

STAFF REPORT: Fire Department

REPORT TO: Council
MEETING DATE: Sept. 8, 2008
REPORT NO.: FD.08.3
SUBJECT: Update – Level of Service
PREPARED BY: Fire Chief Ron Doherty

A. Recommendations

THAT Council accept Staff Report FD.08.3, "Update – Level of Service".

B. Background

For the past several years, the Blue Mountains Fire Department has struggled with a decline in the number of trained, experienced and qualified firefighters. In the past this problem has been isolated to the volunteer complement at Station # 2, however decreased staffing levels have also become an issue at Station # 1 over the past several months.

As a result of these staffing issues, the Fire Department has been forced to implement a number of procedural changes; the net result of these changes has been a substantial change in the level of emergency services offered to the ratepayers of the Town.

Staffing:

For several years now, the staffing level at Station # 2 has been a major concern and has been documented in several previous Staff Reports. In the past year, the number of firefighters has remained constant; the complement consists of four Captains, three Lieutenants and twelve firefighters. This total is one below the prescribed complement of 20. The concern is the lack of experience among these volunteers. Of the thirteen firefighters, only two have five years or more of experience. Of the remainder, seven have only one year of experience while the rest have been with the department only two years. It generally takes a minimum of five years of training and experience for a firefighter to develop the necessary skills to do the job safely and effectively.

In 2007, seven new recruits were hired as probationary firefighters and to date all of these volunteers remain with the department. Of these seven, four have shown an unacceptable level of attendance and will not be promoted to active firefighter status. This recruit group included several volunteers from outside the municipality, a first-time experiment for the department. In the past it had been the department's policy to hire only volunteers who lived in the Town of the Blue Mountains. These non-residents, while they have shown some enthusiasm and attend practices fairly regularly, have been slow to respond to alarms due to the increased travel times. As a result, some of these volunteers

have been attempting to respond less often. As a result of this failed experiment, the department will revert to its former policy of accepting resident volunteers only.

Station # 1, which in the past has had a full complement of four Captains and sixteen firefighters, has seen a marked reduction in numbers during 2008. While the number of Captains has remained steady at four (all of whom have at least 18 years' experience) the number of firefighters has dropped to only eight. Of these, only six are currently qualified to be on-call during weekend hours. Two firefighters have retired, three are on extended administrative leave due to various personal reasons and one is on extended sick-leave due to a non-firefighting injury. Of the eight remaining active firefighters, two have less than two years' experience and three have only three years' experience. As a result, the department's ability to adequately staff a significant emergency has been greatly reduced.

Level of Service:

As a direct result of the staffing difficulties experienced by the Fire Department, a new Standard Operating Guideline was recently put into effect. A copy of SOG # 820 is attached. This Guideline effectively changes the level of service provided by the Fire Department.

The Guideline states that interior firefighting operations will not be undertaken in the case of any structure fire. Structure fires will be fought from a defensive posture, from outside the structure and with a priority on protecting adjacent properties. The Guideline also addresses the issue of rescue of occupants from structure fires; every effort will be made to protect exits and alternative exits will be provided where possible (ladders to upper-floor windows, etc.) but no personnel will enter a burning structure for interior search and rescue operations.

While we recognize that this SOG represents a significant reduction in the level of emergency services the Fire Department has traditionally offered, we feel that we have no alternative at this time. The Office of the Fire Marshal's staffing guidelines call for ten firefighters on scene within ten minutes of alarm if interior operations are to be undertaken. Given our current manpower situation, it is nearly impossible for an adequate crew to be on-scene within ten minutes, if at all. To attempt interior operations with less than the recommended staff on scene would put firefighters at an unacceptable level of risk; we are not willing to risk the safety of these volunteer responders in this manner.

Alternative Measures:

In an effort to maximize our available manpower resources, the Fire Department has implemented additional measures to ensure a greater response to structure fires. Effective September 1, all structure fires will automatically call for a response from both fire stations. This will ensure that we can put the maximum number of available firefighters on scene, however it will not likely enable us to safely perform interior operations due to the travel time involved. The risk arising from this policy is that by committing all of our personnel to one incident, there is the possibility that no firefighting resources will be available should a second incident occur.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan (Statement(s) identifying how actions further the goals of the Strategic Plan)

D. Environmental Impacts (Focus on local impacts and comment on greenhouse gasses if appropriate)

E. Budget Impact (cc: Treasury if required)

Two-station responses will increase costs in terms of volunteer hours, fuel costs and truck maintenance. Specific costs will be determined by the number of such responses.

F. Attached (Relevant documentation not personal information about an identifiable person)

SOG # 820

Respectfully submitted,

Signature

For more information, please contact:

Ron Doherty
rdoherty@thebluemountains.ca
(519) 599-5411

TOWN OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS FIRE DEPARTMENT		SOG # 820
OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES	SECTION : Operational Guideline SUBJECT: Interior Operations DATE REVISED: Aug. 2008	
	Pg. 1 of 1	

RESPONSE: To establish guidelines for interior operations at structure fires.

SCOPE: These guidelines are to be followed by all members of the department.

The Incident Commander may, at his/her discretion, deviate from this Operating Guideline if **all** of the following conditions are met:
 No less than ten fully trained and experienced firefighters are on scene; and
 There is a reasonable chance for the successful rescue of an occupant or a significant reduction in real property loss.

- GUIDELINE:**
- 1). Contents-only fires which, in the opinion of the Incident Commander, can be effectively contained by a single 2-man fire attack crew may be extinguished using an interior fire attack strategy. Interior fire attack for contents-only fires shall be initiated only when sufficient manpower is on-scene to provide support, including Command, water supply / pump operation, ventilation and a dedicated 2-man Rapid Intervention Team.
 - 2). When fire conditions or other information indicate that any part of a structure is involved in a fire, interior operations shall immediately be suspended. Firefighting operations will focus on defensive operations, with emphasis on protecting uninvolved areas of the building and/or exposures.
 - 3). If it is suspected that any persons remain in the building once defensive operations have begun, operations shall focus on the protection of viable exits and/or the provision of additional means of egress (i.e. providing ladder egress from windows, etc.) in order to facilitate self-rescue of persons at risk. **Under no circumstances shall anyone be permitted to enter the structure during defensive firefighting operations.**
 - 4). If the involved structure is equipped with automated firefighting facilities (sprinklers, etc.) the connection of a water supply to these facilities shall be a priority.

5). Any suspected contents-only fire which is known to have been burning for longer than 10 minutes shall be deemed to be a structure fire, and offensive (interior) operations shall not be initiated.

NOTES: This guideline is intended to address the current shortage of trained and experienced firefighters at both stations. The Ontario Fire Marshal's Office has issued a staffing guideline calling for ten firefighters, trained and experienced to the extent that they are competent in specific fire-ground roles, to be on-scene within ten minutes of alarm. To operate outside of these recommended guidelines represents an unacceptable level of health and safety risk for emergency responders.

APPROVED:
Fire Chief