



Workforce Plan

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services



October 2025

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	01/13/25	Ready for 2025-2029 Budget Discussion
1.3	M Furlot	01/22/25	Updated data set, Sec 9.2
1.4	M Furlot	10/30/25	Updated to reflect current staffing and staffing pilot

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: high angle rescue, marine firefighting, and wildfire	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence
Enforce the municipal fire and safety bylaw	Good Governance & Organizational Excellence

2. Frontline Apparatus

Frontline Apparatus

EFRS maintains a fleet of emergency vehicles and equipment designed to address a wide range of emergency scenarios.

Frontline Apparatus:

- **Engine:** The primary firefighting unit equipped with hoses, water pumps, and essential tools.
- **Aerial Ladder:** Critical for high-rise firefighting, rescues, and elevated operations.
- **Rescue Truck:** Specialized for technical rescues and vehicle extrications.
- **Command Truck:** Utilized 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.

Fleet Changes in 2025

In 2025, EFRS implemented significant updates to its fleet following a detailed **Needs Analysis** that evaluated operational efficiency, suitability, and maintenance costs:

- The **Heavy Rescue Unit** was **sold** and **replaced with a Light Rescue Unit**, providing a more agile and operationally efficient apparatus better suited to the department's incident profile and community needs.
- The **Structural Collapse Trailer** was **sold and removed from service**, as its specialized functions were no longer required or sustainable within the department's operational scope.

These changes enhanced overall fleet efficiency, ensured resources align with current community risks, and reduced maintenance and operational costs while maintaining full technical rescue capability through mutual aid and regional partnerships.

3. Current Staffing and Level of Service

3.1 Suppression Firefighters

The staffing structure for the Suppression Division changed significantly in 2025.

Prior to 2025, Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services (EFRS) operated with 28 suppression firefighters. This level of staffing presented ongoing challenges in meeting legislative and life safety requirements, as the department frequently operated with only five firefighters on duty—below optimal operational levels. This limitation affected EFRS's ability to deploy resources safely and effectively, particularly during high-risk incidents such as structure fires and complex rescues.

In 2025, Council approved the addition of one (1) full-time firefighter position, increasing the suppression complement to 29. Despite this improvement, the department continued to experience operational challenges in maintaining consistent staffing and meeting all service and legislative requirements.

Later that year, EFRS completed a comprehensive *Response Analysis* in collaboration with Dave Mitchell & Associates Ltd. The study confirmed that population growth, urban densification, and evolving legislative obligations have significantly increased both community risk and service demand. The analysis concluded that suppression staffing remains below the level necessary to sustain emergency response capacity, meet inspection and regulatory obligations, and support firefighter wellness.

Following the study, Council passed a resolution establishing a minimum on-duty staffing level of six suppression firefighters, formally recognizing this as the minimum standard necessary for a full-service fire department, consistent with the level declared to the Office of the Fire Commissioner. This decision brought much-needed clarity and alignment between operational needs, safety standards, and service level expectations.

Overtime remains a contributing pressure, often required to maintain the minimum on-duty staffing of six firefighters. To address this, in August 2025, Council approved a staffing pilot authorizing the hire of two temporary firefighters, expanding to three temporary firefighters in December 2025 following the return of a firefighter from extended leave. This initiative effectively brings the department's suppression complement to 32 firefighters and aims to reduce overtime demands to more sustainable levels while supporting consistent service delivery.

3.2 Fire Inspector

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services currently does not have a dedicated Fire Inspector.

In the absence of this position, suppression crews are responsible for completing all fire safety inspections. While crews strive to complete approximately 750 initial inspections each year, they do so only by diverting time from critical training, operational readiness, and prevention work. Even with these efforts, the department is unable to complete the required re-inspections and follow-up compliance checks necessary to ensure that identified fire and life safety hazards are corrected. This gap leaves higher-risk occupancies without the ongoing oversight needed to maintain a safe level of compliance.

In 2024, the Fire Safety Act introduced heightened expectations for local governments to ensure that all inspectable properties within their jurisdiction are inspected to a higher and more consistent standard. The Act requires municipalities to prioritize high-risk occupancies with increased inspection frequencies and to ensure that both inspections and investigations are conducted by personnel with the appropriate expertise.

This change effectively shifted inspection responsibilities to officer-qualified staff, reducing the number of firefighters qualified and available to perform inspections by more than half. As a result, departmental capacity to meet inspection demands and maintain proactive fire prevention initiatives has been significantly constrained.

Beyond current obligations, the absence of a Fire Inspector has direct implications for Esquimalt's future economic development. New construction, redevelopment, and increasingly complex architectural projects depend on timely, technically competent fire and life safety reviews throughout the permitting, construction, and occupancy stages. Limited inspection capacity creates delays in development approvals, slows required fire code reviews, and restricts the Township's ability to support high-density or innovative building designs. Predictable inspection timelines are a key factor for developers and businesses, and an inability to reliably meet

legislative requirements undermines Esquimalt's ability to attract investment and facilitate planned growth.

Without the addition of a dedicated Fire Inspector, Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services will remain challenged in meeting its legislative obligations under the Fire Safety Act and municipal bylaw, in supporting future development demands, and in delivering the level of community fire prevention necessary to reduce risk and enhance public safety.

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 continued to significantly reduce Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services' (EFRS) operational capacity.

Even with a complement of 28 suppression firefighters—and continuing after the increase to 29 in 2025—the department remained unable to consistently staff six firefighters per shift without relying on overtime coverage. The reliance on overtime to maintain minimum staffing has increased fatigue, reduced morale, and elevated operational costs.

To address these persistent staffing pressures, EFRS introduced a **Staffing Pilot Program** in 2025. The pilot authorized the hiring of temporary firefighters to offset overtime use, stabilize daily staffing, and improve operational reliability. The intent of the pilot is to evaluate the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of a model that maintains safe staffing levels while reducing dependence on overtime.

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

In 2025, Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services (EFRS) initiated the development of a comprehensive **Officer Development Program** designed to strengthen leadership capacity and support long-term succession planning. This program will launch in early 2026 and will focus on preparing current and aspiring officers for greater responsibility through structured training, mentorship, and progressive qualification pathways.

As participants gain the necessary experience and certifications, the program will provide increased flexibility to address leadership strain, particularly during absences or periods of high operational demand. Over time, this will also enable the department to implement initiatives such as an Acting Duty Chief Program, helping to distribute leadership responsibilities more broadly across qualified personnel.

Building future leaders through this program will enhance organizational resilience, reduce burnout among senior officers, and ensure continuity of leadership across all levels of the department. By investing in leadership development, EFRS is taking proactive steps to strengthen its command capacity, improve succession readiness, and maintain the high standards of professionalism and safety expected of a full-service fire department.

5. Existing Positions

Roles	Current # of FTE Positions
Fire Chief	1
Assistant Chiefs	2
Suppression Firefighters	29
Pilot Suppression Firefighters	3
Admin Coordinator	1
Inspector	0
Total Current FTEs	36

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.	0	+1	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.	+1	+3	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, **three FTEs** are required. Currently to support this assumption, a Pilot is occurring to measure a reduction in overtime.

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						
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 emplc				1630		
STAFFING FACTOR				5.37		
Total FTEs						
6 staffed positions				32.24182		Variance
7 staffed positions				37.61546		
8 staffed positions				42.9891		

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 29 personnel. Using a staffing factor of 5.37 to staff 6 positions 24/7, 365 days of the year, requires the hiring of 3 additional FTEs, for a total of 32 suppression staff. The current staffing of 29 results in a shortfall, which results in excessive overtime.

8. Emerging Pressures

8.1 Staffing Growth to Meet Growing Operational Demands

Emerging operational pressures continue to highlight the need for future staffing growth focused on enhancing the capability and functionality of the Aerial Ladder. The department is increasingly responding to simultaneous or complex incidents that require both fire suppression and rescue operations to occur concurrently. At present, the Ladder is staffed with two personnel, which limits its ability to operate as a fully functional company for both fire attack and rescue assignments. As community density increases and building types evolve, the demand for a more capable and independently staffed Ladder is expected to rise correspondingly.

Future staffing growth will likely focus on increasing the Ladder complement from two to eventually **four personnel**, consistent with the NFPA 1710 standard for full operational effectiveness. This evolution will allow greater cross-staffing flexibility between the Ladder and Rescue functions, improve safety during high-risk operations, and reduce the current risks associated with concurrent incident demands. Expanding the Ladder's staffing will also strengthen EFRS's overall response capacity, improve compliance with best-practice benchmarks, and ensure the department continues to meet the community's growing needs with efficiency and resilience.

A proactive approach to meeting this demand gradually over a period of 5 years as demands continue to trend upwards is a reasonable approach to balance staffing with maintaining expected service level requirements.

8.2 Aerial Ladder Staffing Comparison to other Departments

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

Fire Department	Aerial Ladder Staffing
Esquimalt	2
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.

8.3 Mutual Aid Considerations

As emergency call volumes continue to increase across the region, all neighbouring municipalities are experiencing similar staffing and operational pressures. This shared growth in demand is straining the effectiveness of mutual aid agreements that have traditionally supported service reliability during major or concurrent incidents. Reliance on mutual aid is becoming increasingly uncertain, as departments are often committed to their own simultaneous emergencies. Mutual aid, while an essential component of regional cooperation, is only as effective as its availability. These evolving conditions emphasize the importance of maintaining sufficient internal capacity within

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services to meet the community's needs independently when neighbouring resources are unavailable.

9. Risks with Vacant Inspector Position

9.1 Fire Inspector

Currently, EFRS does not have a dedicated Fire Inspector position. Fire Safety Inspections (750+ 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

Municipality	Population (Census 2021)	# of Inspectable Properties	# of INSPECTION S ACHIEVED BY DEPARTMEN T	Service Level		# of INSPECTOR S
				Initial Inspections	Re- inspections	
Esquimalt	17,533	670	670	✓	✗	0
Oak Bay	17,990	411	672	✓	✓	1
Fort St John	21,465	1218	1845	✓	✓	2
Colwood	18,961	514	568	✓	✓	1 (2 x .5 FTEs)
Squamish	23,819	1200	237	✗	✗	0
Port Alberni	18,259	1000	328	✗	✗	0

Greater Victoria Core Municipalities

Fire Department	Fire Prevention Staff
Esquimalt	0
Saanich	7
Victoria	8
Oak Bay	1 (with plans to hire 1 additional)

9.3 Community Risks of not having a Fire Inspector

The absence of a dedicated **Fire Inspector** in Esquimalt poses significant risks to both public safety and operational efficiency. Without proactive inspections, re-inspections, and consistent code enforcement, fire hazards in residential, commercial, and public occupancies may go unaddressed—raising the likelihood of preventable fires and increasing risk to residents, businesses, and visitors. Limited capacity for fire safety education and enforcement also leaves the community less prepared for emergencies, potentially resulting in injury or loss of life. In addition, delays in reviewing building plans or completing required inspections can hinder economic development, slow occupancy approvals, and discourage local investment.

The lack of a Fire Inspector also places additional strain on suppression resources, as preventable incidents stemming from unmitigated risks lead to higher operational demands, increased overtime, and accelerated resource fatigue. Failure to meet obligations under the Fire Safety Act and related regulations further exposes the Township to potential legal liability, reputational damage, and compliance penalties. Critical life-safety systems—such as alarms and sprinklers—may also go uninspected, allowing deficiencies to persist and compounding risk during emergencies. Without this role, the department is forced into a reactive model of fire protection, responding to incidents that could otherwise be prevented—an approach that is less effective, more costly, and unsustainable in the long term.

10. Future Growth

This plan does contemplate future organizational growth, particularly informed by the findings of the 2025 Response Analysis. The analysis highlighted increasing operational, legislative, and community demands that will require proactive planning to maintain service effectiveness and sustainability.

To balance these growing pressures with fiscal responsibility, the development of a five-year staffing plan is recommended. This plan would outline a measured and strategic approach to workforce expansion—aligning staffing increases with demonstrated community risk, service demand, and budget capacity. Establishing this proactive framework will help ensure that Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services continues to meet its operational objectives, legislative obligations, and the community's expectations for safety and reliability.