

The Firewise USA Application: Our Path to National Recognition

Re: How and why to register Yogaville as a Firewise USA Recognized Community

Date: May 22, 2026

Status: Action memo — application in progress

Executive summary

Registering Yogaville as a Firewise USA Recognized Community is the single highest-return, lowest-cost administrative action available to the committee. It costs nothing but paperwork, it unlocks cost-share and mitigation grants that other workstreams depend on, and it gives the community standing and credibility with Virginia DOF, the county, insurers, and funders. This memo lays out the why, the requirements, and the immediate next steps — including the draft outreach to the Virginia Department of Forestry area forester.

1. Why Firewise USA

- **It's free.** No application fee; the cost is committee time we're spending anyway.
- **It unlocks funding.** Many cost-share and mitigation grants (Memo 8) require Firewise designation as a precondition.
- **It brings expertise.** The required risk assessment is performed free by Virginia DOF, giving us a professional, neutral evaluation of our actual hazard.
- **It may lower insurance costs.** Some carriers discount premiums for residents of recognized communities.
- **It builds credibility.** National recognition strengthens every grant application and every conversation with public agencies.

2. The requirements

1. Form a board or committee — already satisfied by this committee.
2. Obtain a community wildfire risk assessment — performed free by Virginia DOF; this is the immediate ask of the area forester.
3. Develop a multi-year action plan — the memo series is most of this already.
4. Meet the annual mitigation-investment minimum — the equivalent of one volunteer hour per dwelling unit per year (currently ~\$24–\$33/dwelling); easily met by counting in-kind labor (Memo 8).
5. Hold at least one annual wildfire-education event — the Lost Bus screening and Phase 2 gathering satisfy this.
6. Submit the application and renew annually.

3. The Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest adjacency

Yogaville sits adjacent to the Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest, which is directly relevant to the application and to our risk profile. The proximity raises our wildland-urban-interface exposure (a fire in the state forest is a fire at our boundary), but it also means Virginia DOF already has a management presence and interest in the area, which should make the area forester a natural and willing partner. The application should name this adjacency explicitly — it's both the reason we need recognition and a reason DOF should welcome the partnership.

4. The LOTUS shrine and Zone 0

The LOTUS shrine is the community's spiritual heart and its most significant structure, and it deserves specific attention in the risk assessment and the defensible-space plan. Its Zone 0 (the immediate 0–5 feet, per Memo 4) should be exemplary — non-combustible ground cover, screened vents, clear gutters — both because the structure matters and because a well-protected, visible landmark models the standard for the whole community. Make the LOTUS a showcase of Zone 0 done right.

5. Immediate next steps

7. Erik sends the introductory email to the Virginia DOF area forester this week (draft below), requesting the free community risk assessment and Firewise guidance.
8. Schedule the risk assessment, ideally before the Phase 2 gathering so findings can inform it.
9. Assemble the action plan from the existing memo series.
10. Log the per-dwelling mitigation investment (one volunteer hour per dwelling unit, or its ~\$24–\$33 equivalent), including in-kind labor, for the application.
11. Submit the application once the assessment is complete.

6. Draft email to the Virginia DOF area forester

Subject: Firewise USA risk assessment request — Yogaville community, Buckingham County

Dear [Area Forester],

I'm writing on behalf of the residential community at Satchidananda Ashram — Yogaville in Buckingham County, adjacent to the Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest. After three brush fires near our community this spring, residents have formed a fire-safety committee and are working toward becoming a Firewise USA Recognized Community.

We'd be grateful for your guidance on the Firewise process and, as a first step, would like to request the community wildfire risk assessment that Virginia DOF provides. Given our proximity to the state forest, we expect our wildland-urban-interface exposure is significant, and a professional assessment would help us prioritize our defensible-space and mitigation work.

Could we find a time for you to visit and walk the community? We're flexible and happy to work around your schedule. Thank you for the work you do for our region.

With gratitude, Erik Yogaville Community Fire Safety Committee · AgniWellCare

7. Decision / status

This memo is an action item already in motion rather than an open decision. The committee's role is to confirm the approach, support the timeline, and ensure the action plan and investment log are assembled in time for submission.

Om Shanti. Jai Agni.

Prepared by Erik · AgniWellCare · Yogaville Community Fire Safety Committee