

Township of
Langley



Est. 1873

NEWS RELEASE

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DILIGENCE REQUIRED TO PREVENT FIRES IN VACANT HOMES

On the morning of April 26, fire ripped through an empty home on an acreage in Brookwood, threatening the property, neighbours, and the health and safety of firefighters called in to battle the blaze.

Thirty Township of Langley Fire Department crew members and six vehicles were required to extinguish the flames and prevent it from spreading.

The cost of the emergency response is being charged back to the owner of the property, which was abandoned and not properly secured.

“The safety of the Township is everyone’s responsibility,” said Bill Storie, Senior Advisor to Council. He said the incident is a reminder to owners that they are required to monitor and maintain their property, even if it is deserted, and for residents to be diligent and report any suspicious activity they may notice in their neighbourhood.

The fire occurred near 200 Street and 20 Avenue, in an abandoned home that was surrounded by deserted RVs, boats, and “piles and piles of garbage. It was a dumping ground,” said Township Deputy Fire Chief Bruce Ferguson, and the debris provided ample opportunity for the flames to spread.

Crews arrived at 6:00am to find the structure engulfed in flames. It could have been burning for hours, Ferguson said, and crews had no idea if anyone in the building and what conditions awaited them inside. The home had no electricity or gas, making it a suspicious fire, although it is not known if it was set accidentally by people who had were squatting inside or if it had been set deliberately.

Either way, someone had gotten in – and they should not have been able to.

“Property owners of vacant structures are required to ensure they are secure and remain secure against unauthorized entry,” said Ruby Senghera, the Township’s Bylaws Manager. Property owners who fail to do so may be fined \$500 per day and charged fees for Township resources, such as firefighters and inspectors.

When an abandoned building is identified, bylaw officers issue a letter to the owner, stating that the property needs to be boarded up and secured within a certain timeframe, Senghera said. Whether the property is waiting to be redeveloped or the owners are living elsewhere, under Community Standards Bylaw No. 5448, property must be made secure against unauthorized entry or occupation, vandalism or other intentional damage or fire hazard.

Members of the public who have any concerns about a vacant house are asked to contact Bylaws at 604.534.3211 or bylaw@tol.ca.

“If you see a light on or notice people coming and going when they shouldn’t be, even if you simply haven’t seen the occupants of a home living there for some time, let the Township know and we can investigate,” Storie said.

Securing abandoned buildings is also required through Fire Prevention Bylaw No. 4956, to protect the property, surrounding areas, and emergency responders. Those who do not follow the requirements can find themselves on the hook financially: if a fire occurs, cost recovery can be sought by the Fire Department from property owners.

“It can get very costly,” said Ferguson, noting that a fire engine and crew costs \$600 per hour, and the use of a Quint – which serves the dual purpose of an engine and a ladder truck – and crew costs over \$1,300 per hour.

Anyone who notices smoke or flames should immediately call 911.

For more information on Community Standards Bylaw No. 5448 and Fire Prevention Bylaw No. 4956, visit tol.ca/at-your-service/bylaw-enforcement/bylaws.

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