or berry shrubs that would benefit the community
  - Use hydroseeding method to increase speed of grass growth
  - Consider planting wildflowers

- Plant trees beside the trail (provide “forest” feel to the trail and increase privacy)
  - Plant taller trees beside the trails
  - Any remaining trees should not be cut down
  - Trails should be set back
  - Firebreak behind Signal Bay looks amazing; grateful for the grass to have grown
  - Create more dog parks so people won’t take dogs on walks off-leash
  - Make sure when you plant new trees they are planted closer together
  - Areas that have been seeded should be fenced off to allow grass to grow
- OHVs:
    - Speed/Trail cameras with night capabilities
    - Increased fines and ability to seize vehicles
    - Block access to firebreaks
    - Ensure responsible enforcement teams have proper equipment to catch offenders
    - Focus on Tower Rd/Confederation Dr access points
    - Confusion from dispatchers over responsibility (Bylaw or RCMP)
    - Trails crossing regulated water bodies; no enforcement of provincial Water Act
    - Trails were not maintained after the firebreaks were established
    - No accountability from OHV users to clean garbage
    - New staging areas required
    - Real estate agents should not be promoting illegal OHV access as a selling feature
    - Need to develop OHV masterplan in consultation with residents
    - Improve controlled access points with physical barriers
- Drainage
    - Additional drainage ditch with rocks in it (Killdeer)
    - Build berms, help with water and noise reduction
    - Build a berm
      - Create separation from trails
      - At least 2 metre tall berm
      - Berm will offer more privacy than trees
      - Plant trees on it
    - Properly constructed swale
    - Ensure drainage concerns are addressed prior to trail construction
    - Contractors should have proper surveying done to address grading issues
- General Suggestions
    - Provide a rendering of what the finished product might look like
    - Negotiate with residents to create solutions for privacy, wind, slope; make everyone happy
    - Please take a neighbourhood-based approach to the issue, work with each resident to find a solution
    - Explore many alternatives to provide privacy
    - The Municipality needs more dog parks

- Develop community gardens on firebreaks near access points/trailheads
- Council:
  - Council should be engaging with residents on this topic outside of Council meetings
  - Council should be attending HFY sessions
  - Council should not be waiting until July 10 to discuss firebreak concerns
  - Council should not make a final decision regarding the scope of the firebreak project on July 10
- Municipality requires a formal process for community engagement

### **What we heard: General comments**

- This would be wrong (removing trees/encroachments)
- Be mindful of our psychology here
- Do not give us another kick in the teeth
- I find this to be a strange plan
- You are taking this one step too far
- There are bigger fish to fry in the community; focus on other issues
- Leave everything the way it is, this is overkill
- You need to be doing more maintenance on the firebreak areas; living here hasn't been good since the fire
- Maintenance is important, more mowing and work needs to be done on the firebreak areas
- We love the forest, don't change things
- I am against you re-acquiring this property
- I want money spent on fixing Birchwood Trails instead
- We need balance – don't do anything; the 30 metre barrier is enough
- Take off the bubble wrap and let us live
- Don't bash us one more time
- Take into account the livability and social aspects of our neighbourhoods
- You completely ruined the area behind our home with the firebreaks and tree removal
- Firebreak project has caused foundation stability issues
- Cracks have formed in the house due to the machinery working in the area
- Scope changes have decreased trust of Recovery Task Force; promised trees replaced in 2017 and scope changed without consultation with residents
- Scope of work is too drastic; a balance needs to be found
- Too much exposure to wind
- Safety (trees falling down, windstorms)
- Inefficient waste of money
- Off-leash dogs: Bylaw contacted but no action taken, dog waste not picked up, safety concern for children and other dogs
- Animal habitat has been diminished