

Mayor Val Van Den Broek  
Langley City Hall  
20399 Douglas Crescent  
Langley, BC, V3A 4B3

September 30, 2019

**Nicomekl Plain & Nature Trails: A Fire Hazard Waiting to Happen**

Dear Mayor Van Den Broek and fellow Councilors:

I was unable to attend the recent Nicomekl River District Neighbourhood Plan design workshop on June 25-26. Upon reviewing the July 15<sup>th</sup> presentation to council, I have some serious concerns about the potential “fire hazard” conditions along the Nicomekl River System and adjoining nature trails. This potential fire hazard and related liabilities were apparently NOT addressed in the workshop.

The Nicomekl River floodplain area is largely composed of grassland with trees. [photograph 1]. This grass can grow to over a metre in height and when dry will rapidly combust and burn. Cities such as Kelowna and Fort McMurray know all too well when a fire starts how easily it can spread to neighbourhood areas causing devastation. Such fires could be ignited by lightning or humans (cigarettes, campfire by homeless individuals, intentionally set).

**A fire in the Nicomekl floodplain area would lead to the following hazards:**

**SMOKE**

Smoke and dust will comprise the air quality which will cause breathing problems, especially for those with breathing congestion and allergy problems.

**RESIDENCES**

This can lead to fire damage to the residences that border the floodplain. [photograph 2].

**INSURANCE**

This may impact fire related insurance to residences and health related claims.

**HIKERS**

This can lead to entrapment of hikers in the floodplain area, resulting in serious injury or death.

Similar hazards are also present on the various nature trails throughout the city of Langley [photograph 3].

## Fire Suppresion Plan

A Fire Suppression Plan should be implemented to address these concerns. This plan would require the input of the Langley Fire Department , Langley Parks and residents.

This implementation should include the following:

### SAFETY ZONE

Create a buffer fire zone of 30 metres from buildings by keeping the grassland cut and maintained.

### ESCAPE ROUTES

Review escapes routes throughout.

### ACCESS ROUTES

There are no apparent rapid access routes for fire trucks or fire equipment vehicles. Need to review.

### REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL FORESTER

A Registered Professional Forester, Registered Forest Technician or Registered Professional Engineer qualified by training or experience in fire protection, should be commissioned to undertake an assessment and determine the fire hazard within the Nicomekl River System and adjoining nature trails.

If there is a fire related casualty or accident, the city would be liable for a lawsuit.

**It is time to be proactive on safety.**

I look forward to you reply.

Yours truly,

*"Bruce Downing"*

Bruce Downing, MSc, PGeo, FGC, FEC(hon)

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cc city councilors

Rick Bomhof, director of engineering, parks & environment



**Photograph 1    Grassland, Nicomekl River Floodplain**



**Photograph 2 Grassland, Nicomekl River Floodplain, note townhouses adjoining the grassland**





**Photograph 3 Trail to Nicomekl River Floodplain, note residences in fire catchment area.**



**Photograph 4    A potential grassland fire.**



**Photograph 5    Potential smoke and fire in a grassland.**