CORPORATION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT

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Legislation Text

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TOWNSHIP OF ESQUIMALT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: July 20, 2026 Report No. SI-26-016

TO: Council

FROM: Judy Kitts, Director, Strategic Initiatives

SUBJECT: Update on Policing Services and Policing Models Analysis

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive Staff Report No. SI-26-016 “Update on Policing Services and Policing Models Analysis” for information and direct staff to include a comprehensive orientation and strategic discussion about policing early in the 2026-2030 term of Council, enabling decision making on future strategic direction for the Framework Agreement, regionalization opportunities, and exploration of alternative policing models.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report provides an update on the status of the Framework Agreement, which expires on December 31, 2026, and summarizes considerations related to an extension. It also shares the outcomes of Council's exploration of alternative policing models.

Since 2022, a significant amount of Council and staff effort has been devoted to the work related to policing in Esquimalt. The assessment of Esquimalt Police Department models identified significant operational, governance, and financial challenges that would need to be overcome. This information now informs Council decision-making about the next potential steps in assessing police service delivery for Esquimalt residents. Recent changes in leadership at VicPD and the Victoria and Esquimalt Police Board have also created opportunities to resolve longstanding operational and governance challenges. New initiatives involving collaborative work on governance matters, Esquimalt-focused performance measures, and improvements to the budget process show some early promise.

Given these developments, staff believe that continuing to focus on extending the Framework Agreement, while advancing Council's long-term interest in regionalized policing and pursuing improvements within the existing service model, continues to represent a most practical path forward. Staff further recommend that the incoming Council receive a comprehensive orientation on policing governance, service delivery models, and strategic considerations, potentially enabling them to set the strategic direction for policing in Esquimalt.

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BACKGROUND:

Framework Agreement Status

The Framework Agreement governing shared policing services between the Township of Esquimalt, the City of Victoria, and the Victoria and Esquimalt Police Board expires on December 31, 2026.

Policing Model Review

In 2022, following community concerns about cost equity, governance, and service delivery, Council initiated a review of alternative policing models. The December 2023 Policing Service Delivery Model Interim Report (perivale+taylor) assessed several options. In February 2024, Council unanimously directed staff to explore an Esquimalt Police Department supported by contracted specialized services.

ANALYSIS:

Framework Agreement Status

Esquimalt formally requested an extension on February 11, 2026. Victoria subsequently requested that extension discussions be deferred pending provincial direction on regional policing. Although discussions have not yet commenced, the parties have a shared interest in maintaining continuity of policing services governed by the Framework Agreement. The strong collaborative relationship that has developed in recent years provides confidence that the Township, the City, and the Police Board will continue to work together to support good governance and the required operational outcomes in Victoria and Esquimalt.

Council has consistently identified regionalization as the preferred long-term approach to policing. Continued collaboration on the Framework Agreement will support service stability in the near term while facilitating broader discussions regarding the future governance and delivery of policing services in the region.

Policing Models Options Analysis: What We Have Learned

In February 2024, Council received a briefing exploring the potential options for change in policing models for Esquimalt. At that time, Council made key decisions that essentially eliminated certain options from consideration, including the RCMP and a stand-alone Esquimalt Police Department (EPD). Council directed staff to explore the feasibility of establishing an EPD supported by services provided by a larger police department. Through this work, including the perivale+taylor assessment, consultations with the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG), discussions with other police departments, and a review of Surrey's police transition, staff gained valuable insight into what would be required to create a new police department:

- Regulatory Process: Any proposal to establish an EPD would require approval from MPSSG. This is not a municipal decision. As demonstrated through the municipality's 2011 policing review, even a comprehensive process culminating in a preferred service model and a formal submission to the Province does not always result in Provincial approval. Securing provincial approval for an EPD proposal would face similar scrutiny and uncertainty, with no guarantee of a favorable outcome regardless of the quality of our proposal.

- Partner Cooperation: Outreach in 2024 and early 2025 to regional police departments to explore options for contracted specialized services yielded no commitments. Saanich Police and Westshore RCMP declined engagement, and the Township withdrew its request to VicPD in April 2025 due to leadership transitions. Without confirmed partners for specialized services, staff were unable to identify a clearly defined operational pathway for the model at this time.
- Resource and Cost Implications: Establishing an EPD would require dedicated internal resources and sustained expertise. Staff anticipate that moving forward with an EPD proposal would require hiring a dedicated project lead and engaging a contractor to develop a comprehensive proposal for MPSSG consideration. This represents a substantial commitment of municipal resources with no guarantee of provincial approval or successful implementation.
- Policing Services: An EPD relying on contracted specialized services operates fundamentally differently than being part of a larger police department. VicPD provides immediate, integrated access to specialized functions (major crime investigation, forensics, training, professional standards, etc.). With contracted services, Esquimalt would depend on external agencies to prioritize our requests alongside their own operational demands. Staff were unable to confirm that contracted arrangements would consistently provide service levels comparable to those available through an integrated police department model. This introduces operational risk that is difficult to quantify or mitigate.
- Cost Certainty: One of the original drivers for this exploration was cost equity and ultimately, the question of whether Esquimalt could obtain equivalent policing services at lower cost. However, to date, the exploration has not identified a definitive pathway to achieving cost savings while maintaining comparable service levels. A smaller, standalone police department does not inherently cost less than participation in a larger service, particularly when transition costs, specialized service contracts, and operational redundancies are factored in. The Surrey Police transition demonstrates that policing transition costs can increase significantly beyond initial projections.
- Regionalization: Pursuing an EPD may be difficult to reconcile with the Township's long-standing advocacy for regional policing solutions. In correspondence with the Province, the Township has consistently emphasized the need for coordinated regional governance, service delivery, and cost-sharing frameworks. Establishing an independent police department would represent a different approach to addressing policing challenges in the region.
- Labour Relations and Staffing Risk: Establishing an EPD would require recruiting sworn members, civilian staff, and command leadership in a highly competitive labour market. New departments face recruitment challenges, wage pressure, and retention risk, particularly without established career pathways and specialized units. Relying on contracted specialized services limits professional development opportunities. When major investigations and specialized work are contracted out, officers have fewer opportunities to build expertise and advance their careers. This makes it difficult to attract and retain quality personnel.

Collectively, this work has provided important insight into the feasibility of establishing an Esquimalt Police Department. While an EPD remains possible, the exploration highlighted the significant planning, provincial approvals, service agreements, staffing considerations, and financial analysis that would be required to advance the concept. Future consideration of the model would benefit from greater certainty regarding specialized service arrangements, implementation requirements, and long -term costs.

A full list of the various staff and consultant reports informing the development of policing options in

Esquimalt can be found here:

https://www.esquimalt.ca/public-safety/policing-esquimalt/learn-more-about-policing-esquimalt-where-we-are

Concurrently, VicPD, under its new leadership, has responded to Council's continued concerns regarding the lack of focus on Esquimalt's specific needs by developing targeted service initiatives. Chief Constable Wilson, in her recent budget presentations and quarterly reports to Council, has committed to an Esquimalt-focused approach that includes dedicated efforts for after-hours bylaw enforcement, addressing traffic needs, and increasing patrol presence in the Township. In addition, in recent meetings with the Police Board, the Chair of the Finance Committee has indicated openness to working collaboratively with Esquimalt on the budget processes, examining other municipal police board models to improve engagement. While early in nature, this represents a potential opportunity to address some of the concerns that prompted the original model review without the risks, costs, and uncertainties of a full transition.

Given the upcoming municipal election, staff are not seeking direction on a preferred policing model at this time. Instead, the intent of this report is to summarize key findings and ensure that the incoming Council is well positioned to establish future strategic direction.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 (staff recommended):
That Council receive Staff Report No. SI-26-016 "Update on Policing Services and Policing Models Analysis" for information and direct staff to include a comprehensive orientation and strategic discussion about policing early in the 2026-2030 term of Council, enabling decision making on future strategic direction for the Framework Agreement, regionalization opportunities, and exploration of alternative policing models

Option 2:
That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

COUNCIL PRIORITY:

Engaged and Healthy Community

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There are no direct financial impacts associated with the recommendations contained in this report.

The Framework Agreement currently establishes the governance and cost-sharing arrangements for policing services between Esquimalt and Victoria. Should the agreement expire without an extension or replacement arrangement, there may be financial implications related to future policing costs and funding allocation; however, the nature and extent of any impacts are not known at this time.

COMMUNICATIONS/ENGAGEMENT:

Staff will prepare a public update summarizing the outcomes of the policing model review and the current status of the Framework Agreement. Future communications will be provided as discussions

regarding a Framework Agreement extension advance and as new information becomes available regarding regional policing initiatives. Following the 2026 local government election, information from the review will be incorporated into Council orientation materials to support strategic discussions on policing.

TIMELINES & NEXT STEPS:

- Fall 2026: Target completion of Framework Agreement extension
- October 2026: New Council Orientation
- November 9, 2026: VicPD Q2 update to Council - review progress on Esquimalt-focused initiatives with metrics and KPIs.
- December 14, 2026: VicPD Q3 update to Council - Review progress on Esquimalt-focused initiatives with metrics and KPIs.

REPORT REVIEWED BY:

1. Ian Irvine, Director of Finance, Reviewed
2. Deb Hopkins, Director of Corporate Services, Reviewed
3. Dan Horan, Chief Administrative Officer, Concurrence

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

There are no attachments to this staff report.

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