

## BUSINESS CASE

**DATE:** February 15, 2023

**TO:** Dan Horan, Chief Administrative Officer

**FROM:** Steve Serbic, Fire Chief

**SUBJECT:** Request for 4 x Full-Time Fire Fighters

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### Background

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services runs on a four-platoon model, with 6 members per platoon. These four platoons cover 10-hour day shifts and 14-hour night shifts 365 days a year. Firefighters work on a 4-days-on/4-days-off (2 days/2 nights) schedule. There are three management staff: a Chief and two Assistant Chiefs.

Before the beginning of each calendar year, all members of the department schedule their planned vacation days and their 13 statutory days off for the following year. This means that most shifts throughout the year are made up of 5 members. This is also the number of firefighters on a shift to meet required levels of service and safety requirements. Esquimalt's 24-member department is designed to make up for unexpected/unplanned absences (sick days, injuries, family emergencies, etc.) by asking firefighters to work overtime shifts instead of taking their scheduled days off.

### Needs Assessment

Esquimalt Fire Rescue Services has experienced a substantial increase in staff absences since 2020. The challenges of the global pandemic have resulted in an increase in sick time requested by our members. In addition, some critical changes to WorkSafe BC's presumptive claim regulations has resulted in a substantial increase in WorkSafe claims, and has significantly increased the pressure on the department to meet each shift's minimum requirements. Like many fire departments across the country, staffing availability dropped by as much as 1/3 during 2021 and 2022. Consistently during that period, the department had 25% of members away due to workplace injury or illness. Historically, approximately 5% of members are away due to injury or illness.

In 2022, only 41 shifts (of 712) had a full complement (i.e. 6 members) to serve the community and provide protection, thus operating at full capacity for only 17% of the time. Over 100 shifts required either the Chief or an Assistant Chief to step in and be the department's 5<sup>th</sup> member for a shift. Historically, this generally occurs about 30 times per year.

In 2022, 430 (of 712) shifts required a member on overtime to fill long-term and short-term absences. This is also a circumstance that does not match pre-2020 patterns. The increased reliance on firefighter overtime to meet daily operational needs can be seen in the budget trends outlined in the table below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Overtime Budget</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Variance</b>
2020	165,000	176,212	(11,212)
2021	165,000	260,570	(95,570)
2022	165,000	334,000	(169,000)

Historically, overtime shifts have been used to compensate for any staffing availability fluctuations (due to injuries, absences) that occur year to year. Unfortunately, overtime shifts are now being relied upon far more than originally contemplated in the 24-member department design. After nearly 3 years of this tempo, many members are not able or willing to work further overtime shifts, as the tempo has begun to have a negative impact on members' personal lives.

Staff have completed an analysis of the resourcing requirements, including an analysis of the resourcing requests of other regional fire departments. There is likely a range of additional firefighters that can be added to the department to alleviate the challenges faced. A department with 4 additional fire fighters is the right size for Esquimalt. Based on the review of other department requests, Esquimalt's proposed growth appears to be lower.

### **Risk Assessment**

The department is relying more and more on overtime to meet its minimum requirements; this tempo is not sustainable. Without a change in the situation, the department is likely to experience regular shifts where the duty shift does not have the staff on site to meet minimum requirements. If no change to the resourcing situation occurs, it is likely that staff absences due to burnout or injury will continue to increase, with further reliance on overtime being necessary going forward. Some of the outcomes that flow from these risks include departures of firefighters to other departments, shifts that do not meet minimum requirements, and reduction of skills and knowledge due to deferred training and development.

### **Recommendations**

Increase the authorized complement of Esquimalt Fire Rescue services by 4 additional firefighters. This change will result in a decrease in overtime costs, improved service levels, and improved staff morale.

Though not a core reason for the request for increased staff, an additional benefit to the increase in staff would be the potential for increased participation in mutual aid, response to secondary calls, support and liaison with neighbouring First Nations communities, support and liaison with local schools, and a more robust skills and safety training program.

It is also recommended that the Township engage a 3<sup>rd</sup> party in 2026 to complete a service level review to assess the department's performance against industry best practices and standards. Such a service level review would assess current resources against approved levels of service. It is recognized that the recommendations of such a service level review could include potential reductions in numbers of firefighters in the department; such reductions could be made via attrition by not replacing fire fighters who have departed due to retirements. However, based on the analysis of the expressed needs of other fire departments in the region and in the province, it is unlikely that an independent review would recommend a reduction in crew complement unless it was tied to a significant reduction in the services provided to the community.

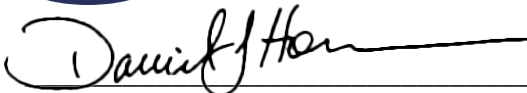
## Cost Implications

The cost for four firefighters for 2024 is approximately \$434,667.

In addition, there would be a cost of \$7,500 in gear for one firefighter as the other three firefighters already have gear as temporary FTE's.

It is expected, that with the addition of one firefighter per platoon (total of four), overtime costs will be reduced by approximately \$200,000 per year in comparison to the overtime expenditure in 2022.

Supported / Not Supported



Dan Horan, P.Eng  
Chief Administrative Officer

1 March 2023

Date