Recommendations from the Bald Range Wildfire Business Resiliency Task Force

An Economic Recovery Task Force was established to support the business community's recovery following the Bald Range Wildfire, which began on August 7, 2026, and directly affected the District of Summerland and neighbouring regional areas. The wildfire resulted in the evacuation of the entire Summerland community and surrounding areas for a 10+ day period, displacing approximately 20,000 residents, many of whom were welcomed into the City of Penticton. The event had significant economic repercussions across the region, including event cancellations, lost tourism activity, cancelled hotel bookings, business interruptions, property damage, and other adverse impacts on local businesses and the broader economy.

To help address these challenges, the Economic Recovery Task Force was formed, bringing together representatives from government (local, regional and provincial) and business focused non-profit / community organizations, with a shared focus on supporting economic recovery. The Task Force began meeting weekly in late August as evacuation orders were lifted and recovery efforts commenced and continues to meet to support recovery of the business community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been endorsed by the Task Force and are presented as considerations to support both short-term economic recovery and long-term community and business resilience planning.

1. **Ensure business recovery remains a priority during recovery efforts (current and future events):** While recovery efforts often focus on residential impacts, businesses are frequently among the sectors most severely affected by disasters, as seen with Bald Range. Revenue losses, operational disruptions, physical damage, and workforce challenges can persist long after an event has ended. Delayed business recovery can have broader impacts on employees, local services, and the regional economy. Recovery

planning should therefore include a dedicated focus on assessing business impacts, identifying barriers to reopening, and ensuring that appropriate financial assistance and support programs are available to help businesses resume operations and restore economic activity as quickly as possible.

2. **Financial Assistance for Economic Losses:** Recognize that businesses can suffer significant losses without sustaining physical property damage. Future recovery programs should consider business interruption, lost revenue, cleanup and reopening costs, insurance gaps, utilities and other extraordinary costs resulting from evacuation orders and reduced visitation. Major financial assistance for items like lost revenue, cleanup, etc, could not be managed by the local government but strong recommendations to the Province should be considered. Local costs, like disposal, permitting, etc, should be embedded within local policies so that decisions can be made quickly following a disaster.

3. **Work towards dispelling myths about wildfire in the Okanagan:** Public understanding of wildfire risk is often influenced by misconceptions regarding wildfire behaviour, causes, prevention, and recovery. These misconceptions can create unnecessary fear, undermine confidence in affected communities, and influence decisions related to tourism, investment, recreation, and business activity. Governments, industry organizations, and community partners should work collaboratively to provide accurate, science-based information about wildfire risk, mitigation measures, emergency preparedness, and post-fire recovery. Improving public awareness and understanding can help build community resilience, support informed decision-making, and reduce the economic and social impacts associated with misinformation.

   The wildfire and the resulting negative media coverage, including a nationally published feature in *The Globe and Mail*, also highlighted the importance of protecting and strengthening the region's reputation for effective wildfire management and resilience. Equally important is reinforcing public confidence that the region remains a safe and attractive destination for tourism, agriculture, events, real estate investment, and residents seeking a high quality of life. Protecting and restoring the region's reputation should be recognized as a critical component of economic recovery planning, with communications and marketing strategies incorporated into future emergency response and recovery plans.

4. **Work towards building out the seasonality of our tourism offerings:** The regional economy is heavily influenced by seasonal tourism patterns, making businesses and communities vulnerable to disruptions during peak summer tourism periods. Expanding and promoting year-round tourism opportunities can help diversify visitation, stabilize

business revenues, and enhance economic resilience. Governments, tourism organizations, and industry partners should work collaboratively to develop and market attractions, events, recreational activities, and cultural experiences that draw visitors throughout the year. A more balanced tourism season can help reduce the economic impacts of future disruptions while supporting local businesses, employment, and investment on a sustained basis.

5. **Focus on a regional economic development program:** The Task Force acknowledges that an emergency such as this is regional in nature and not just impacting one municipality or regional areas. It is important to have a regional Economic Development forum to focus on business resiliency and recovery for emergencies of this nature.

6. **Ensure business representation within the emergency operations centre (EOC):** Business impacts should be considered alongside public safety and residential concerns throughout emergency response and recovery efforts. Including business and economic development representation within the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) can help ensure that business needs, economic impacts, workforce challenges, supply chain disruptions, and recovery considerations are identified and addressed early in the response process. Maintaining a business perspective during emergency operations can improve communication with the business community, inform decision-making, facilitating re-entry in a timely manner and create a smoother transition from emergency response to economic recovery.

   Maintaining a business perspective during emergency operations can improve communication with the business community and inform decision-making. This should include establishing clear and consistent communications protocols for businesses, including regular updates, business-specific briefings, dedicated communication channels, and timely information regarding evacuation orders, re-entry processes, site access, permits, support programs, and recovery resources and will help in not having duplication (ie different orgs putting out similar surveys etc.)

7. **Develop business emergency preparedness program and offer training to businesses prior to next summer:** Many businesses lack formal emergency preparedness, continuity, and recovery plans. Providing training, resources, and planning tools can help businesses better prepare for future emergencies and reduce recovery times. While the Task Force acknowledges the existence of some great resources, particularly from DBC, linking these resources to business is a key objective. Stronger preparedness contributes to greater business resilience and reduces economic disruption during future events.

8. **Establish a business recovery information hub for businesses impacted by emergencies:** Following a disaster, businesses often struggle to navigate available recovery programs, funding opportunities, insurance processes, and regulatory requirements. A centralized information hub can provide a single source of reliable information, helping businesses access support programs and recovery resources more efficiently.