

To: Electoral Area Services Committee

Date: 2025-02-13

From: Tarina Colledge, Manager of Emergency Management

Subject: Community Preparedness and Resiliency Program Strategy

Reviewed by: Graham Daneluz, Director of Planning & Development
Stacey Barker, Director of Regional Services
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RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Fraser Valley Regional District Board endorse the development and implementation of the **Fraser Valley Regional District's (FVRD) Preparedness, Resiliency, and Emergency Program (PREP) Strategy**.

BACKGROUND

During emergencies and disasters, the best outcomes occur when residents are personally prepared, and communities have the knowledge and capacity to support one another. Neighbourhood-based models work best when residents first engage in household preparedness, which is often more successful when done collectively.

The FVRD spans a geographically diverse area with varying hazards and vulnerabilities, including rural and remote communities with limited emergency services, some outside fire protection, and others experiencing delayed response times for ambulances and RCMP. The **Emergency and Disaster Management Act (2023)** mandates an all-of-society approach, positioning local governments to take a leadership role in community preparedness and resiliency.

Following the Lytton wildfire, community members have increasingly sought involvement in emergency preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. Many inquiries come from residents **unfamiliar with FVRD's emergency management role, emergency coordination processes**, or how to align their efforts with existing services. Additionally, there has been a rise in Electoral Area Grant in Aid applications for preparedness-related activities—some extending beyond community-based preparedness into more tactical or structural initiatives. Without a standardized approach, FVRD is supporting ad hoc efforts rather than a cohesive, long-term strategy.

Since 2019, FVRD has been strengthening its emergency management program to align with provincial requirements. With foundational components in place—including bylaws, the [Emergency Management Program Policy](#), the [Emergency Management Plan](#), and a [Hazard Report](#)—FVRD is now positioned to develop the **Preparedness, Resiliency, and Emergency Program (PREP)**. The PREP strategy will provide a structured, community-driven approach to emergency preparedness while meeting provincial statutory obligations.

DISCUSSION

Neighbourhood-based preparedness is a well-researched approach that has been successfully implemented across BC. Many communities have tailored these models to fit their specific needs, hazards, and resources.

In regional districts, FireSmart programs are often managed within emergency programs because emergency management covers entire electoral areas, unlike fire protection, which is often jurisdictionally limited. As FVRD develops a resiliency program, integrating FireSmart into PREP attempts to reduce duplication, enhance coordination, and ensure a unified approach to community-based risk reduction. Other regional districts are similarly working to align FireSmart with broader neighbourhood resiliency programs.

By using the established Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Program (NEPP) model—already promoted through the Province of BC’s PreparedBC resources—FVRD can provide:

- Clear hazard awareness and preparedness tools for residents
- Structured emergency management resources via FVRD’s website and materials
- A network of local resiliency leaders for better coordination
- A flexible framework that communities can tailor to their unique needs.

A standardized approach to community resiliency focuses efforts on consistency, reducing duplication, and helping residents better understand available resources and their role in emergency preparedness.

PREPAREDNESS, RESILIENCY AND EMERGENCY PROGRAM (PREP)

The PREP strategy aims to:

1. **Enhance Personal Preparedness:** Support community groups to provide residents with tools and information to prepare for emergencies, including hazard awareness resources and household emergency plans.

2. **Strengthen Community Capacity and knowledge:** Partner with community organizations to develop localized emergency resiliency plans, host preparedness workshops, and pre-positioning of preparedness supplies.
3. **Foster Collaborative Networks:** Establish PREP Pods—local groups led by trained Champions—to coordinate neighborhood-level preparedness and act as liaisons with the FVRD Emergency Management Program and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) when it is active.
4. **Address Regional Challenges:** Focus on rural and remote areas with limited access to emergency services, increasing awareness of the BC Emergency Management Systems, bring cohesion to information and support.

The program's phased approach prioritizes mitigation and preparedness, including FireSmart neighbourhood initiatives, laying the groundwork for reduced risk on the landscape, increased preparedness and resiliency, and cohesive response and recovery coordination. Staff will provide training, mentorship, and resources to community groups, leveraging existing networks to ensure program sustainability.

By arranging a common approach, FVRD will be better able to manage our role and interdepartmental linkages and reduce the margin of confusion and danger during emergencies. It can also be expected that understanding will grow among residents about what they can reasonably achieve with finite sources of funding within the scope of the program.

THE STRATEGY

WHO

Effective neighbourhood-based resiliency programs require structured support and local implementation. FVRD will focus on partnering with motivated community groups, ideally established groups that have strong leadership, financial oversight, and long-term presence, such as:

- » Ratepayer Associations
- » Strata Corporations
- » Non-profits and community societies
- » Other community organizations

WHAT

Each community has unique needs and interests. The PREP strategy will provide a common framework that allows community groups to focus on the elements most relevant to them, while ensuring alignment with FVRD's emergency management program.

Key Program Elements:

1. **Local Representation**
 - Identify and support PREP Pod Champions within community groups to coordinate local preparedness, facilitate workshops, and liaise with the FVRD Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) when activated.
2. **Local Preparedness**
 - Provide hazard awareness tools, household emergency planning guides, and FireSmart resources.
 - Promote neighbourhood self-reliance, encouraging residents to be prepared for up to 14 days without external assistance.
3. **Community Capacity-Building**
 - Develop and support PREP Pods to organize localized preparedness efforts.
 - Offer training sessions, mentorship, and resource-sharing opportunities.
 - Strategically pre-position emergency supplies in key community locations.
 - Integrate FireSmart activities within the broader resiliency framework.
4. **Operational Integration**
 - Align neighbourhood preparedness efforts with the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) and provincial emergency frameworks.
 - Improve understanding of emergency response coordination and roles.
 - Establish communication protocols for situational awareness and information exchange between PREP Pods and liaising with the FVRD EOC
5. **Resilience and Hazard Awareness**
 - Address the unique needs of rural and remote communities with tailored materials.
 - Use provincial hazard assessment tools to develop Localized Hazard, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessments.
 - Promote risk reduction initiatives like FireSmart and other community-led resiliency projects.

MATERIALS

The implementation of a program will require a series of program materials to be developed and maintained by FVRD. Some materials will be focused on preparedness, while others will be Train the Trainer type materials designed for PREP Champions to lead initiatives within their PREP Pod. Staff anticipate the following material requirements:

2. **Educational Resources:**
 - Hazard awareness brochures and guides
 - A revision of the 2018 FVRD Emergency Preparedness **Workbook aligned with FVRD's Hazard Report and Emergency Management Program Policy and Emergency Management Plan**
3. **Training Programs:**
 - PREP Champion training modules and guidance materials

- Community workshops on topics like first aid, FireSmart practices, and neighborhood evacuation planning
4. **Onboarding & Operational Tools:**
 - An agreement between the FVRD and each organization
 - Templates for community program implementation
 - Templates for community-developed plan
 - Have Your Say landing page tailored to the program
 - Communication protocols for PREP Pods and liaising with the FVRD EOC
 5. **Community Outreach Materials:**
 - Social media campaigns, Alertable notifications, and local event materials
 - New media engagement
 - Flyers and signage to promote program participation
 6. **Supplies and Equipment:**
 - Pre-positioned emergency kits for community hubs
 - Mobile event kits (tents, displays, and printed materials)
 7. **Neighbourhood Funding Options:**
 - Electoral Area Grant in Aid – defining eligibility, scope, and limitations.
 - Linking to FireSmart funding for FireSmart Neighbourhoods.
 - Highlighting relevant external grants.

RATIONALE

The best disaster outcomes are realized by prepared people who can help one another locally. Emergencies and disasters begin at the local incident level and escalate as complexities become layered thereby seeking support from disaster & emergency management.

The Emergency and Disaster Management Act paints a canyon of expectation that can only be achieved through collaborative approaches. True resiliency must incorporate our population and not create reliance solely on limited response-based services that are often well beyond capacity when disasters happen. Staff envision that a structured program will:

- » achieve a critical element of the Emergency Management Program Policy;
- » fulfill statutory emergency management responsibilities;
- » collaboratively achieve mitigation, preparedness and resiliency initiatives;
- » reduce impacts from vulnerabilities and enhance the social capacity of communities to withstand and recover from emergencies and understand local resources and resource limitations
- » be sustainable and scalable fostering collaboration and localized self-sufficiency

- » clarify how and when it is appropriate for community group to become part of a response and respect when it is not appropriate or safe (for the groups and response agencies alike);
- » increase situational awareness through information exchange during routine return events like freshet;
- » bridge gaps between service levels and expectations, while increasing awareness of support limitations across the rurality of the FVRD landscape.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

To support implementation, emergency management staff will require the creation of materials with support and staff time from the:

- » Communications Department for:
 - Materials development concept drafting & brand alignment
 - Review draft materials
 - Publication of materials and communications strategy & implementation
- » Finance Department for:
 - electoral area Grant in Aid considerations
 - Hold Harmless and insurance/risk considerations
- » Protective Services (Fire Services) Department for:
 - Concept drafting about integration within the ICS framework during response
 - Considerations related to social convergence (people coming together to help)
 - Tactical communications behaviors between Pod Champions and Incident Commanders during activation events
 - Co-training and cross-training on common topics
 - Participation for PREP Pods at Fire Department public events for key provincial and national public safety thematic events: Fire and Life Safety Week, Emergency Preparedness Week, The Great Shakeout, etc.

The [4th Annual Great Canadian Fire Census](#), a national survey approach to assessing the challenges and limitations among Canadian Fire Departments, states the importance of emergency responders being involved in the creation of any civilian programs that could be called upon as surge support during emergencies. Recognizing this, staff must engage with emergency responders on the landscape throughout the program development, which includes Haig fire centre staff, 4 police detachments, 9 fire departments, BC Ambulance, and the 4 Ground Search and Rescue teams that

operate in our electoral areas to ensure effective program development and successful implementation.

Furthermore, while the program development is essential to emergency management, our EDMA responsibilities, the fulsome FVRD program, and our EM service, staff anticipate that there may become interest among other FVRD business units as the program grows momentum. The root of the program development is resiliency, not limited to preparedness initiatives. Other departments may have an interest in offering their own engagements through the network of PREP groups for key resiliency topics related to their program areas such as: air quality and wildfire smoke, recycling and waste reduction, reducing water demands during drought, parks or recreation activities, and exchanging information between the FVRD and active Pods with the PREP network. Staff recognize the importance of this and hope that other departments will too.

COST

The FVRD financial plan allocated \$13,000 in 2024 for PREP program development, which has been carried forward to 2025. Moving forward, the 2025-2029 financial plan includes \$25,000 - \$30,000 annually to support program implementation.

Funding Breakdown:

- Year 1: Development of program materials, training resources, and initial outreach.
- Ongoing: Maintenance of materials, printing, and training sessions.

Community Funding Options:

PREP groups may apply for:

- Electoral Area Grant in Aid (subject to eligibility and scope)
- FireSmart Neighbourhood funding
- Other external grants to support local initiatives

A structured approach aims to establish transparency, maximize funding impact, and provide clear guidelines for community and responder involvement.

CONCLUSION

Emergencies and disasters are inevitable, but their impact can be significantly reduced when communities are engaged, prepared, and resilient. The Fraser Valley Regional District faces unique challenges due to our diverse geography, rural landscapes, and varying levels of emergency services. Without a structured approach to community preparedness, residents would continue to face inconsistent access to information, resources, response services and support.

The PREP Strategy provides a clear, coordinated, and sustainable framework that will empower communities to take ownership of their preparedness while aligning with provincial emergency management standards. By investing in neighbourhood-based resilience, the FVRD aims to enhance

local capacity, reduce reliance on emergency responders during critical events, and ultimately improve safety, coordination, and recovery outcomes across the region.

Other regional districts have already seen success with similar programs, and the Province of BC encourages neighbourhood-based preparedness initiatives. By endorsing PREP, the Board endeavors to position the FVRD as a leader in proactive emergency management—bridging the gap between community expectations and available emergency services.

Working to further our statutory emergency management responsibilities with a well-structured approach, the FVRD can take a necessary step toward a safer, stronger, and more resilient future for all residents by developing a culture of preparedness and risk awareness that intends to protect lives, strengthen communities, and create lasting resilience. Staff recommend that the Board approve the PREP Strategy and direct the development of program materials and resources, ensuring the initiative moves forward in alignment with the 2025-2029 financial plan.

COMMENTS BY: