

Hello,

I was asked by District 13 Councillor Lovelace (cc'd) to send my speech from the July 20th meeting to this email to have it incorporated into the public record. That speech is attached to this email.

Additionally, Councillor Lovelace had suggested that I request the ability to speak to HRM Regional Council and had indicated that a meeting of the Transportation Standing Committee may be the best venue for this discussion. It is my understanding that the Transportation Standing Committee's next meeting is on August 24th and I am requesting the opportunity to speak to the committee at that meeting.

Please let me know if you require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Dustin O'Leary

President, Westwood Hills Residents Association

Hello everyone,

I want to start by saying thank you to the First Responders, including some that are here tonight, for all they have done from May 28<sup>th</sup> to now. Your dedication to doing everything possible to protect us and our homes is appreciated.

I also want to acknowledge my neighbours in Westwood here tonight and watching remotely, as well as folks who are in other neighbourhoods including Highland Park, Yankeetown and Perry Pond who either lost homes or suffered extensive property damage. We are truly all in this together.

While there are so many points to discuss, based on this evening's format, there just isn't enough time. I will be submitting a list of questions on behalf of our residents to the groups represented here tonight.

For this time, as much as we would all appreciate an opportunity to look back and see how we got to this point, I am not sure that is a luxury we can afford. Residents of Westwood Hills are worried and scared – and rightfully so. As damaging and impactful as the May/June fires were, those fires had characteristics that ended up containing what could have been an even worse situation. Elements like the wind direction, the fact that the fire was on a weekend, the fact that the fire was during the day with high visibility all worked together to, while still causing horrific damage, prevent a human catastrophe in our neighborhood.

While we all hope this doesn't happen again – hope is not a strategy. There is also no assurance that conditions for the next fire will be the same as they were earlier this year.

So, looking forward to the next fires, I want to focus on a few points:

#### Egress

- Westwood Hills residents, specifically at the middle and back of the neighbourhood had a terrifying experience trying to exit the subdivision during the fire.
- To date, we have heard a bit about options that are not possible, but not a lot about what is possible
- What options are being considered and will government representatives, specifically HRM, give that egress the priority that over 1500 Westwood residents want it to be given. Recently, a petition has been signed by over 1500 people asking for that egress to be constructed by the end of September of this year.

#### Additional Safety Measures

- Will there be an additional plan for other fire mitigation measures, including dry hydrants/fire walls, etc created for Westwood Hills and other neighbourhoods?
- If yes, when can neighbours expect these measures to be implemented?

#### Daycares

- I also want to provide comment on behalf of some of our littlest neighbours. Giant Steps Daycare had three locations in Westwood Hills with one being lost in the fire. As I understand it, their plan for a future fire that happens on a weekday is to load their youngest children into their teachers personal vehicles and remove them from the neighbourhood. They are also planning to walk the older kids out of the neighbourhood on foot, if conditions permit.
- While that plan is admirable, our youngest residents are every bit as vulnerable as our oldest.
- Will HRM/EMO and others work with those charged with watching children within the neighbourhood (not just Giant Steps, but others as well) to ensure they have a reliable way out of the neighbourhood in the event of another emergency? If so, will the commit to following it?

For a final few seconds, I want to say a word on communication.

For those leaders tasked with communicating to those most affected by this fire, nobody – absolutely nobody – should be taking any congratulatory bows on this.

Fractures between HRM and the Province have been made very public with folks seemingly more invested in avoiding accountability than helping people or finding solutions. Nobody should forget that those intergovernmental fractures had hundreds of impacted families caught in the middle.

First responders raced to the fires and took on the impossible task ahead without skirting their responsibility – we need our leaders to do the same!

We need you to embrace the responsibility and accountability for keeping our residents safe going forward – not point in every direction to avoid it sticking to you.

Make friends here among these groups tonight, stop talking to the media and work behind the scenes to find a way to make our neighbourhoods safer – and do it fast.

Hope isn't a strategy.