Workforce Plan

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services

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Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services
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Version History

Version	Authored By	Date	Reason for Revision
1.0	M. Furlot	11/26/24	First record of workforce analysis
1.1	M Furlot	11/28/24	Formatting edits made
1.2	M Furlot	01/13/2025	Ready for 2025-2029 Budget Discussion

1. Department Profile

In 2023, Council identified and adopted the following six priorities:

- Climate Resilience & Environmental Stewardship
- Diversified & Thriving Economy
- Engaged & Healthy Community
- Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
- Housing
- Strong Relationships & Partnerships

The Fire Department leads the following functions:

Service Provided	Related Council Priority
Fire Prevention: annual business inspections, building fire pre-planning & review, public education	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence Engaged & Healthy Community
Fire Suppression: emergency response to structural, high-rise, wildfire, and vehicle fires	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Medical Aid: emergency medical response including CPR, trauma care, and advanced first aid	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Rescue Operations: motor vehicle accidents, high angle rescue (ie tower cranes), and confined space	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Hazardous Materials Response: mitigating chemical, biological, radiological, and other haz-mat incidents	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Annual recruitment process	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence Strong Relationships & Partnerships
Training and Preparedness: meeting the standards and regulations of a full service department through continuous training	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Fire Investigations: determine the origin and cause of fires and reporting to Province	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Mutual Aid and Automatic Aid: partnering with neighboring departments for large or complex incidents	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence Strong Relationships & Partnerships
Specialized Services: urban search and rescue, marine firefighting, and wildfire	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Enforce the municipal fire and safety bylaw	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence

2. Frontline Apparatus

EFRS maintains a fleet of emergency vehicles and equipment to address diverse emergency scenarios. This includes:

- **Frontline Apparatus**:
  - **Engine**: Primary firefighting unit equipped with hoses, water pumps, and other essential tools.
  - **Aerial Ladder**: Critical for high-rise firefighting, rescues, and elevated operations.
  - **Rescue Truck**: Specialized for technical rescues and vehicle extrications.
  - **Command Truck**: Used by incident commanders to coordinate emergency operations.
- **Additional Units**:
  - **Spare Engine**: Provides backup support when the frontline engine is unavailable.
  - **Second Command Truck**: Enhances flexibility during large-scale incidents.
  - **Utility Truck**: Used for transporting equipment and personnel.
  - **Structural Collapse Trailer**: Equipped with tools and materials for urban search and rescue operations.

These apparatus are integral to EFRS's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, ensuring the department is well-prepared for both routine and extraordinary incidents.

3. Current Staffing and Level of Service

The current staffing model for Esquimalt Fire & Rescue Services (EFRS) frequently operates with only five suppression firefighters on duty and falls short of optimal operational levels. This staffing level limits the department's ability to deploy resources effectively, particularly in high-risk scenarios such as high-rise fires or multi-alarm incidents.

The absence of a dedicated **Fire Inspector** means that suppression crews are tasked with conducting fire safety inspections. While these crews perform approximately 650+ inspections annually, this dual responsibility reduces the time available for critical training and preparedness activities. It also leads to delays in re-inspections of high-risk properties, which can compromise fire prevention efforts and community safety.

Reliance on overtime to address staffing shortages places additional strain on firefighters, increasing fatigue, reducing morale, and raising costs for the Township. Without staffing enhancements, the department's ability to maintain service quality and meet community needs will remain compromised.

4. Pressures for Change

4.1 Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Several legislative and regulatory changes are driving the need for increased staffing within Esquimalt Fire & Rescue Services:

- **Fire Safety Act:** Introduces stringent requirements for fire safety inspections, re-inspections, fire investigations, and community safety programs. Meeting these obligations requires dedicated resources for inspection and prevention efforts.
- **Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) Standards:** Full-service fire departments like EFRS must meet elevated training, readiness, and operational standards, increasing the demand for staffing and resources.
- **NFPA 1710 Standards:** Although not legally binding, these industry benchmarks highlight the importance of appropriate staffing for fire suppression and aerial ladder operations. Non-compliance increases liability and operational risks.
- **WorkSafeBC Part 31 (Firefighting):** This regulation mandates specific safety requirements, such as the "Two-In, Two-Out" rule for Immediate Danger to Life or Health (IDLH) environments and proper staffing for aerial ladder operations. Compliance with these standards necessitates additional personnel.

4.2 Staffing Challenges and Capacity Loss

Staffing shortfalls and absences have significantly reduced EFRS's operational capacity:

- **Leaves of Absence:** Current sick leaves, long-term disability cases, and maternity leave with modified duties are factors that impact consistent staffing levels.
- **Suppression Staffing Gaps:** The department frequently operates with a minimum of five suppression firefighters per shift. This staffing level does not fully support safe operations, particularly for aerial ladder deployment, and strains overall response effectiveness.

4.3 Relationship to Township Growth and Council Priorities

Esquimalt's growth and Council's priorities of fostering an **Engaged & Healthy Community** and promoting **Good Governance & Organizational Excellence** highlight the urgent need for increased staffing to sustain high-quality service delivery:

- **High-Density Development:** The rise of high-density residential and industrial developments introduces more complex firefighting scenarios, particularly for first- and second-alarm responses, necessitating an appropriate and adequately staffed firefighting force.
- **Public Safety:** Esquimalt Fire & Rescue Services (EFRS) is integral to advancing public safety and community resilience. Maintaining adequate staffing levels ensures timely emergency response, supports proactive fire prevention initiatives, and supports a safe and thriving community.

4.4 Retention Risks

Unsafe staffing levels and excessive overtime contribute to a stressful work environment, increasing the likelihood of firefighter burnout and turnover.

4.5 Vulnerability of Workforce and Leadership Challenges

While the department is currently benefiting from relatively low long-term absences compared to previous years, the workforce remains vulnerable due to limited leadership capacity. The Fire

Chief and two Assistant Chiefs are the only individuals who fulfill the critical leadership and operational roles within the department, including the "Duty Chief" and "Back-Up Duty Chief" responsibilities. This limited leadership team faces significant challenges in balancing operational readiness with strategic priorities, such as succession planning and workforce development.

The Fire Chief, in addition to regular administrative and operational responsibilities, serves as the "Back-Up Duty Chief" whenever not actively serving as the primary Duty Chief. This backup role is critical for maintaining operational continuity, particularly during major incidents. Key responsibilities include:

- **Logistical Support**: Providing critical behind-the-scenes support, such as activating call-back procedures, liaising with the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and responding to media inquiries.
- **Incident Transition**: Taking command of a second major incident if one occurs simultaneously with an ongoing response, ensuring uninterrupted leadership and coordination across both incidents.

This structure is highly reliant on all three Chief Officers being available. If any one Chief Officer is unavailable due to illness, extended leave, or other reasons, there would be a severe deficiency in leadership capacity. This would directly impact operational capabilities, such as fulfilling Duty Chief responsibilities, as well as routine management tasks required to sustain the department.

Consequences of Leadership Strain

The current system of requiring Chief Officers to remain "on-call 24/7" significantly increases the risk of burnout and fatigue over time. Additionally, if one Chief Officer were absent, the remaining two would face substantial pressure, compromising both operational and administrative effectiveness. The limited leadership capacity also hinders the ability to mentor and develop emerging leaders, further jeopardizing the long-term resilience of the department.

Strengthening Succession Planning and Staffing

Adequate staffing of suppression personnel would create the capacity to implement succession planning initiatives, such as an Acting Duty Chief program. This initiative would alleviate the workload on the three Chief Officers by distributing leadership responsibilities more broadly. It would also provide leadership depth, enhancing the department’s resiliency by reducing risks associated with absences or vacancies. Formalizing an Acting Duty Chief role would serve as a key element of leadership development, preparing future leaders for higher-level responsibilities. Additionally, expanding the leadership pool would improve operational efficiency, ensuring better compliance with regulations and readiness for high-risk incidents or simultaneous calls.

By addressing these staffing gaps and focusing on leadership development, the department can mitigate burnout, improve operational resiliency, and ensure long-term organizational health.

5. Existing Positions

Roles	Current # of FTE Positions
Fire Chief	1.0
Assistant Chiefs	2.0
Suppression Firefighters	28.0
Admin Coordinator	1.0
Inspector	0.0
Total Current FTEs	**32.0**

The current workforce plan reflects the known pressures to respond to legislative changes and requests for organizational support. Numerous indications exist that show the Fire Department is underperforming in inspections, falling short of safety standards, and creating operational strain.

6. Additional/New Positions Required

Positions	Reason for Increase	Forecasted Position Needs		
		2025	2026	2027
Inspector	Ensure timely completion of fire safety inspections, re-inspections of high-risk occupancies, compliance with the Fire Safety Act, and the effective delivery of community fire prevention programs.	+1	0	0
Firefighters	To ensure compliance with safety regulations, meet growing operational demands, and provide timely, effective emergency responses without over-reliance on overtime or risking burnout.	+3	+1	TBD
	Total New FTE	**4**	**1**	**TBD**

To ensure long-term sustainability, address operational risks, and comply with legislative and regulatory requirements, additional Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions are needed. A staffing factor analysis demonstrates that:

- To meet ideal inspection and reinspection requirements to enforce bylaw and provincial regulations, **one FTE** is required to create an Inspector position.
- To maintain six suppression firefighters per shift, **four additional FTEs** are required.

However, this new plan proposes a phased approach: increasing staffing by one Fire Inspector FTE and three suppression FTEs in 2025, and adding the fourth suppression FTE in 2026. This approach addresses immediate staffing shortfalls while leveraging overtime where necessary in 2025 to assess the plan's effectiveness before fully implementing the fourth suppression FTE. This phased strategy ensures a balanced and sustainable solution.

7. Staffing Analysis

EFRS Staffing Factor based on 28 Suppression Staff

To ensure that adequate staff are available to cover necessary positions, including coverage for employees on various types of leave, a "Staffing Factor" should be calculated.

Hours of work to be covered in 1 year		
	Days of work	365
	Hours of work	24
	Total annual hours of work	8760
Number of Shifts/Platoons		4
	Hours worked per group	2190
Workweek (hours)		42
Average Leave Used Per Employee (Hours)		
	Average Sick Leave	63
	Average WorkSafeBC Leave	108
	Average Vacation Leave	155
	Average STAT Leave	177
	Average Training Leave	10
	Average Bereavement Leave	9.5
	PEFL	38
	Total Average Leave Per Employee	560
Hours Actually Worked by Average Employee		1630
Staffing Factor Calculation		
	Total annual hours of work	8760
	Hours actually worked by average emplo	1630
STAFFING FACTOR		**5.37**

Total FTEs			**Variance**
	6 staffed positions	32.24182	4.241824928
	7 staffed positions	37.61546	9.615462416
	8 staffed positions	42.9891	14.9890999

7.1 Leave Data (Suppression)

The leave data utilized in this analysis was gathered with the assistance of Payroll and reflects leave reported in 2023. This year was chosen as a reasonable baseline, as prior years showed higher levels of absenteeism and long-term leave, which may not accurately represent current trends.

7.2 Staffing Analysis Summary (Suppression)

EFRS staff specific positions (ie, Firefighter, Driver, Captain, etc) 24/7, 365 days of the year. The total hours of required work in 1 year for 1 staffed *position* equals 8760. The average hours actually worked by a single employee in 1 year is 1630. The hours required to staff a position divided by the average hours actually worked equals the "Staffing Factor".

The analysis shows that the Staffing Factor of **5.37** full time equivalents (FTEs) in Suppression are required to staff each designated position in order to cover all positions 24 hrs a day, 365 days/year. The staffing factor of 5.37 is used to calculate the total number of new hires necessary to staff 6 positions consistently per shift.

7.3 Result

The current suppression staff total for EFRS is 28 personnel. Using a staffing factor of 5.37 to staff 6 positions 24/7, 365 days of the year, requires the hiring of 4 additional FTEs, for a total of 32 suppression staff. The current staffing of 28 results in a shortfall, which especially impacts the Aerial Ladder operations.

8. Risks with Staffing and the Aerial Ladder

8.1 Staffing Comparison

The NFPA staffing standard of a minimum of four firefighters on an engine has been an established safety benchmark in Canada for nearly 20 years for full-service fire departments. When staffing levels reach five, four firefighters are assigned to the engine, and one firefighter is designated to the ladder apparatus. At six, the engine maintains four firefighters, while two are assigned to the aerial ladder apparatus.

Staffing Comparison							
Staffing	WorksafeBC RIT Require-ments Met	Ladder Transit Risk	Ladder Supervison Risk	Ladder Capable for Mutual Aid	Ladder as Water Attack	Ladder Cross-staffed for Rescue	Ladder Rescue Ready
5	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
7	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

8.2 Ladder Transit Risks

When staffing is limited to 5 personnel, we assign 4 to the Engine (standard practice) and only 1 driver to the Ladder. This poses a significant risk because the Ladder apparatus is approximately 40 feet long, with substantial overhang at both the front and rear of the wheel axis, making it more difficult to maneuver. The risk of an accident is high, especially given the need for extreme caution when navigating roads, clearing intersections, and occasionally entering opposing lanes to negotiate corners. In situations requiring the driver to reverse, blind spots increase the potential for error, further elevating the risk. Many departments consider it best practice to staff the Ladder with a second person during transit, providing additional observation during navigation, backing up, and spotting at incidents. Having a second person also ensures accountability and a witness should an accident occur. The current practice of operating the Ladder with only 1 person carries a high degree of risk for the Township of Esquimalt.

8.3 Ladder Supervision Concerns

When the Ladder is staffed by only 1 person, there is a separation between the driver and their supervising officer. This disconnect can lead to miscommunication or delays in tactical decisions, such as Ladder placement at an incident. For example, the Engine typically arrives at a scene faster than the Ladder, which can create a lag in coordination and reduce the officer's ability to provide timely supervision. In contrast, when staffing is increased to 6 (with 2 personnel on the Ladder, including 1 driver and 1 lieutenant), supervision is more effective, allowing for better decision-making and improving the operational efficiency of the Ladder at the scene.

8.4 Mutual Aid Considerations

Under mutual and automatic aid agreements with neighboring municipalities (Victoria, Saanich, and Oak Bay), our department is required to provide a Ladder staffed with 2 personnel. However, when staffing is limited to 5, and only 1 person is assigned to the Ladder, we must pull 1 firefighter from the Engine to meet this mutual aid obligation. This creates risks for Esquimalt, especially if a simultaneous call occurs. An Engine responding with just 3 personnel has inherent limitations, including being unable to make entry into a structure fire until additional mutual aid resources arrive, as per WorkSafe BC Regulation Section 31.23. This practice compromises safety for both the firefighters and the community.

8.5 Operational Limitations for Ladder as Water Attack

To effectively operate the Aerial Ladder as an elevated master stream for fire suppression, at least 2 personnel are required: one stationed at the turntable to control the Ladder and another operating the pump at the pump panel. With only 1 person assigned to the Ladder when staffing is limited to 5, the truck is unable to function as an elevated master stream, one of its primary roles. This reduces the Ladder's operational effectiveness during critical fire suppression activities.

8.6 Ladder Cross-Staffing for Rescue Operations

For rescue operations, such as rescuing trapped occupants from a high-rise balcony, 4 personnel are required: 2 for the rescue team, 1 to operate the turntable, and 1 to handle the pump panel. Cross-staffing is possible, with the driver also operating the turntable if no pumping is required. Alternatively, additional firefighters could be reassigned from other crews to support the rescue operation. However, this depends on the availability of on-scene resources and could compromise other critical operations.

8.7 Ladder Rescue Readiness

To function effectively as a Ladder Company, both for fire attack and rescue operations, 4 personnel are the minimum required staffing, as outlined in NFPA 1710 standards. This standard further recommends staffing a Ladder with 6 personnel in areas with a high likelihood of rescue operations in densely populated communities. Current staffing levels, particularly with only 1 person assigned to the Ladder, significantly limit the department's ability to meet these standards, reducing both fire attack capabilities and rescue readiness.

8.8 Aerial Ladder Staffing Comparison to other Departments

According to NFPA 1710, recommended Aerial Ladder staffing ranges from 4–6 personnel for full operational effectiveness. Comparative staffing for other departments is as follows:

Fire Department	Aerial Ladder Staffing
Esquimalt	1
Saanich	4
Victoria	3
Oak Bay	2 (with a hiring plan to increase)
Delta	3
North Vancouver	4
Nanaimo	4
Prince George	4

Aerial Ladder Staffing Levels and Operational Effectiveness

- **1 Staffed:** The Aerial Ladder can only be driven and staged. Ground ladders and tools can be deployed from compartments.
- **2 Staffed:** Fire suppression capabilities become available with one operator at the turntable and the other at the pump.
- **3 Staffed:** Basic rescue capabilities are achieved with cross-staffing.
- **4 Staffed:** Full functionality for fire suppression and rescue operations.

9. Risks with Vacant Inspector Position

9.1 Fire Inspector

Currently, EFRS does not have a dedicated Fire Inspector position. Fire Safety Inspections (667 annually) and Fire Investigations (approximately six per month) are conducted by suppression firefighters with supervision and assistance from the Assistant Chief.

About one-third of all Fire Safety Inspections fail due to fire or safety risks. Due to limited capacity and the advanced knowledge required, duty crews are often unable to complete these re-inspections, and there is insufficient capacity to attend these 200+ re-inspections by the crews.

Many municipalities enhance their fire prevention efforts by employing a designated Fire Inspector. This role focuses on re-inspections and is supported by specialized education to handle complex situations, ensure the application of the fire and safety bylaw, and maintain compliance with governance, such as the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Additionally, Fire Inspectors often have the capacity to implement fire prevention programs that improve community safety, such as smoke detector campaigns and building initiatives like lock-box programs.

9.2 Comparison of Fire Prevention Staffing by Municipality

Fire Department	Fire Prevention Staff
Esquimalt	0
Saanich	7
Victoria	8
Oak Bay	1 (with plans to hire 1 additional)
Coquitlam	9
Delta	4
North Vancouver	7
Nanaimo	4
Prince George	4

9.3 Community Risks of not having a Fire Inspector

The absence of a dedicated Fire Inspector in Esquimalt poses several significant risks to public safety and operational efficiency. Without proactive re-inspections and code enforcement, fire hazards in residential, commercial, and public properties may go unnoticed, increasing the likelihood of fires and putting residents, businesses, and visitors at risk. Additionally, the lack of capacity for fire safety education and enforcement leaves the community unprepared for emergencies, potentially leading to injury or loss of life. Economic development may also be hindered, as delays in reviewing building plans and inspecting projects could slow development approvals, discouraging investment and affecting the local economy.

The absence of a Fire Inspector also places greater strain on fire suppression resources, as preventable incidents due to unaddressed risks lead to increased operational demands, overtime costs, and resource depletion. Furthermore, failure to meet obligations under the Fire Safety Act and other regulations exposes the Township to potential legal liabilities, reputational damage, and penalties. Critical life safety systems, such as alarms and sprinklers, may also go uninspected, allowing deficiencies to remain undetected, which increases the risks during emergencies. Ultimately, the department is forced into a reactive approach, responding to incidents rather than preventing them, which is more costly and resource intensive.

10. Future Growth

This plan does not contemplate future or forced growth over the long term for either the organization, or the Fire Department independently. Changes in legislation, increased demands for current or new services will have additional impacts that may require further consideration dependent upon the department's ability to appropriately respond.