



## OPEN WOOD BURNING FIRE PITS

### Council / Governance Issue

Direction from the Governance and Priorities Committee is required in response to a resident's request to ban open wood burning fire pits within Okotoks Town limits.

### Recommendation

That a recommendation be forwarded to Council to amend Fire Services Bylaw 10-17 as discussed by November 12, 2024.

### Background and Considerations

Administration received a request from a resident for an amendment to Fire Services Bylaw 10-17 in order to completely ban open wood burning fire pits within Town limits.

Fire Services Bylaw 10-17 allows for open wood burning fire pits. Further, there is no permit requirement for any contained fires, recreational fires, or portable cooking appliances. The use of fire pits is not allowed when a fire ban is issued.

Exceptions for contained or recreational fires (fire pits) that are permitted are provided with details of good practice for use of a fire pit. The Bylaw authorizes Okotoks Fire & Rescue or Municipal Enforcement to mandate a fire be relocated, removed, or extinguished for noncompliance, which includes fire, embers, sparks, or smoke emanating from such fire does not endanger any persons or property.

Between 2021 and now, Okotoks Fire & Rescue responded to 17 fire pit complaints:

- nine (9) of these complaints were deemed to be compliant with the Bylaw;
- three (3) were considered neighbour disputes; and
- eight (8) were considered noncompliant for the following reasons:
  - five (5) were regarding burning improper materials;
  - one (1) was an unattended fire;
  - one (1) was misuse of propane; and
  - one (1) was regarding a fire that was too large.

From a greenhouse gas emissions perspective, the use of propane or natural gas pits over open wood burning fire pits is not recommended. Burning biomass (e.g. wood) is generally considered to have less of an overall contribution to climate change than burning fossil fuels. The production of natural gas and propane fuels generates emissions at manufacturing and processing facility locations, before the fuel is transported to Okotoks. The emissions impacts of wood-burning fires are likely more noticeable if causing a localized negative impact to air quality, that is, when the fires are not moderated.

### Current Policy or Bylaw Analysis

Fire Services Bylaw 10-17

## Municipal Comparisons

The municipal comparisons provided below illustrate that currently there are no municipalities in Alberta that have completely banned the use of wood burning fire pits. The comparison does show good practice of greater specifications including the maximum fire pit size and ensuring a means to extinguish a nearby fire.

The Town's website does provide guidance for the use of fire pits, however, the comparative review identified that the content could be increased to include fire pit safety awareness. Administration will update the website to increase safety awareness messaging and also provide information on the negative health affects of smoke.

Municipality	Comparative Review
St. Albert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permitted with approval from the fire chief: must meet specifications.</li><li>• Greater specifications to the size and material of the fire pit.</li><li>• Greater specifications regarding height of fire.</li></ul>
Calgary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permitted: must meet specifications.</li><li>• Greater specifications regarding size, material, height of fire, putting out the fire.</li><li>• Section regarding control of smoke.</li><li>• Calgary's website education: Fire pit safety: <a href="https://www.calgary.ca/safety/fire-pits.html">https://www.calgary.ca/safety/fire-pits.html</a></li></ul>
Airdrie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permitted: must meet specifications.</li><li>• Greater specifications regarding an acceptable fire pit.</li></ul>
Chestermere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permitted: must meet specifications.</li><li>• Greater specifications regarding size, material, and height.</li></ul>

Administration believes the Town's Fire Services Bylaw meets good practice, sets out the requirements for a fire pit to be used safely, and provides the authority to deal with noncompliance issues or those that may endanger people or property.

There are minor amendments Administration recommends be made to the Bylaw however, including:

- Under prohibited debris for burning the addition of treated or painted lumber, lumber products containing glue products, leaves, brush or yard waste, wet or unseasoned wood.
- Under exemptions, the addition of fire pit dimensions.
- Criteria regarding a means to extinguishing a fire, ensuring it is thoroughly extinguished prior to leaving it, and maximum flame height.

## CAO Comments

Committee direction is requested. In accordance with policy, only Council has the authority to establish bylaws. Council has an established bylaw however; a member of the community has requested that it be reviewed. The Governance and Priorities Committee acts as an advisor to Council will need to weigh the benefits/risks of advancing this request.

**Attachment(s)**

1. Resident's Email Request - April 25, 2024
2. Fire Services Bylaw 10-17

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October 16, 2024