

**REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2020**

SUBJECT Electoral Area Volunteer Fire Department Service Level Review

ISSUE SUMMARY

Volunteer-based fire departments provide crucial public safety services in the Capital Regional District (CRD) Electoral Areas (EAs) and are regulated by the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) minimum training standard “Playbook”. The OFC has contracted the CRD and requested verification of EA Fire Department service levels and training programs. Over the coming months, staff will be contacting fire departments to review their programs and ensure compliance.

BACKGROUND

In September 2014, the OFC presented the Structure Firefighters Competency and Training Playbook, known as the “Playbook”, which established training standards for all fire services personnel in British Columbia. The Playbook requires the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) to declare fire service levels for each fire department, and describes minimum training levels associated with each level. The CRD is the AHJ for all fire departments within the EAs, except those which fall under improvement districts (Salt Spring Island, Mayne Island, and Piers Island).

Fire Service Levels

- **Exterior Operations:** Firefighting activities are restricted to a position external to the building or object in question. This level does not allow entry into an “Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health” environment and precludes rescue operations.
- **Interior Operations:** This service level authorizes firefighting activities that include entry into simple structures, such as single family homes. Complex structures that have been pre-assessed and determined to be safe for interior operations may be included provided firefighters have been trained in the associated hazards.
- **Full Service Operations:** This service level includes a full spectrum of firefighting competencies outlined in National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001 Level 2, and NFPA 1021 standards. This level of service requires establishment of response protocols with minimum levels of on scene staffing and apparatus.

An independent review of EA Fire Departments was conducted by a consultant in 2015. This review provided an initial independent determination of each fire department’s capabilities and recommended appropriate service levels. In June 2016, the CRD Board declared the following fire service levels:

- **Exterior Operations:** North Galiano Island, Saturna Island, Willis Point, Port Renfrew
- **Interior Operations:** Otter Point, East Sooke, Shirley, South Galiano Island
- **Full Service:** Pender Island

Since the Board's declaration, commendable progress towards Playbook compliance has occurred throughout EA volunteer fire departments. A staff report to the EA Committee in July 2018 reported all services had either achieved or were very close to compliance. CRD Protective Services works closely with individual fire societies/commissions and departments to ensure support is available to enable each service to meet its declared service level.

In December 2019, the OFC contacted the CRD and other AHJs in BC to verify that appropriate fire services training programs are presently in place for declared service levels (Appendix A). In response, Protective Services is conducting an independent review of fire service training programs to certify that EA fire services are compliant. Over the coming months, Protective Services staff and independent fire service contractors will be working with fire department leadership to evaluate the current state of training programs and verify it meets declared service level standards. In case of discrepancies, the review will recommend training program improvements or revised service levels in consultation with Fire Chiefs and their societies/commissions.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

That the Electoral Area Volunteer Fire Departments Service Level Review report be received for information.

Alternative 2

That the Electoral Area Volunteer Fire Departments Service Level Review report be referred back to staff for additional information based on Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Implications

Most communities expect properly trained and equipped fire services to respond safely and effectively to emergencies. While the provision of fire suppression services is not a legislated requirement, once established, removal or decrease in services are usually met with significant community resistance.

Service Delivery Implications

It is imperative that all necessary steps are taken to ensure the safety of our volunteer firefighters is consistent with CRD Policy and WorkSafeBC. Section 217.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada states "*Everyone who undertakes, or has authority, to direct how another person does work or performs a task is under a legal duty to take reasonable steps to prevent bodily harm to that person, or any other person arising from that work or task.*" This has been interpreted as ensuring that all firefighters assigned a task have the necessary training, supervision and equipment required to perform the task safely. The courts have interpreted this to include the lowest level supervisor up to and including individual Board of Directors.

From a fire department and organizational perspective, it is incumbent upon the fire department leadership, commissions/societies, and the CRD to ensure that all firefighters attending a scene are suitably trained and equipped to undertake the job they are requested to perform. This has implications for both public and firefighter safety. This includes ensuring fire departments do not engage in operations where the number of resources or trained personnel are not sufficient to perform the task within established safety standards.

CONCLUSION

The CRD supports volunteer-based fire departments across its unincorporated areas. As the AHJ, the CRD ensures fire departments have the required training to keep firefighters and citizens safe. Staff and contractors will review training programs with fire department leadership over the coming months to verify that the programs meet provincial standards.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Electoral Area Volunteer Fire Departments Service Level Review report be received for information.

Submitted by:	Jonathan Reimer, MSC, Acting Senior Manager, Protective Services
Concurrence:	Kevin Lorette, P. Eng., MBA, General Manager, Planning & Protective Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Playbook Advisory to All Fire Departments