

## **Update on Mandatory Firefighter NFPA Certification and 2023 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment**

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### **Report Summary**

This report provides information regarding the status of volunteer recruitment, retention activities and the City's progress in meeting firefighter certification requirements found within O. Reg 343/22 Fire Fighter Certification.

### **Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Community Energy & Emissions Plan (CEEP)**

This report refers to operational matters and has no direct connection to the Community Energy and Emissions Plan.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **Background**

#### **Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention**

Fire Services undertakes volunteer recruitment annually and has been accepting Volunteer Firefighter (VFF) recruitment applications year-round for the last several years. There were 91 applications on file since the closure of the [2022 VFF recruitment](#) which Fire Services proceeded to process. In addition, Fire Services contacted 51 recruits who did not attend physical testing during the 2022 recruitment, to ask if they were interested in reapplying for the 2023 recruitment. All applicants (those on file and those who reapplied) were then vetted to ensure they reside within the fire beat and have a high school diploma and driver's license, a process which reduced the applicant pool to 85.

Physical testing was divided into two groups and took place over two days. To accommodate individuals' schedules and bolster this year's recruitment, two additional days of physical testing were offered to qualified candidates who were unable to attend the first two physical testing sessions. Of the 85 applicants invited to participate in physical testing only 53 chose to participate in one of the four scheduled dates. A demonstration video of volunteer firefighters performing each component of the physical testing was made [available on the City's website](#). The video helps new recruits prepare for the physical testing component of the recruitment process. There were 16 active volunteer firefighters and officers who participated and

assisted with the physical testing process which included providing information and guidance.

To ensure the health and safety of each participant, blood pressure (160/100) and heart rate (110ppm) in accordance with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requirements, were taken by paramedics prior to and following the physical testing. During testing, two individuals were advised to consult a physician for further evaluation and one candidate could not complete the physical testing. A total of 48 candidates successfully advanced to the interview stage of the recruitment process.

The interview panel consisted of an Assistant Deputy Fire Chief, Human Resources Talent Acquisition Specialist, and a Volunteer Captain. Interviews were conducted virtually over a seven-day period. Volunteer Captains provided valuable feedback on the applicants and their experiences. There were 41 applicants who were successful in the interview process and offered employment. Appendix “A” provides the total number of recruits and their progression through the various phases of recruitment that resulted in the final 41 job offers.

All candidates offered probationary positions were invited to attend an orientation session on October 10, 2023. Those in attendance were measured for station wear, personal protective equipment and bunker gear. The session included a comprehensive presentation about the fire service, highlighting the roles and responsibilities of a volunteer firefighter and the relevant rules and regulations pertaining to the fire service and the City of Greater Sudbury. The Community Safety Wellness Coordinator addressed the group, offering insights into the Peer Support Network, Employee Assistance Program and vital information on mental health and well-being. The Chief Training Officer distributed training materials to each recruit, provided an overview of expectations associated with recruit certification training and responded to their inquiries.

## **Volunteer Recruitment Committee**

Over the last three years, Greater Sudbury Fire Services (GSFS) has remained committed to reinforcing our volunteer firefighter ranks, hiring 130 new volunteers despite widespread recruitment difficulties being experienced across North America, and establishing of a Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Committee consisting of members from Fire administration, Communications, Human Resources, and Organizational Development as well as volunteer firefighters chosen by the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). This Committee’s goal is to develop strategies to attract new volunteer recruits. To ensure continuous improvement in recruitment efforts, the Committee meets before and after each recruitment drive to assess the effectiveness of our recruitment strategies and explore potential new strategies.

## **Part 2: Mandatory Certification Training**

On July 1, 2022, the Government of Ontario placed into effect O. Reg. 343/22 Firefighter Certification which outlines the mandatory minimum standards and job performance requirements for all firefighters. The regulation provides flexibility to meet local training needs based on the level of fire protection approved by municipal council, through the Establishing and Regulating Bylaw. All Fire Departments must comply with the regulation by July 1, 2026, and by July 1, 2028, for technical rescue disciplines.

Prior to this proposed certification, there were no provincial requirements for firefighters to be certified in any discipline related to the level of fire protection services they provide. In the absence of regulations, Greater Sudbury Fire Services maintained a best effort training model to align with both NFPA standards and training language contained within collective bargaining agreements.

Greater Sudbury Fire Services performs the following Council approved services under the current Establishing and Regulating Bylaw, 2020-58:

- Fire suppression (interior attack), fire prevention and fire safety education

- Mitigation and prevention of the risk created by the presence of unsafe levels of carbon monoxide and safety education related to the presence of those levels
- Rescue and emergency services
- Emergency first response in accordance with the medical tiered response protocol

Based on the service levels, Greater Sudbury Fire Services is defined as a full-service department, which provides interior fire attack, auto extrication and hazardous materials response. Under this designation, it is expected that, to achieve certification in accordance with the regulation, our career and volunteer firefighters must achieve the following certifications:

- NFPA 1001 – Standard for Firefighter
- NFPA 1002 – Standard for Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator
- NFPA 1021 – Standard for Fire Officer
- NFPA 1031 – Standard for Fire Inspector and Plans Examiner
- NFPA 1035 – Standard for Fire Life Safety Educator
- NFPA 1041 – Standard for Fire Services Instructor
- NFPA 1072 – Standard for Hazardous Material Response
- NFPA 1006 – Standard for Technical Rescue Personnel

The chart below reflects our current focus to meet the regulatory requirements for fire suppression training by the July 1, 2026 deadline. The additional NFPA technical rescue and officer requirements listed above will follow to ensure compliance with the regulation.

### Certification Overview for all Firefighters

	Career Firefighter		Volunteer Firefighter	
NFPA Standard	Certified	Require Certification	Certified/Awaiting Results	Require Certification
1001 – Firefighter Level 1	94	18	130	80
1001 – Firefighter Level 2	94	18	75	135
1002 – Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator	0	112	0	210

Our recent cohort of 23 firefighters, from both the 2021 and 2022 recruitments, participated in the Provincial testing and certification for NFPA 1001-1 Firefighter Level One, with all participants passing both the written and practical examinations and reinforcing their firefighter skills. An additional 10 firefighters have also nearly completed the certification, pending a few components.

The dedication of the training division in ensuring every participant was successful cannot be overstated. The Training Division has shown an outstanding commitment to quality, dedicating countless hours to developing and delivering our new Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) approved program that meets the standards of the new certification regulation.

Our training programs have not historically encompassed the complete NFPA 1002 Standard for Fire Apparatus Driver/Operator training (Pump Operations). Consequently, all firefighters will be required to undertake this training as mandated by the Ontario Fire Marshal. The Training Division's current focus prioritizes the delivery of NFPA 1001 training to both current and incoming volunteers in 2024, thereby necessitating the scheduling of the NFPA 1002 standard training for all firefighters in the subsequent year, 2025.

## Challenges

- **Attrition** - The rate at which volunteer firefighters leave the service presents significant challenges. Attrition leads to continuous recruitment needs, associated costs and time for training new recruits. Historically, Fire Services experiences a 15 to 20 per cent attrition rate annually, necessitating regular recruitment drives and numerous certification training sessions encompassing required NFPA standards for a full-service department.
- **Volunteer Capacities** - Amidst a broader decline in volunteerism across North America, and with the introduction of standardized training requirements, the service faces a challenge in attracting and retaining volunteer firefighters. The commitment required for modern firefighting, especially with the comprehensive training mandated by the Province, makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to dedicate the necessary time.
- **Service Demands** - Increasing and evolving demands for fire services, including emergency response, medical aid, and specialized rescue operations, place a continual strain on resources. Volunteer firefighter training, which until 2020 was only 40 hours, has now increased to more than 330 hours delivered over a three-year period. Initial training for technical disciplines has increased to more than 250 hours, requiring more than 100 hours of proficiency training annually. Balancing these demands with available personnel while maintaining an efficient and effective response remains a critical challenge.
- **Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) Restrictions** – The service operates under two separate Collective Bargaining Agreements which outline specific terms and conditions that can limit operational flexibility. Constraints related to work hours, training requirements, and personnel deployment need careful navigation to ensure compliance while striving for operational efficiency. For instance, the annual training hour allotment in the volunteer firefighter collective agreement may be insufficient to maintain skills proficiency.
- **Training Capacity** - It is extremely challenging to accommodate the training schedule around individual personal schedules of 225 volunteer firefighters. Throughout the 2022 NFPA certification training program (Appendix B – Chart 1), the training division provided flexibility in the schedule by allowing VFFs to attend alternate scheduled training dates if they were unable to attend on their assigned scheduled training date. However, the training division has experienced employee fatigue, resulting in short-term absences. Training officers are scheduled to work more than 30 weekends in 2024 (Appendix B – Chart 2&3) specifically for certification training. Staff may continue to burn out with the excessive number of hours required to conduct weekend certification training while also meeting the ongoing training needs of the department.

## Opportunities

- **Training Sustainability**- To address the demands of training requirements, we are exploring the expansion of our training division. This includes increasing the number of Training Officers and enhancing the role, and number, of volunteer training coordinators in the delivery of training. Such expansion is crucial for managing the substantial training workload, mitigating staff fatigue, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of our training programs. A business case has been submitted in the 2024 budget proposing the addition of two new Training Officers as a crucial step in addressing training sustainability.
- **Formation of a Collaborative Working Group** - A dedicated working group, including the Chief, Deputy Chief, Chief Training Officer, and several volunteer firefighters, has been established to identify and evaluate innovative strategies for delivering mandatory certification training. This group has convened twice in the past two months to deliberate on alternative approaches, including the

potential for condensed weekday training programs. To better understand the preferences of noncertified volunteers for weekday training schedules, a survey has been created for their feedback. Regular monthly meetings are scheduled for this task force to scout for and appraise alternative training modalities.

- **Engagement with Educational Institutions** - Fire Administration initiated discussions with Cambrian College regarding the potential development of a preservice fire training program tailored for evenings. This initiative aims to provide volunteer firefighters with an alternative pathway to obtain NFPA 1001 certification. Cambrian College is currently assessing the feasibility.
- **Labour Negotiation Outcomes** - As a result of recent labour negotiations with the volunteer firefighters' union, CLAC, it is agreed that volunteers who independently complete their NFPA 1001 and 1002 certifications through a recognized third-party provider will be eligible for a reimbursement of \$3,000. This arrangement empowers volunteers to pursue and attain their firefighter certifications according to their personal schedules.
- **Provincial Collaboration** - The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs has created a recruitment and retention committee exploring new and different ideas and opportunities to change the trend for volunteer firefighters. Fire administration is pleased to have a member of our team assigned to this committee to work with other Fire Services across Ontario to find solutions to this recruitment and retention problem.

## Conclusion

In alignment with Resolution CC2023-203, this semi-annual report provides an update on Fire Services' efforts in volunteer firefighter recruitment, retention, and compliance with O. Reg 343/22 Firefighter Certification. The importance of retention mirrors our efforts in recruitment, with initiatives like the formation of a dedicated working group to explore innovative training opportunities. Our involvement in the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs' recruitment and retention committee emphasizes our strategic approach to curbing attrition, leading to sustainable growth in our volunteer service despite declining numbers in volunteerism in North America.

The introduction of the Ontario Fire Marshal's mandatory certification has brought about significant changes in training requirements. Our firefighters' recent success in certification exams is a clear indication of the quality and efficacy of our training programs. However, challenges such as training capacity, increasing service demands, and Collective Bargaining Agreement restrictions persist. In response, we have proposed the addition of two new Training Officers in the 2024 budget and are exploring collaborative solutions with educational institutions and through labour negotiations to offer more flexible and accessible training options for our volunteers.

The efforts and achievements of the past year reflect our Fire Services' commitment to maintaining high standards in fire service delivery, balancing operational efficiency with the health and safety of our firefighters. Our proactive approach, including the deployment of volunteer training coordinators and diverse training methodologies, ensures that the service continues to meet the evolving needs of our community.

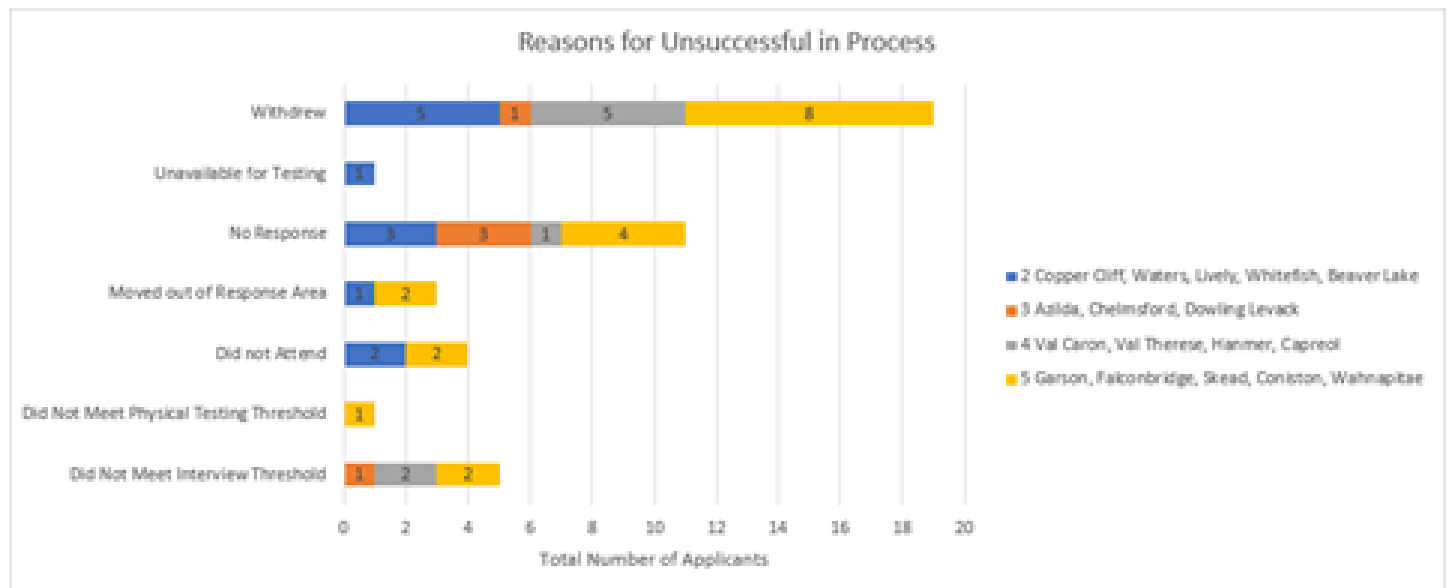
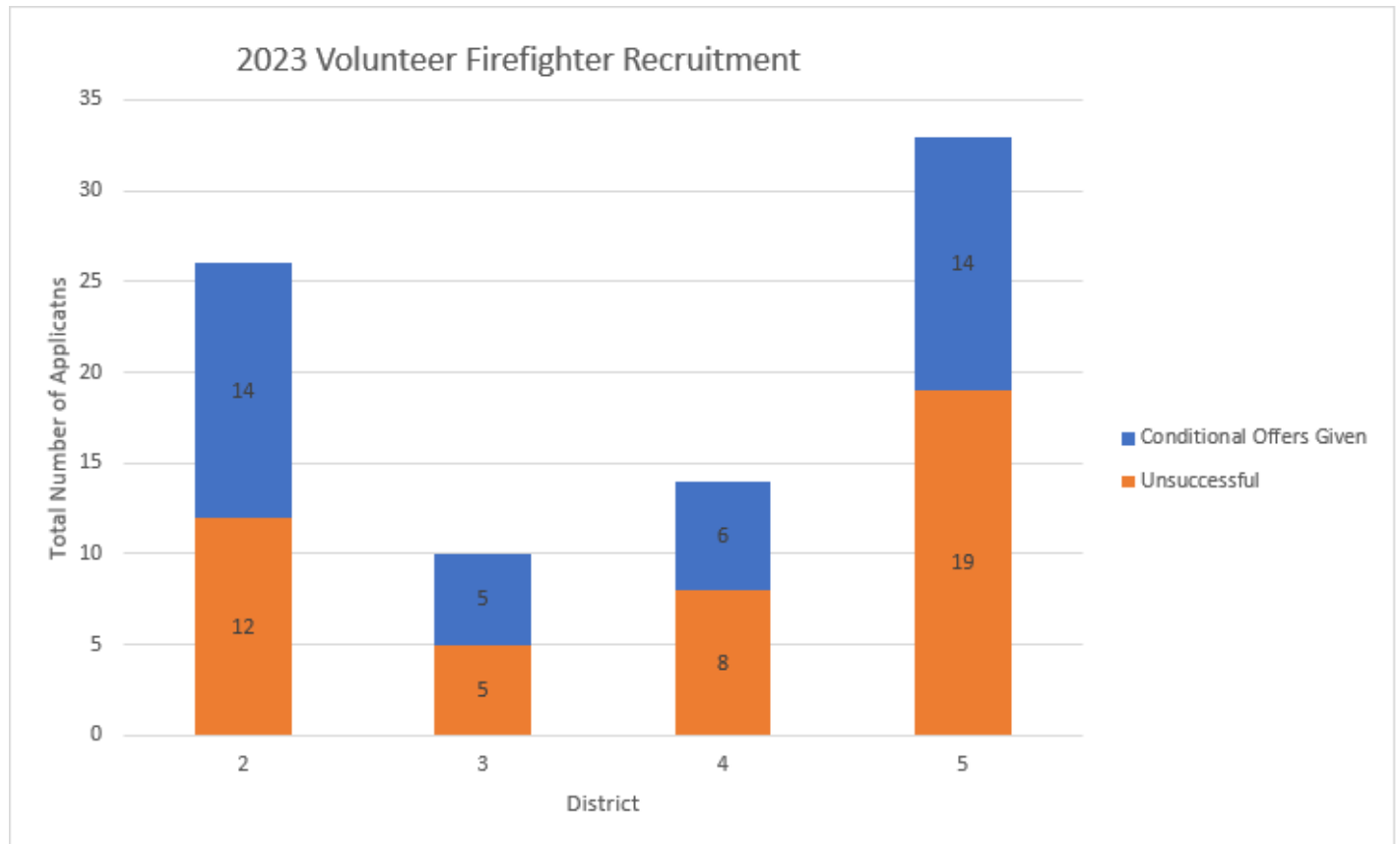
## Resources Cited

[Greater Sudbury Fire Services - 2022 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment Update \(escribemeetings.com\)](https://www.escribemeetings.com/greater-sudbury-fire-services-2022-volunteer-firefighter-recruitment-update)

<https://youtu.be/QD3TqJ5Qk1I>

## APPENDIX A

### Overview of Final Stats – 2023 Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment



## Appendix B

### Chart #1 - NFPA 1001-1 Training Schedule for 2023

\*\*\* Existing volunteer firefighters

Time	Location	Dates	Session
0800-1800	LEL	January 28, 29, February 11, 12	1
0800-1800	LEL	February 25, 26, March 25, 26	2
0800-1800	LEL	April 15, 16, 29, 30	3
0800-1800	LEL	May 13, 14, 27, 28	4
0800-1800	LEL	June 10, 11, 24, 25	5
0800-1800	LEL	July 8, 9, 15, 16	6
0800-1800	LEL	July 29, 30, August 12, 13	7
0800-1800	LEL	August 26, 27, September 9, 10	8
0800-1800	LEL	September 23, 24, October 7, 8	9
0800-1800	LEL	October 14, 15, 28, 29	10

### Chart #2 - NFPA 1001-2 Training Schedule for 2024

\*\*\* 2021 recruits, 2022 recruits and existing volunteer firefighter

Time	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Session
0800-1800	January 5, 2024	January 14, 2024	August 24, 2024	1
0800-1800	January 19, 2024	January 28, 2024	August 25, 2024	2
0800-1800	February 2, 2024	February 11, 2024	September 7, 2024	3
0800-1800	February 16, 2024	February 25, 2024	September 8, 2024	4
0800-1800	March 1, 2024	March 24, 2024	September 21, 2024	5
0800-1800	April 5, 2024	April 7, 2024	September 22, 2024	6
0800-1800	April 12, 2024	April 21, 2024	October 5, 2024	7
0800-1800	April 26, 2024	May 5, 2024	October 6, 2024	8
0800-1800	May 10, 2024	May 12, 2024	October 19, 2024	9
0800-1800	May 24, 2024	June 2, 2024	October 20, 2024	10

### Chart #3 - NFPA 1001-1 Recruit Training Schedule for 2023/2024

\*\*\*2023 recruit volunteer firefighters

2024 Volunteer Firefighter 1001 Level 1		
Session Number	Course Date	Course Date
Session 1	December 02/2023	December 03/2023
Session 2	January 20/2024	January 21/2024
Session 3	February 10/2024	February 11/2024
Session 4	March 23/2024	March 24/2024
Session 5	April 13/2024	April 14/2024
Session 6	April 27/2024	April 28/2024
Session 7	May 11/2024	May 12/2024
Session 8	May 25/2024	May 26/2024
Session 9	June 08/2024	June 09/2024
Session 10	June 22/2024	June 23/2024