

HOW FALLS AVENUE NEIGHBORS GOT A BREAK ON MITIGATION COST

It all began when Bob Korzekwa went knocking on doors of his Falls Avenue neighbors in March 2020. He hoped they would share his interest in getting financial help to lessen the neighborhood's risk from wildfire.

Long story short, working with the Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP), the Falls Avenue neighbors had 40 per cent of their fire mitigation costs paid for by the Colorado State Forest Service. They were responsible for paying 60 per cent. Since then, due to rising costs, that calculation has changed. Homeowners are now expected to pay 70 per cent.

By year's end, 10 properties in Korzekwa's neighborhood looked a lot different. The neighborhood has an airy feel. Gone are dead and diseased trees – some 30 of them from Korzekwa's property alone. Sunshine streams through, giving hope that wildflowers and healthy trees will be around next spring.

Fire experts say there's no guarantee against wildfire striking -- even destroying -- homes if it is bad enough. They are quick to add, however, that steps to rid properties of fire starters like dead trees and brush go a long way towards preventing the spread.

The Falls Avenue neighbors received help in writing the grants from CUSP, a nonprofit dedicated to, among other things, preserving forests within the South Platte watershed. CUSP staff are experts in helping both towns and individuals write grants asking funders like CFS for money to defray costs. Green Mountain Falls is a member and is also receiving help from CUSP to obtain funds for public projects.

Perhaps the key to the Falls Avenue Ten's success in winning grants was that they applied as a group for the mitigation funding. CUSP had advised them that when work can cover several acres at once, costs go down.

A CUSP representative met with each homeowner to look over their property and determine its feasibility for funding. Once the property was approved, CUSP foresters marked dead and diseased trees for removal. Homeowners could use the tree service of their choice, but CUSP required that the service meet its standards for workers compensation, liability insurance and other requirements.

Work began in late summer, with CUSP foresters overseeing the work. Once the work was finished, the contractor submitted a bill to CUSP. Using grant money it received from CFS, the coalition paid the contractor in full, then billed the homeowner for their share.

Korzekwa said he was impressed by CUSP's flexibility working with homeowners, particularly when it came to choosing trees that had to go.

"They weren't militant about it. There are plenty of trees left", he said.

For more information about how you and your neighbors can get on the list for possible funding, write to CUSP at cusp@cusp.ws or visit their [website](#).

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