



**REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28, 2018**

SUBJECT **Analysis of the Feasibility of a Regional Fire Dispatch Model for the Capital Regional District**

ISSUE

At the December 13, 2017 Capital Regional District (CRD) Board meeting, staff were directed to review the potential for a Regional Fire Dispatch model as per the following recommendations:

THAT staff be asked to:

1. *Provide an analysis of the feasibility of co-locating 911 with police and fire dispatch in the new purpose-built centre, or within Saanich Emergency Services Building.*
2. *Provide advice on the process required to establish a regional fire dispatch centre and a corresponding governance model.*
3. *Consult with municipal staff to identify issues that will need to be addressed to create a regional fire dispatch centre and governance model.*

Additionally, staff were directed to facilitate a meeting with Victoria, Saanich, Langford and E-Comm to explore models for the unification of fire dispatch services within the region.

BACKGROUND

Within the CRD, 911 call answer, police dispatch and fire dispatch functions are presently handled by seven separate communications centres. The three existing 911 call answer and police dispatch operations will be consolidating into the South Island Communications Centre under operational contract with E-Comm in January 2019.

Within BC dispatch services for the varied emergency services such as police, fire, and ambulance all require different dispatcher skill sets and agency specific training and protocols. As these requirements are not consistent between the services, there are challenges bringing agencies together to share resources. Currently there are three fire dispatch centres within the CRD. These are the Saanich Fire Department, Victoria Fire Department and the CRD Fire Dispatch service provided by Langford Fire Department under contract. A fourth federal fire dispatch exists at the Department of National Defense, but it is outside regional jurisdiction. Victoria provides dispatch for itself while Saanich and CRD each provide dispatch service for a number of fire departments as follows:

- Victoria
 - Victoria
- Saanich (Note: Changes to the service participants are pending for five municipalities)
 - Saanich, Oak Bay, Esquimalt, Sidney, North Saanich, Central Saanich, Colwood, and View Royal
- CRD (Langford)
 - Langford, East Sooke, Highlands, Mayne Island, Metchosin, North Galiano, Otter Point, Pender Island, Piers Island, Port Renfrew, Salt Spring Island, Saturna Island, Shirley, Sooke, South Galiano, Willis Point, and Sidney Island

Saanich provides dispatch services to the above participants under a contract. CRD contracts with Langford Fire to deliver fire dispatch services to the above noted participants under Bylaw 3854 (Appendix A) which establishes the regional emergency communication dispatch service. Presently, the three fire dispatch centres combined handle approximately 28,000 calls per year. Recently, the

municipalities of Colwood, View Royal, Sidney, Esquimalt and North Saanich, currently with the Saanich fire dispatch service, put out a request for proposals (RFP) for the delivery of fire dispatch services. This RFP closed on February 23, 2018.

The individual fire departments in the region vary from fulltime urban career departments, composite fulltime/volunteer departments, to rural volunteer based services. Each of these departments has individual operational guidelines and practices and have varying dispatch service support needs.

A CRD fire dispatch review was undertaken in 2011 by Planetworks Consulting Corporation to identify a recommended fire dispatch service delivery model best suited to meeting the fire dispatch needs within the capital region (Appendix B). The study high-lighted the benefits to consolidation of fire dispatch in terms of the required support for technologies as well as staffing and management. The service delivery options presented indicated that some form of fire dispatch consolidation within the CRD would gain operational and fiscal efficiencies.

It should be noted that service delivery models for fire dispatch centres in the region has evolved since the Planetworks report of 2011 based on changes to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards and in response to some of the information contained in the report.

As part of the consultation process related to the Board direction, staff met with Fire Chiefs and facilitated a meeting with Victoria, Saanich, Langford and E-Comm as regional fire dispatch experts, to gain consensus on the base components of a regional fire dispatch model with consideration of regional fire leadership operational needs. This meeting focused on a forward looking exploration of the requirements of a consolidated regional fire dispatch system to meet regional operational needs and was not a review or assessment of current systems. The group also addressed the facility requirements necessary to house a regional fire dispatch program with some discussion regarding governance. The summary of this meeting is included as Appendix C.

Based on that input from the dispatch focus group, the required components of a regional fire dispatch centre were determined to be as follows:

- Post disaster facility with seamless back-up at another site in case of systems failure
- Have four work stations for operations and access to additional workstations for training and major events
- Compliant with NFPA standards for fire dispatch including staffing, training, facility, radios, technology, computer aided dispatch (CAD and records management)
- Staffing ratio of between 1:8,000 and 1:12,000 of dispatchers to annual call volume based on a range of service expectations
- Must meet NFPA performance standards and metrics

IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

The consolidation of fire dispatch services into a regional service delivery model would create a number of economies of scale in the areas of staffing, technology, facilities and administration resulting in best value for tax dollars. Staff completed a high level analysis of a unified service operated within one of the facilities in the region and determined that there would be 10-20% direct cost savings over having three fire dispatch providers in region. The savings would result from a decrease in staffing requirements as there are currently four dispatchers on duty 24/7 in the region to manage the combined annual call volume of 28,000 of the three dispatch centres. This ratio of dispatchers to calls is 1:7000 and is higher than what would be necessary to manage the combined volume at a single regional centre. It is anticipated that a consolidated regional fire dispatch service would require up to three dispatchers 24/7 with some potential staffing variations during peak time hours. Administrative

overhead and supervision costs would also decrease with a consolidation of fire dispatch as there would be fewer workstations, less equipment, common information technology and support, as well as fewer back-up service arrangements. Indirect and future investment would also decrease, especially in consideration of next generation technology.

Operations Implications

There is agreement among fire leaders that a consolidated fire dispatch service would lead to improved operational capacity and effectiveness within the region. The use of consistent protocols and communications would lead to better managed fire grounds and would improve cooperation and collaboration amongst departments as well as ultimately improving responder safety. A regional fire dispatch model could potentially decrease response times and improve public safety by having responders on scene faster despite municipal boundaries. A singular dispatch could enable supplementary agreements to dispatch the closest responder to the call versus the designated department for a specific area or enable improved mutual aid responses between communities through automatic aid policies. Assistance could be immediately dispatched from a single site versus having calls transferred to another dispatch centre to make requests.

When municipalities enter into an automatic aid agreement for fire services they benefit from the combined resources of all municipalities participating and receive credit to their municipality when looking at the resourcing for fire protection requirements. This can impact issues such as number of firefighters required, number of specialty vehicles (currently there are six ladder trucks in the CRD which is far greater than what would be needed under a consolidated automatic aid model), training costs, purchasing etc. An often overlooked aspect is the potential savings that residents and businesses may receive from insurance rates due to the increased level of fire protection that an automatic aid regional system provides. These indirect savings significantly increase the fiscal benefit that can be achieved through a consolidated regional fire dispatch model.

Facility Options

Upon review of facility options in the region, there are three potential sites that could support a regional fire dispatch model. The possibility to create a regional fire dispatch function through an out of region contractor was also considered but was discounted due to the potential operational benefits associated with retaining the program within the region. The facility options considered are:

1. The new South Island Communications Centre (SICC) being built and owned by the CRD to manage the regional 911 and police dispatch operations, operated under contract with E-Comm. This is a purpose built post disaster facility for 911 and police dispatch operations. There appears to be room for expansion however the SICC Steering Committee have indicated a strong desire for a facility to remain exclusive for this use to allow for future growth and the incorporation of next generation technology. The inherent back-up for E-Comm is their dispatch centre in Vancouver which would be a seamless transition in the event of systems failure. The Steering Committee for the SICC would have to approve any proposed new service entity that may want to operate out of that facility.
2. Saanich Fire Dispatch. The Saanich site is post disaster and has the necessary space to manage the increased number of dispatchers required for a regional fire dispatch program as well as the training and extra workstations. The departure of police dispatch and 911 from the Saanich site has created additional space for seven workstations. Saanich has an agreement with E-Comm for the use and support of the E-Comm hosted CAD and RMS. This agreement allows for E-Comm's Vancouver dispatch centre to act as a back-up in the event of systems failure.

3. CRD Fire Dispatch in Langford. This facility is post disaster and has the necessary space to manage the increased number of dispatchers required for a regional fire dispatch program. Langford currently has room for four workstations and has an agreement for extra workstations at BCEHS which provides redundancy for systems failure or can act as operational workstations if required. If the CRD delivered the regional program through an extended contract with Langford there would need to be improvements to the existing back-up capacity.

Intergovernmental Implications

The recent agreements with E-Comm to provide 911 call answer and police dispatch services in the region at the proposed SICC demonstrates positive movement towards a unified regional dispatch service delivery model. The SICC is currently under construction by the CRD at 4219 Commerce Circle and is expected to be operational January 1, 2019.

The establishment of a regional fire dispatch service that meets the needs of all fire departments in the region aligns with the regional initiatives to improve service and gain efficiencies through consolidation of services.

Governance of a regional fire dispatch system would depend somewhat on the model chosen whether direct delivery by an agency within the region or by third party contract with an external agency such as E-Comm. To realize the greatest efficiency and value the preferred governance model would be a combined service with an in-region or potentially out of region contractor.

The fire leadership within the region were very adamant that the system needs to be flexible and responsive to input and feedback from fire department operations to ensure that there is an equal voice in decisions that would affect individual operations and system development. This would be more likely realized with an in-region contractor under a unified governance structure, where if given an appropriate mandate, significant cost savings and future fire service operational efficiencies could be achieved.

CONCLUSION

Analysis shows it is feasible to unify fire dispatch and co-locate in a facility. It is also feasible to co-locate in the new 911 and police dispatch building. However, the Steering Committee for the new 911 and police dispatch building have indicated a strong desire to have a purpose built facility to accommodate future growth and the advent of next generation technology and operations. It is also feasible to have a unified fire dispatch service located in the Langford facility, Saanich facility or to operate with an out of region contractor.

Without exception, fire leaders in the region stated that there would be significant operational and economy of scale benefits to the establishment of a regional fire dispatch system ultimately leading to improved emergency response and firefighter safety. The establishment of a single regional fire dispatch centre under a unified governance structure would align fire operations in the region and with the appropriate mandate, realize significant cost savings and efficiencies.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning and Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That this report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Shawn Carby, CD, BSc, MAL, Senior Manager Protective Services
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P.Eng., MBA, General Manager Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

SC:cp

Attachments: Appendix A – Bylaw 3854
Appendix B – Review of Fire Dispatch for the Capital Regional District
Appendix C – Fire Dispatch Service Components