



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Andy Taylor, Chief Administrative Officer
Brenda Librecz, Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

Prepared by: Andy Taylor, Chief Administrative Officer
Brenda Librecz, Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

Date: April 20, 2020

Re: Response to York Region – Fire Regionalization

RECOMMENDATION:

The York Region Council met on February 27, 2020, and approved the attached motion (Attachment 1). The motion asks local municipal Councils to provide a resolution by May 29, 2020, indicating whether they support proceeding with a study on the potential creation of a Regional Fire Service.

A Briefing Note on this subject (see Attachment 2) was prepared for the March 13th meeting of the Fire Response Task Force, which was cancelled due to COVID-19. Some of the key considerations highlighted in the Briefing Note include:

- **Markham's 2020 Estimated Operating Budget Cost per Capita for Fire Services is 40% Lower than Central York Fire Services** - Using current budget data, we note that Aurora and Newmarket residents pay a higher operating budget per capita cost for fire protection services than the City of Markham. MFES is currently delivering its suppression services with less staff than Central York Fire Services (CYFS).
- **Past amalgamations have not demonstrated savings** – It tends to create larger unionized bargaining units. Regionalization will create winners and losers. Winners will be those municipalities that gain access to a larger tax base and higher service standards in order to pay for enhancements in their local community. It is unlikely Markham will be a winner in the regionalization of fire services.

- **Increased Efficiencies and Effectiveness can be achieved through Partnerships** - Staff have located no empirical data to indicate the regionalization of fire services will increase efficiencies and effectiveness for the City of Markham. The cities of Markham, Richmond Hill, and Vaughan have created a Shared Service Committee to maximize the benefits provided by Automatic Aid, Joint Training Initiatives, Joint Technical Rescue Response, Communications, and Procurement, all without relinquishing decision-making control from the local municipal Councils.

It is the opinion of senior staff that without measurable benefits and cost savings demonstrated over the many years that this topic has been discussed and pursued, we recommend against proceeding with a study to pursue the consolidation of services through the creation of a Regional Fire Service. Staff believe that time spent on studying Regional Fire Service may inadvertently distract and slow down the advancement of the current partnerships among Markham, Richmond Hill, and Vaughan for the shared communications centre. The centre will be a critical stepping-stone for the three cities to realize greater efficiencies through other partnership opportunities. We believe this partnership will yield greater return on investment (ROI).

In light of COVID-19 pandemic, this study is not a priority for staff. Our attention needs to be focused on keeping our essential services running and then putting our energies into a solid recovery plan for our corporation and our community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Council not support proceeding with a Regional Fire Service study; and,
2. That Staff recommend that we continue current efforts with Richmond Hill and Vaughan, in particular the creation of a shared communications centre that will enable further joint/shared opportunities to achieve efficiencies and to improve services to our residents and businesses.

Andy Taylor
Chief Administrative Officer

Brenda Librecz
Commissioner, Community & Fire Services

Attachment 1 – York Region Council Motion

Attachment 2 – Briefing Note: 2020 York Region Committee of the Whole Item - Regional Fire Service