

Request for Decision

Comprehensive Review of the City's Fire Services

Presented To: Community Services
Committee

Presented: Monday, Feb 27, 2012

Report Date Wednesday, Feb 15, 2012

Type: Managers' Reports

Recommendation

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury undertake a comprehensive review of the City's Fire Services; and

THAT the Chief of Emergency Services working under the direction of a Steering Committee consisting of Departmental Senior Management ensure that the investigation of options include an assessment of benefits, disadvantages, costs and risk.

Finance Implications

If approved, \$150,000 set aside for professional assistance from the Reserve for Various will be used for the review.

Signed By

Report Prepared By

Tim Beadman
Chief of Emergency Services
Digitally Signed Feb 15, 12

Recommended by the Department

Tim Beadman
Chief of Emergency Services
Digitally Signed Feb 15, 12

Recommended by the C.A.O.

Doug Nadorozny
Chief Administrative Officer
Digitally Signed Feb 22, 12

Background

The Fire Services Division is comprised of 132 full-time staff, including 108 career fire fighters and approximately 340 volunteer fire fighters who, operating out of 24 fire stations provide Greater Sudbury with fire prevention, fire suppression and emergency rescue services. Fire prevention services include fire safety inspections, fire code enforcement and public safety education.

Fire Services operates within a backdrop characterized by increasing demand for emergency services (including medical aid calls, water/ice rescue, vehicle extractions, fire alarm calls, and land search and rescue), albeit accurate statistics on growth and Fire Services needs are not readily available.

It is a relatively large operation, consisting of some 450 fire fighters operating out of 24 stations that are geographically dispersed over an area of 3,627 square kilometres that has evolved from an amalgamation of multiple municipal fire services in 2001, which to date has not been subjected to rigorous examination relative to the City's Fire Service needs. The Service operates under protocols that vary by community. Questions abound concerning the number and geographic location of stations, and potential redundancy of specific stations.

There also are questions regarding the City's investment in Fire Services. In particular, how does the City's investment compare to fire services costs in other municipalities of similar size. Where variance in costs exists, is it attributed to a difference in delivery system or operational effectiveness of the Fire Services, or to a difference in number, type or potential severity of local Fire Services needs (i.e., risk threats)? It also has been suggested that the

City should investigate the use of User Fees to manage/contain Fire Services costs.

Suppression operations of the Fire Services is subject to Area Rating, a solution introduced in conjunction with amalgamation, as a means by which to harmonize the former variation in service levels without significantly increasing the combined Fire operating budget, or residential property taxes. Area Rating has resulted in the provision of three service levels - full time career fire fighters in the City core, volunteers supported by a few full time career fire fighters in the former Valley East, and volunteer fire fighters serving all other sections of the City. It has been suggested that the City should investigate whether fire area rating is impacting service delivery, and provide any recommendations for improvement.

In consideration of the above, it is recommended that the Emergency Services Department should undertake a comprehensive review of the City's Fire Services with the following as principal scope:

- To investigate the City's Fire service needs (risks) and trends, including needs specific to essential services e.g., hospital, long term care facilities, Sudbury airport, etc.
- To assess the operational performance of the City's Fire Services, including number and geographic location of stations, and utilization of resources.
- To investigate the costs to operate the City's Fire Services and how the cost compares to fire services costs in other municipalities of similar size.
- To investigate options for containment of the City's Fire Services costs (capital and operating), including the use of User Fees.
- To investigate options for improving the operational effectiveness of the City's Fire Services, including options for rationalizing (consolidating) infrastructure (stations), resources (manpower, fleet and equipment) and operating protocols.
- To investigate whether fire area rating is impacting the service delivery, and provide any recommendations for improvement.
- To review the volunteer operations with respect to the examination of alternative volunteer deployment models, alternative volunteer in-the-field oversight models, as well as alternative approaches to volunteer retention and recruitment by other municipalities.
- In tandem with the Fire Rationalization review, a Fire Capital Replacement program should be developed for replacement of Fire vehicle, apparatus, and systems. A similar initiative for capital improvements/replacement of Emergency Services facilities should be included.

Investigation of options should include assessment of benefits, disadvantages, costs and risks. Further, given the scope and complexity of the undertaking, the Chief of Emergency Services will be retaining third party subject matter expertise working under the direction of a Steering Committee consisting of Departmental Senior Management.

The use of third party subject matter expertise will provide the necessary oversight support for the scope of project, and their professional experience and knowledge of industry Best Practises will assist with the validation of the options developed by the in-house resources. This process will provide the needed due diligence on the validity of the options developed before the final recommendations are presented to the Community Services Committee/Council.

It is expected that working committees will be required throughout this project comprising of frontline fire fighters from the career and volunteer sections, and other administration/technical support personnel. Given the time period involved, this project is not expected to be completed until the first quarter of year 2013.