



Emergency management planning, recovery, and resilience

TOCAN/RSPN Quarterly meeting
July 7, 2026



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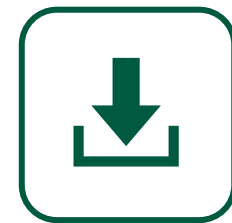
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How to use this resource

This resource has been ~~co~~created by everyone in attendance at the meeting on July 7, 2026. It's complimentary to the meeting summary that can be found at <https://www.communityenergy.ca/rspr/> and includes downloadable graphics, links to additional resources, and more.

This resource can be shared with people outside the network.

You will also find useful resources and links, identified by these icons:



Downloadable resource for presentations & reports



External resource link



Exercise or take-away activity

Emergency management planning, recovery, and resilience – July 7, 2026

Meeting Objective:

- To connect as a group and learn from organizations engaged in broad emergency management planning, recovery, and resilience.

Speakers & Topics:

- Kelly MacDonald, Interior Health Key findings from their recent report on Climate Event and Emergency Preparedness, which is a collaborative project with SPARC BC and People in Motion
- Kristi Rintoul, United Way BCWBC's emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and long-term resilience building efforts
- Madison Poultney, City of Kelowna Climate Smart Zoning bylaw updates

Meeting Highlights:

- Emergency management guidance is under development to support implementation of BC's new legislation and regulations, to be shared January 2027 but will remain high level.
- Climate emergencies disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, with key gaps in communication, housing, transportation accessibility.
- Nonprofits and community networks play a critical role in emergency preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience.
- City of Kelowna's Climate Smart Zoning amendments support wildfire resilience, urban cooling, and energy development through measures such as FireSmart landscaping and enhanced tree canopy requirements.
- Climate resilience depends on equity-focused planning, strong partnerships, proactive preparedness, and accessible communication. We must move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach.



Complete summary can be found at
<https://www.communityenergy.ca/rspn>

Province of BC updates

Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) is developing guidance for local authorities to accompany the Province's emergency management regulations.

Key updates

- The guidance is currently in development and is intended to support implementation of the new legislative requirements.
- The Province is targeting January 2027 for completion of the guidance, aligning with the anticipated release of the regulations.
- Initial work may be shared at the 2026 UBCM Convention, although plans are still being finalized.
- Local authorities will have opportunities to provide feedback through future engagement and consultation processes, with details to be shared as they become available.

What local authorities can expect

The Province noted that the guidance is expected to be high level and may not address all of the detailed implementation questions raised by local authorities over the past year. Recognizing this, EMCR is exploring opportunities to develop additional supporting resources and supplementary guidance to provide further clarity and practical direction where needed.

Key takeaway: Guidance remains on track for release alongside the regulations in January 2027. While the primary guidance document will provide broad direction, additional resources may be developed to address more detailed implementation questions from local authorities.

About EMCR and EDMA

EMCR (Emergency Management and Climate Readiness) is the provincial agency responsible for emergency management in B.C.

EDMA (Emergency and Disaster Management Act) is B.C.'s emergency management legislation, introduced in 2023. The guidance being developed by EMCR will help local authorities understand and implement EDMA requirements.

Climate Event and Emergency Preparedness Project

Community Conversations with Equity-Deserving Groups

Project overview

Interior Health, in partnership with People in Motion and SPARC BC, engaged equity-deserving groups to better understand their experiences during climate-related emergencies and preparedness needs.

Focus areas

-  Wildfires & Smoke
-  Extreme Heat
-  Extreme Cold
-  Flooding
-  Snowstorms

Objective

Gather community perspectives to improve local and provincial emergency planning, particularly through an equity lens.

Partners: Interior Health | People in Motion | SPARC BC

Why the project was undertaken

Climate Risks Are Increasing

Climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, creating new health risks for communities.

Impacts Are Not Shared Equally

Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, worsening existing social and health inequities.

Planning Often Misses People's Reality

Traditional emergency plans assume people can independently prepare, relocate, and access support, despite significant barriers.

This Project Sought to Understand

- ✓ What is working well
- ✓ Existing gaps and barriers
- ✓ Supports needed for preparedness, response, and recovery

Engagement approach

- 8 facilitated engagement sessions
- 6–10 participants per session

Participants represented:

- Low-income individuals
- People experiencing homelessness
- People with disabilities
- Older adults
- Indigenous people
- Racialized persons
- Newcomers to Canada
- People living with substance-use challenges

How participation was supported

- Honoraria (grocery gift cards)
- Transportation support
- Room rentals
- Refreshments
- Facilitation and note-taking costs

Data Collection

- Sessions were documented through note-taking
- No recordings or personal identifiers were collected
- Feedback was analyzed by theme
- Findings were shared back with participants

Key Findings

1. Participants Struggled to Identify Clear and Trusted Information During Emergencies

What participants said

Participants actively sought information through:

- Emergency alerts
- Mobile apps
- News media
- Social networks
- Word of mouth

I was checking everywhere—alerts, news, social—but still unsure what to do.

Common challenges

- Conflicting information
- Unclear instructions
- Uncertainty about trusted sources
- Difficulty knowing what actions to take

These barriers were particularly significant for:

- Newcomers
- Non-English speakers
- Older adults
- People with disabilities
- Individuals without smartphones or internet access

If you're new here, you don't automatically know how emergencies work or where to look for information.

Everything was coming from different places—it was overwhelming.

Implications

Emergency communications need to be:

- Clear
- Coordinated
- Accessible
- Multilingual
- Delivered through multiple channels

Key Findings

2. Stable housing reduces risk, while evacuation barriers increase vulnerability

Knowing there was a reliable way out for non-drivers would make evacuations less frightening

What participants said

Housing conditions strongly influenced people's ability to stay safe.

Participants reported that homes with:

- Air conditioning
 - Heating
 - Air filtration
 - Reliable utilities
- provided important protection during heat waves, smoke events, and power outages.

Common challenges

For people facing housing insecurity, Key concerns included:

- Rental housing limitations
- Lack of cooling systems
- Poor air quality indoors
- Unstable housing situations

During evacuations, additional barriers included:

- Transportation challenges
- Mobility limitations
- Medical needs
- Pet and service animal accommodations

Participants noted that these issues can delay evacuations and increase risk, especially for individuals facing multiple vulnerabilities.

Implications

Emergency planning should better account for:

- Accessible transportation
- Mobility needs
- Medical supports
- Housing realities
- Pets and service animals

Leaving wasn't an option unless I knew my dog could come with me

Not having the money or landlord's permission to make changes made it hard to prepare the home properly."

Key Findings

3. Community members, local organizations and first responders play a critical role

What participants said

Participants highlighted the importance of community-based support, including:

- Neighbours
- Non-profit organizations
- Public facilities
- First responders
- Cooling centers
- Indoor public spaces

These resources often filled gaps when formal systems were stretched.

TRU opened overnight and turned into a safe refuge.

It felt like everyone was doing their own thing, and no one was clearly in charge.

Common challenges

Participants also reported challenges such as:

- Services being too centralized
- Limited neighbourhood-level access
- Poor coordination between agencies
- Inconsistent communication across governments and organizations

These gaps often created confusion and placed greater pressure on community organizations.

Not everyone feels safe going into public spaces without being questioned or judged.

Implications

Building local community capacity and improving coordination between agencies could significantly improve emergency response.

The fire department was phenomenal.

Conclusions and recommendations

Community resilience is already strong, but climate emergency systems need to become more equitable, coordinated, and accessible. Effective preparedness requires designing emergency responses around people's real-world needs, barriers, and lived experiences.

What’s working

People from equity-deserving groups are already actively preparing for and responding to climate emergencies using:

- Personal preparedness strategies
- Informal support networks
- Available community services
- A strong sense of resilience and community care exists.

What shapes outcomes

Preparedness, safety, and recovery are not experienced equally. Outcomes are heavily influenced by:

- Income
- Housing stability
- Transportation access
- Health status
- Mobility
- Language barriers
- Technology access
- Familiarity with emergency systems

What participants called for

- Clearer communication
- Better coordination across systems
- More inclusive emergency planning
- Greater attention to lived experiences
- Proactive rather than reactive preparedness efforts

Key recommendations: Address housing-related vulnerability as a core emergency preparedness issue | Ensure evacuation planning is inclusive and realistic for people with diverse needs | Recognize and integrate lived experience and Indigenous knowledge into emergency planning | Strengthen pre-season preparedness through coordinated, community-based education and planning | Improve clarity, accessibility, and coordination of emergency information | Expand neighbourhood-level and place-based supports during emergencies

United Way BC's Role in Emergency Response

About United Way BC

- Province-wide registered charity formed in 2021 through the amalgamation of regional United Way organizations
- Works to strengthen connections that support people and communities across BC
- Focuses on improving well-being, inclusion, resilience, and access to supports

Mission

- Strengthen vital connections that support people in need
- Build healthy, caring, and inclusive communities

United Way BC's unique approach to emergency response

United Way's approach extends beyond immediate disaster response and extends to looking at that social infrastructure needed to rebuild for communities following an emergency. Their framework consists of three interconnected phases:

1. Response

Supporting communities during emergencies through:

- Social sector coordination
- Fundraising appeals
- Grant distribution
- Gap-filling services
- Support for vulnerable populations

2. Recovery

Working with communities in the months and years following a disaster through:

- Mental health programming
- School-based supports
- Community gatherings
- Cultural ceremonies
- Community-led recovery projects

3. Resilience Building

Helping communities become better connected and better prepared before future emergencies occur.

Social Sector Activation Guide

United Way's Social Sector Activation Guide provides structure for a coordinated social response in communities before and during an emergency.

The guide offers recommendations on how a host community's social sector can work alongside Emergency Support Services (ESS) and local governments to better support evacuees, including:

- Information on foundations of equitable and socially focused emergency response
- Action oriented questions for reflection and consideration
- Step by step recommendations for organizing social sector before and during event
- Social response task force contact list template
- Provincial resource guide
- Communication tips
- Local resource guide template



United Way
British Columbia

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Key learnings

1. Climate related events will continue to affect our province – community-wide preparation is key
2. Working with local non-profit partners to identify needs quickly and respond with funding, volunteers or advocacy – local government is not alone in this work!
3. Building community capacity and collaboration is mitigation and preparedness, response and recovery comes through a strong social infrastructure and leads to a resilient community

City of Kelowna – zoning bylaw climate resiliency amendments

Presenter: Madison Poultney, City of Kelowna

Overview of Kelowna's climate resiliency zoning amendments, developed as part of the city's implementation of the Resilient Kelowna strategy.

Project goal

- Ensure new development is better prepared for climate related risks while also supporting low emission, more efficient communities

Focus areas

- Wildfire risk mitigation
- Urban heat risk
- Building energy efficiency

These changes are intended to increase the resilience of new construction to climate hazards, support low emission and efficient buildings, and better integrate climate considerations into land use planning.

The regulations apply primarily to development permit projects such as new multi family and non-residential development.

Additional work would be needed before considering how these requirements might apply to other development types such as single family homes.





Firesmart Landscaping

- The project team worked closely with Firesmart BC to identify the highest wildfire risks around buildings and determine how those risks can be reduced through landscaping design.
 - Ignition resistant groundcover/surface treatments required within 1.5 metres (immediate zone)
 - Non-combustible fencing materials required within 1.4 metres of buildings (immediate zone)
- **Key changes from previous bylaw:**
 - Coniferous shrubs (i.e. cedar hedges) are now prohibited within 10 metres of buildings
 - 5 metre spacing between coniferous trees & buildings
 - Existing coniferous trees may still be retained within this area if they can be appropriately maintained to reduce wildfire risk through firesmart practices such as pruning and maintenance
- The focus is on the area closest to the buildings where windblown embers are most likely to cause ignition during a wildfire.



Firesmart Landscaping

Trees can help – in the right context

- Although coniferous trees are more of a hazard, broad-leaf deciduous trees resist ignition and can shield homes from embers.
- Research shows that well-cared for trees can act as a low risk for wildfires.

Fencing and groundcover

- The amendments also address fencing to reduce fire risk. Requiring ignition resistant materials in areas close to buildings has been found to save homes by breaking the pathway for flames.

Similarities between firesmart and watersmart landscaping

- Contrary to assumption, firesmart and watersmart landscaping are actually very similar
- Both support attractive, low-water, biodiversity-friendly landscapes
- The main difference is that the area within 1.5m of a building uses lower risk landscaping treatments to help reduce wildfire risk.

Reducing urban heat

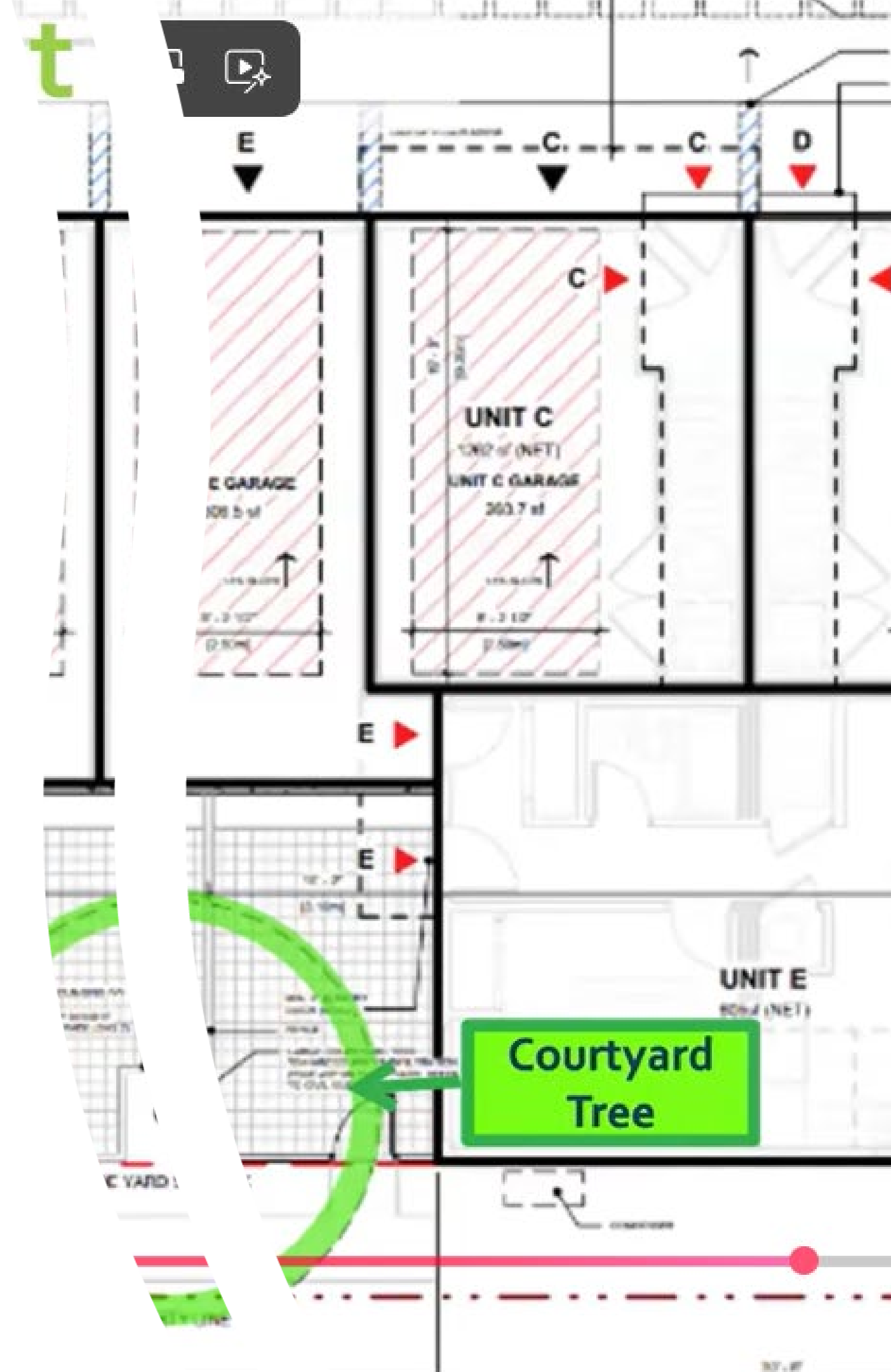
More flexibility with tree cover requirements

- Kelowna's Reducing Urban Heat bylaw supports urban cooling by encouraging trees throughout a site.
- Previously, required trees only counted if they were located in the front or flanking landscape areas along the edges of a property. This sometimes led to variances or design changes when those limited areas couldn't accommodate the soil volumes needed for healthy trees or when utility infrastructure conflicted with root or branch growth.
- The amendment doesn't change the number of trees required on a site – instead, it provides flexibility to locate required trees in other suitable areas like courtyards and around drive aisles.

Soil depth requirements

- The team also proposed amendments to increase the minimum required soil depth for lawn and perennial planting areas because deeper soils support healthier, more resilient vegetation and improve storm water absorption and retention.
- These changes are a part of a broader effort to establish landscape standards across the entire site rather than focusing on only the limited landscape areas around the edges of a property.

The overall goal of Kelowna's urban heat amendments is to increase shade throughout the development and improve comfort for residents during hot weather.





Built Form Options for Energy Efficiency

- Under the existing bylaw, many midrise buildings are required to include stepbacks, which create more complex building forms.
- While stepbacks can add visual interest, they also increase the number of corners and transitions in the building envelope, making it harder to retain heat and meet higher Energy Step Code standards.
 - This is because simple building shapes are generally easier to heat and cool efficiently than complex building shapes.
- To better align zoning regulations with Kelowna's climate goals, the amendment limits stepback requirements to buildings longer than 60 m and allows some architectural projections within the stepback area. The result is greater design flexibility, simpler building forms, and fewer variances while still maintaining good urban design outcomes.
- In short, this change removes a regulatory barrier to energy efficient building design and supports the construction of lower emission, higher performance buildings.

Additional Resources

United Way's Social Sector Activation Guide

<https://uwbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Working-Together-in-an-Emergency-Social-Sector-Activation-Guide-1.pdf>

Climate resilient Kelowna Strategy

<https://getinvolved.kelowna.ca/climatestrategy>

Climate resilient Kelowna tracker

<https://climateresilience.kelowna.ca/>

Firesmart BC landscaping hub

<https://firesmartbc.ca/landscaping-hub/>