



Report to: General Committee

Date Report Authored: May 27, 2013

SUBJECT: Fire Services Automatic Aid Pilot Project with the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill

PREPARED BY: Bill Snowball, Fire Chief
Brenda Librecz, Commissioner, Community and Fire Services

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) THAT the report entitled, "Fire Services Automatic Aid Pilot Project with the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill" dated May 27, 2013 be received;
- 2) AND THAT the City of Markham participate in a two-year Fire Services Automatic Aid Pilot Project with City the of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill;
- 3) AND THAT the Fire Chief be authorized to enter into discussions to develop an Automatic Aid Agreement with the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill;
- 4) AND THAT the Fire Chief advise the Markham Professional Firefighters Association formally of Markham's intent to take part in the pilot project;
- 5) AND THAT the Fire Chief report back on the results and provide recommendations following the two-year pilot;
- 6) AND THAT the Fire Chief also pursue other collaborations within the Region of York that would be beneficial to the fire services in Markham;
- 7) AND THAT this report be circulated to City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill; and
- 8) AND THAT staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

To respond to the requests received from the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill to enter into a two-year Automatic Aid Pilot Project in the urbanized part of York Region as an innovative example of collaboration and service delivery to the public.

BACKGROUND:

There are currently eight fire services serving the nine municipalities of York Region, namely Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, King, Whitechurch-Stouffville, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, and Central York. Central York serves Aurora and Newmarket.

Local Association Presidents of the six fire services, as represented by the Ontario Professional Firefighters Association, approached the Region of York to discuss

regionalizing the fire services. Currently, firefighter associations from across York Region are jointly pursuing the regionalization of fire services. These associations have hired a lobbyist group to make their case across the Region. The pursuit of regionalization requires a 'triple majority' from the area municipalities and the Region. Previous attempts to regionalize fire services in 1997 and then to centralize fire communications in 2003 failed due to legislative barriers and the lack of a convincing business case to satisfy all impacted municipalities.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

Resolutions from City of Vaughan and Town of Richmond Hill

Firefighter associations at Vaughan, Georgina, and Richmond Hill have made presentations to their respective Councils seeking to pursue regionalization by undertaking a study as a first step to amalgamating fire services. In response, the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill have each passed a resolution recommending an Automatic Aid Pilot as a more viable alternative to the regionalization or amalgamation of fire services.

As the most urbanized areas of York Region, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham have similar built forms and completed investments in fire infrastructure (buildings, equipment) and programs (training, public education). Being location adjacent and sharing common characteristics and challenges have made it possible and ideal for these municipalities to investigate the benefits of Automatic Aid without changing the decision-making role of each municipal Council or ignoring the unique community characteristics and diversity of each municipality. As such, it is anticipated that an Automatic Aid approach could avoid future costs, such as the Langstaff site, and improve service responses.

Both the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill have requested that Markham participate in the Automatic Aid pilot for a two-year period through the use of an Automatic Aid Agreement. Following are excerpts from the Vaughan and Richmond Hill Council resolutions with complete resolutions attached as Appendix A:

On April 23, 2013, **Vaughan Council** passed the following: That the City of Vaughan conduct a pilot project for a two year period to implement automatic aid, being reciprocal fire, rescue, and emergency response support, with the City of Markham and the Town of Richmond Hill in response to emergencies;

On May 27, 2013, **Richmond Hill Council** passed the following: That the Town of Richmond Hill conduct a pilot project for a two year period to implement Automatic Aid with the City of Vaughan and the City of Markham.

On April 15 2013, Georgina Council received a presentation from the President of Georgina Professional Firefighters Association to study a Regional Fire Service. A report from the Town of Georgina administration is expected shortly.

Automatic Aid Increases Service to the Public and Firefighter Safety at the Same Operating Costs

Automatic aid, as defined in the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997 states:

4) For the purposes of this Act, an automatic aid agreement means any agreement under which,

(a) a municipality agrees to ensure the provision of an initial response to fires, rescues and emergencies that may occur in a part of another municipality where a fire department in the municipality is capable of responding more quickly than any fire department situated in the other municipality; or

(b) a municipality agrees to ensure the provision of a supplemental response to fires, rescues and emergencies that may occur in a part of another municipality where a fire department situated in the municipality is capable of providing the quickest supplemental response to fires, rescues and emergencies occurring in the part of the other municipality. 1997, c.4s.1 (4).

An Automatic Aid Agreement among Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill would result in the closest fire apparatus to an emergency responding regardless of municipal boundaries. This would apply to single and multiple unit responses. For a single unit response in Richmond Hill, a Markham apparatus may respond if it is closest to the emergency incident. For multiple unit responses at a location such as the Yonge St. and Highway 7 area of Markham, the quickest response may result in apparatus arriving from all three municipalities. In each instance, the public will be receiving the quickest response possible.

An Automatic Aid agreement does not impact York Region's current Mutual Aid Plan, a plan to assist each other in the event of an emergency. Mutual Aid is identified in Part 2 Section 7 (1), (2) of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act 1997. Markham Fire and Emergency Services have been members of the York Region Mutual Plan since the inception of the Region in 1971. Mutual Aid is only activated after the majority of the resources of the requesting department have been exhausted.

Entering into an Automatic Aid agreement with Vaughan and Richmond Hill will provide an opportunity to collect actual data on shared responses, while increasing the service to residents and improving firefighter safety. A two-year pilot will provide information for Council to make an informed decision on future options for continuous improvement in the Fire Service.

Rationale for Markham to Pursue Automatic Aid

To date there have been no detailed studies completed on the overall impact on service or cost of regionalizing fire services in York Region. However, the Firefighters Associations have worked on a new collective agreement and GPS study of existing fire station

locations. There was a study done in 1997 which is outdated and of limited value as it did not fully consider the operating costs and the non-financial impacts, such as service outcomes to the public and moving local decision-making of fire services to a regional level.

There are some fundamental questions that need to be considered regarding regionalization, namely

- Regionalization or amalgamation of fire services within a large urban geographic area in Ontario has not demonstrated reductions in operating costs. Without cost reductions that do not negatively impact service quality, what would be the municipal benefits for pursuing regionalizing?
- Is bigger really better? Especially in the case of Markham where it has already made the investments that other smaller municipalities in York Region have yet to make.

Decisions on service delivery must be focused on cost-effective community outcomes, be fact-based, and not be swayed by a few interest groups and lobbyists.

Over the past 15 years, the experiences across Ontario in terms of cost reductions as a result of amalgamation have been less than stellar. Regionalization and amalgamation experiences in Ontario (Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton) have not resulted in the reduction of costs. Aside from increases in labour costs, there are additional costs associated with the consolidation of physical and financial assets, and creating uniform systems and practices that have been quite expensive and time-consuming to undertake.

Markham has a track record for participating in many service delivery improvements in which resources are shared or pooled. Some examples in existence in York Region include:

- York Region EMS and fire services have co-located Emergency Medical Responder at municipal fire departments
- Local municipal fire services have organized into three dispatch centres
- York Regional Police and local municipal fire services share radio infrastructure
- Mutual Aid
- Shared training

Based on the track record for collaboration among the fire services in York Region the Automatic Aid Agreements have a higher probability of success than regionalization and could be achieved significantly faster with the benefits accruing to our residents.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS AND TEMPLATE: (external link)

There are no financial implications related to this report.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

N/A


ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Aligns with recommendations in Master Fire Plan

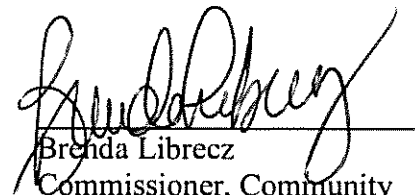
BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Human Resources

**RECOMMENDED
BY:**



Bill Snowball
Fire Chief



Brenda Librecz
Commissioner, Community
& Fire Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A