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## REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2023

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**SUBJECT:** Fire Services Governance Review Report

### **ISSUE SUMMARY**

To introduce the Capital Regional District (CRD) Fire Services Governance Review report and to seek approval to engage local Fire Commissions and Fire Societies toward the development of an implementation plan in response to the recommendations in the report.

### **BACKGROUND**

The current fire service governance structure, challenges with regulatory compliance, and lack of direct oversight has been identified as a serious liability and risk for the CRD. On February 10, 2021 the Board directed staff to report back with operational, administrative, and governance strategies to meet and sustain regulatory compliance for fire services in the CRD electoral areas.

In November 2022, the CRD procured contractor Tim Pley & Associates to facilitate a review of roles, responsibilities, and governance models in fire services (Appendix A). Protective Services coordinates 11 CRD Fire Services through delegated authority commissions, contracts with not-for-profit societies, and agreements with neighboring jurisdictions.

Fire protection is a local government service, and subject to a complex collection of regulatory requirements and recognized operating, staffing and training standards. The report identifies various regulatory change drivers affecting the fire service in British Columbia. These regulatory change drivers have led to a significant evolution in the way local governments manage and oversee their fire services and have fundamentally impacted the way in which fire protection services are delivered in rural areas. Methods and approaches that once worked are becoming less effective or more challenging to sustain, and some practices are no longer permitted. As such, local governments have been compelled to review their processes and materially adjust their oversight and management of fire service delivery. Fire and emergency response service management has necessarily become far more technical and far more complex than in the past.

The requirements to meet appropriate standards – whether in training, or equipment/apparatus use and maintenance, or occupational health and safety processes – has made clear and effective oversight essential. For local governments, ensuring that such oversight is in place and functioning properly are critical elements of proper risk management, both to protect the local government itself and to ensure the safety of emergency responders and the public they serve.

The effects of regulatory change drivers on the rural fire service are being compounded by the impacts of societal changes. At the same time that regulatory changes are making it more challenging and costly to meet minimum training and operating requirements, the pool from which fire departments traditionally draw firefighters is drying up. Resident populations in rural communities are aging and volunteerism has waned. Rural fire services rely on volunteers, and many rural departments now struggle to recruit, train and retain an adequate number of qualified firefighters. This confluence of factors has adversely impacted delivery of fire protection services in rural areas, and local governments have found it increasingly necessary to update and revise their approach to governing and overseeing their fire departments while supporting their firefighters.

This project involved the Consultants reviewing the governance models currently utilized by the CRD and making recommendations for improvements. The Consultants undertook a comprehensive review to ensure as full an understanding of the current state as possible. A detailed document review and analysis covering bylaws, service agreements, occupational health and safety matters and budgets was undertaken, the results of which are reflected in the attached report. The Consultants also travelled to every rural community with a CRD fire service area and met with each fire chief and society president or commission chair, or their alternate. The Consultants and the CRD jointly considered it critical that this review be informed by local conditions, practices and concerns.

Ultimately, the report identified 36 recommendations designed to ensure CRD fire departments can meet and sustain regulatory compliance while minimizing the liability and risk to the firefighters, public and the CRD. Many of these recommendations would be transformational and would see a significant change in the way fire services are delivered in the region if implemented.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### *Alternative 1*

The Electoral Areas Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to distribute the report and to engage the fire commissions and fire societies and to report back to the Committee with an implementation plan.

### *Alternative 2*

That the Fire Services Governance Review report be referred back to staff for additional information.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### *Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities*

A CRD Board priority for the 2023-2026 term is the effective advocacy, coordinated and collaborative governance, and leadership in organizational performance and service delivery.

- Initiative 16e-3 in the CRD Corporate Plan is to continue to review committees and commissions to find efficiencies and improve consistency.
- Initiative 16g-3 is to review and modernize fire and emergency management programs.

### *Service Delivery Implications*

The CRD electoral area fire services have been seriously challenged to meet regulatory requirements since the introduction of the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) Playbook in 2015. The implementation of these recommendations can result in the sustainable delivery of fire protection services in a manner compliant with regulatory requirements, which provides the highest possible level of safety for firefighters and residents.

As next steps, staff will engage with the fire commissions, fire societies and key stakeholders on the recommendations and will bring back a staff report on an implementation plan in Q1 2024.

### *Social Implications*

The delivery of fire services in the electoral areas is community driven and any changes made in this sector should be well-thought out, and there should be a communication and implementation plan developed that reflects stakeholder inputs. The CRD should continue to be mindful of the deep investment made by volunteers in the delivery of fire protection services in communities across the regional district areas, that their continued involvement will be dependent upon the

continued feeling that they are contributing to their local community, and that changes to the current state and motivations for those changes could easily be misunderstood if not adequately communicated. Communication and consistent, reliable actions by the CRD will be critical to successful implementation of recommendations.

**CONCLUSION**

Substantial regulatory changes over the last decade has created significant challenges for rural volunteer based fire service to achieve and maintain compliance within the current governance and operating structure. The Fire Services Governance Review report prepared by Tim Pley & Associates reviewed the governance models currently utilized by the CRD and provides recommendations for improvement. Staff recommends engaging local fire commissions, fire societies and key stakeholders for the purpose of developing an implementation plan in response to the recommendations in the consultant’s report and will report back to the EAC.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The Electoral Areas Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:  
That staff be directed to distribute the report and to engage the fire commissions and fire societies and to report back to the Committee with an implementation plan.

Submitted by:	Shawn Carby, Senior Manager, Protective Services
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P. Eng., MBA, General Manager, Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Kristen Morley, J.D., General Manager, Corporate Services & Corporate Officer
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**ATTACHMENT**

Appendix A: Fire Services Governance Review Report