



# Municipality of North Cowichan

## Review of Communications and Leadership within the North Cowichan Fire Department

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## Table of Contents

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. SCOPE OF WORK, METHODOLOGY, AND STAKEHOLDER INTERACTIONS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
3.1. SCOPE OF WORK.....	6
3.2. METHODOLOGY .....	7
3.3. STAKEHOLDER INTERACTIONS.....	8
<b>4. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>9</b>
4.1. CURRENT STATE .....	9
4.2. DEPARTMENT CHANGES OVER RECENT YEARS .....	10
<i>Fire Department Leadership Team</i> .....	12
<i>Mayor and Council</i> .....	16
<i>Information Sharing Within the Department</i> .....	17
4.3. MATTERS REQUIRING CLARIFICATION .....	18
<i>Member Input into Appointment of Officers</i> .....	18
<i>Recruitment Program</i> .....	19
<i>Recruit Training</i> .....	19
<i>Recognition and Celebrations</i> .....	20
<i>Fire Hall Identity</i> .....	20
<i>Associations and Families</i> .....	20
<i>Community Engagement</i> .....	21
<b>5. FIRE DEPARTMENT DIRECTION</b> .....	<b>22</b>
5.1. STAFFING.....	22
5.2. THE ROAD MAP.....	24
<b>6. APPENDIX A – EMAIL DATED MAY 12, 2023 FROM CAO TED SWABEY TO ALL DEPARTMENT MEMBERS, INTRODUCING THE PROJECT AND THE CONSULTANT</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>7. APPENDIX B – SCHEDULE OF STAKEHOLDER INTERACTIONS</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>8. APPENDIX C – FDLT TERMS OF REFERENCE (2021)</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>9. APPENDIX D – BRIDGES TRANSITION MODEL</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>10. APPENDIX E – THE DESIRED FIRE DEPARTMENT – VISIONING FOR THE FUTURE</b> .....	<b>39</b>

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# 1. Executive Summary

Tim Pley & Associates Ltd. (the “Consultant” or “TPA”) was engaged by the Municipality of North Cowichan (the “Municipality”) to undertake a review of communications and leadership within the North Cowichan Fire Department (“NCFD” or the “Department”). This review follows on the work of other third parties, the most recent being a 2022 report by Arjuna George, *Vision for the Future: North Cowichan Fire Department Survey Results*. That report summarized results from a survey of Department members and included references to unresolved concerns about communications and leadership within the Department.

Municipal leaders desired to further explore the issues of communication and leadership within the Department, and engaged the Consultants to obtain input from as many Department members as possible, as well as to conduct exit interviews with some former Department members. An estimated 84 people participated in group meetings or individually as part of this review. Some people who took part in a group session also engaged in one-on-one consultation. A review of relevant background material regarding the Department was also undertaken.

The Municipality describes itself as a *community of communities*: geographically large, covering as it does some 195 square kilometres, it comprises several small communities including Chemainus, Crofton, Maple Bay, and South End, each of which is served by a separate fire hall, as well as several other distinct communities.<sup>1</sup> Some of these communities and their associated fire halls have long histories and deep community roots. The NCFD provides fire protection services across the entire municipal area, responding to emergency incidents from one or more of the four fire halls. Emergency response is also provided into neighbouring jurisdictions under service agreements and mutual aid agreements.

Historically, the individual fire halls operated independently of each other. Each fire hall had its own fire chief, who acted with considerable autonomy from the Municipality. Equipment, training and service provision were not consistent across the four fire halls and their primary service areas. Changes in the regulatory environment, combined with external reviews and recommendations related to the operation of the Department, led the Municipality to take steps to consolidate the Department under once central administration, to better enable the Municipality to meet its obligations as the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the “AHJ”) for fire protection service delivery. For all intents and purposes, four autonomous fire departments were consolidated into one, and a central fire administrative structure was established where previously there had been none.

The Municipality’s longstanding status quo posture with regard to its decentralized delivery of fire protection services, in combination with external pressure from changed legislation, led to the implementation of a considerable amount of change. The consolidation, driven in large measure by external regulatory requirements and risk management issues, resulted in a rapid pace of transformative change for the fire service within the Municipality. The rapid pace of

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the use of the term “fire hall” within this report is synonymous with “fire station”.

transformation gave rise to a series of change management and communication issues, and to resistance from some Department members, resulting in the current situation that was observed by the Consultants.

Given the changing regulatory environment and the increased pressure to meet external standards for matters such as training and occupational health and safety, the enhanced integration of the four relatively independent fire halls was a necessary step to enable the Municipality to manage and oversee the service. The alternatives – such as creating and managing four separate fire administrations – would likely have proven to be expensive and impractical, leaving the Municipality to pursue the chosen course. That the integration has not gone smoothly in all respects does not mean it should be abandoned – rather, there is a need to focus on the change management issues which have arisen, to redouble efforts to engage the members in all of the fire halls, and especially the Fire Department Leadership Team, and to address the issues of resourcing, leadership, trust and communications.

The Department was under-resourced for the work involved in integrating the four fire halls and creating an effective and well-regarded centralized fire administration. The resourcing problem was compounded by resistance at the FDLT level and throughout the Department, and by the leadership style utilized to manage issues arising from change implementation. The result is that, some five years on, while many Department members acknowledge that there was a need for change, there remains broad and deep resistance directed towards the Department and Municipal leadership about the manner in which changes have been implemented and communicated.

An absence of effective channels of communication has left many members unsure of what to believe and who to look to for leadership. Speculation and conspiracy theories thrive in such a climate. The Department has become “stuck” in a pattern that involves Department leadership managing tactically, with insufficient resources to transition to a more appropriate strategic leadership mode. As a result, Department members as a group have ended up focussing on management’s inconsistencies, and criticizing rather than supporting. All parties agree that the chain of command is not being adhered to effectively, and some individuals expressed they feel their own actions have been forced by actions or inactions of others.

The current situation is unlikely to improve without a significant change. To be clear, this is not a finding of fault with current Department and Municipal leaders or with the general membership of the Department, but rather an indication that when situations devolve to the point where trust has been fractured to the extent it has in this case, a material investment of time and effort will be required to rebuild the necessary working relationships. Even then, that developing trust will be fragile, and care will need to be taken to communicate clearly and effectively to maintain a stated course of action over time.

While there are a series of challenges to be addressed, the Department has a number of strengths, and there are opportunities which will enable it to move forward to manage those issues. Despite reported increases in the rate of retirements and decreases in the rate of recruitment of new members, the Department appears to be relatively well-staffed with qualified, competent and committed paid on call firefighters. The Municipality has a CAO and Director of

Human Resources who are well-informed on Department matters and committed to moving forward in a positive manner. The Municipal Council is informed and engaged on the matter of fire protection services and are demonstrating support for the implementation of solutions while attempting to remain outside of the operational sphere. The Department's Assistant Fire Chief and Fire and Bylaw Services Coordinator are engaged and eager to move forward. Finally, a vacancy in the Fire Chief position provides an opportunity to make a significant change that could enable the Department to re-engage with its members and build the necessary trust and working relationships.

This was not a forensic review, one that would investigate previous actions and inactions in order to assign fault. Some readers of this report will no doubt find the report lacking in such assignments. The current state of communications and leadership within the department were examined. The root causes of the current state were determined only so far as was required to enable the development of recommendations for improvements going forward. This report is intended to provide a windshield view as opposed to a rear view mirror one.

This report includes several recommendations for change that, if implemented, will support the development of effective communication processes and enable the Municipality to provide an effective, centralized fire administration. At the same time, it will help the Municipality and the Department appreciate and address the change management issues which have negatively affected the relationship between the Municipality and their firefighters.

## 2. Summary of Recommendations

The following section extracts the recommendations contained within the report. The more expansive discussion in the report contains details regarding each of these recommendations.

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<b>Recommendation #1</b>	The Terms of Reference for the Fire Department Leadership Team should be revised. The FDLT should act as a round table Department leadership forum, chaired by the Fire Chief. Output communications from the FDLT should be written, and form the basis of the communication from Station Chiefs to Department members after each meeting.
<b>Recommendation #2</b>	A process should be established for the purpose of enabling Department members (the “Employees”) and the Municipality (the “Employer”) to communicate on non-operational matters.
<b>Recommendation #3</b>	The Fire Chief should report regularly (quarterly) to Council. The written report could include a summary of calls for service, response metrics, training status, promotions, recruitment and retention matters, progress on capital and strategic initiatives, and seasonal fire safety matters.
<b>Recommendation #4</b>	The Department should explore opportunities for Mayor and Council as well as senior municipal staff to interact with Department members at Department functions such as open houses and ceremonies. Given the Community of Communities nature of North Cowichan, such interactions might occur on a station-by-station basis, with a goal of transitioning to a department-wide basis.
<b>Recommendation #5</b>	The use of a functional read-only, online platform should be established where Department members can access Department documents, information, and regular updates.
<b>Recommendation #6</b>	The Department should review and update its Operational Guidelines. Gaps in the existing Operational Guidelines should be addressed. New OGs should continue to be reviewed by the FDLT prior to being signed by the Fire Chief and new approved OGs should be reviewed by Station Chief’s with the members prior to being implemented.
<b>Recommendation #7</b>	The Department should make Operational Guidelines readily available to all members, both in hardcopy and electronic form.

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<b>Recommendation #8</b>	The Department should develop and implement a process for formally reviewing and updating its OGS.
<b>Recommendation #9</b>	<p>The Municipality should consider creation of the following staff roles as soon as possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief in charge of training and operations;</li> <li>• Increasing the ½ FTE Fire and Bylaw Services position to full-time in support of only the Fire Department;</li> <li>• One full-time Human Resource position designated to support Fire Department recruitment and labour relations;</li> <li>• A full-time Payroll position; and</li> <li>• Enhanced Communications Department staffing to support Department fire prevention and community engagement efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation #10</b>	The Municipality should consider separating the reporting relationship between the Fire Chief and Bylaw Services.
<b>Recommendation #11</b>	The Municipality should explore options to enable the continued use of the paid on call model, including mitigating both the increase in calls for service in the South End fire hall area and the periodic low turn out of members to emergency calls.
<b>Recommendation #12</b>	The Municipality should undertake a strategic planning process, to develop a road map outlining the Department's path over the next five years, through which undertaking the longer term needs and goals can be identified and the members made part of the process. Representatives from all levels of the Department should be included in the process of developing the road map.

## 3. Scope of Work, Methodology, and Stakeholder Interactions

### 3.1. Scope of Work

The Municipality has implemented transformative change within the Department over the past five years, including:

- centralizing and standardizing fire protection services administration and Department practices, enabled through the creation of a North Cowichan Fire Chief position;
- transitioning from independently managed fire halls run by four paid on call Fire Chiefs and four Deputies, to a one department model, with four halls, each under the supervision of a Station Chief and Deputy, overseen by two full-time (“career”) chief officers; and
- defining and standardizing administrative processes, fire services and service levels.

Considerable advances have been made in centralizing and modernizing fire protection administrative processes and setting the consolidated fire department up for success in responding to a rapidly changing operating environment. These advances have not been without some unintended and negative internal consequences. The Municipality has previously engaged third parties to assess progress and make recommendations for improvements.

Notwithstanding previous and recent third-party engagements, the Municipality continued to have concerns about communication and leadership within the Department. In 2022, all Department personnel were surveyed on a range of matters related to the Department by an external consultant.<sup>2</sup> While the resulting summary report cited very positive feedback from members on several surveyed topics, concerns among members regarding communication and leadership within the Department were evident. These concerns were compounded by the rate and manner of implementation of change over recent years. The Municipality wished to explore the matters of communication and leadership further to ensure that the Department could go forward along a positive path.

The scope of work for this assessment included examining the current state of communications and leadership within the Department, and making recommendations for improvements. To achieve that, previous staff and third-party reports were reviewed, as well as written communication within the Department and within the Municipality. As many key personnel as was possible were to be interviewed, along with elected officials. In addition, several former department members were to be “exit interviewed”.

A written report summarizing key findings and recommendations was to be provided.

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<sup>2</sup> Arjuna George, Silver Arrow Coaching and Consulting, *Vision for the Future: North Cowichan Fire Department Survey Results and Report 2022*.

*It is important to note that this was not a forensic review, one that would investigate previous actions and inactions in order to assign fault. Rather, the scope of work for this project was to assess the current state of communications and leadership within the department, and determine the root causes of the current state only so far as to enable the development of recommendations for improvements.*

## 3.2. Methodology

A kick-off meeting was conducted with the Municipality's Chief Administrative Officer (the "CAO") and Director, Human Resources and Health & Safety to review and finalize the project scope, refine the list of documents to be reviewed, and identify key people to be consulted.

The Consultants reviewed a range of background materials, including:

- North Cowichan Fire Services Review (2018);
- *Vision for the Future: North Cowichan Fire Department Survey Results and Report 2022*;
- Fire Presentation to Council (December 2022);
- North Cowichan Service Level ("Interior Level") Declaration (2016);
- *Fire Protection Bylaw No. 3841, 2021*;
- Fire Department Leadership Team ("FDLT") meeting agenda and minutes; and
- Terms of Reference for the North Cowichan Fire Department Leadership Team (2021).

The Municipality provided contact information for individuals and groups identified to be consulted or facilitated. In some cases, individuals were invited to contact the Consultants. A written message was sent by the CAO to all Department members introducing the project and the Consultants.<sup>3</sup>

A schedule of meetings with Department personnel was developed with the assistance of the Municipality's Human Resources Department. A group session was conducted at each fire hall for firefighters assigned to those halls, and separate group meetings were conducted with Station Chiefs and Deputies, as well as Captains. The Fire Chief and Assistant Fire Chief were engaged individually and separately.

The Consultants met with Municipal Council as a group and met separately with five of seven members of Council. Council was asked to provide names of people with whom the Consultants should engage.

"Exit interviews" were conducted with identified former members. Some of those former members had long term involvement in the Department. Their input helped to provide historical context to the current situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Message from the CAO to Department members is attached to this report in Appendix A.

### 3.3. Stakeholder Interactions

Over the course of the review, the Consultants met with some 84 individuals, several of them on more than one occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Where possible, meetings were conducted in-person. In some instances, due to circumstances, meetings were conducted electronically or by telephone. Individual meetings ranged from 30 to 120 minutes in duration, and some individuals were engaged more than once. Some individuals reached out directly to the Consultants for engagement. Some of those individuals also took part in group sessions.

In total, six group sessions were conducted. Five sessions were held in-person in a fire station, and one session (with Station Chiefs and Deputies) was conducted via Zoom.

During all group meetings with Department members and during some in-person meetings with individuals, the Consultants were represented by Tim Pley and one of his associates.

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<sup>4</sup> Stakeholder engagement sessions are documented in Appendix B of this report.

## 4. Findings and Recommendations

### 4.1. Current State

Communication and leadership are topics that impact all aspects of an organization, especially a fire department. During times of emergency, clear communications and adherence to chain of command are critical to the success of emergency operations and to the prevention of harm to responders, and it is during those times when communications and leadership are most challenging. Clear communication practices and effective leadership begin and are fostered during times of non-emergency. These are not organizational traits that can be turned on when desired, they must be ingrained.

While the scope of work for this project included a focus on communication and leadership within the Department, conversations during engagements were at times wide-ranging. The Consultants did not unduly restrict those conversations from covering a range of topics, in the interests of helping people to feel heard, and exploring the current state of communication and leadership within the Department and the underlying drivers for that current state.

*“North Cowichan is a community of communities, and the municipality includes Crofton, Chemainus, Maple Bay, Quamichan, Bell McKinnon, Berkey’s Corner, and South End/University Village. Each unique area has its own history and values, as well as natural and built environments that define its character.”<sup>5</sup>*

A district municipality established in 1873, North Cowichan operates fire halls located at Chemainus, Crofton, Maple Bay, and South End, each of them a part of the North Cowichan Fire Department. The Municipality spans an area of approximately 195 square kilometers. The 2021 Canadian Census recorded 31,990 people residing in North Cowichan, representing growth of some 7.7% since 2016.

Although the Municipality has been established as the local government for 150 years, the fire service appears to have developed in a de-centralized manner. Each fire hall historically served its own local part of the broader community, and each fire hall was operated by its own fire chief and deputy. The Department was, for all intents and purposes, four separate fire departments with little to no oversight. The Municipality undertook taxation to provide funding for each of the services.

The statutory and regulatory environment within which the fire service operates has become more demanding over the past twenty years. Those regulatory changes, with a heavy focus on improved training and records, combined with a better appreciation by local government of the risks arising from the provision of emergency response services, have driven change across the local government fire protection sector. The adoption of a new minimum training standard for

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<sup>5</sup> [Municipality of North Cowichan website](#)

structure firefighters in 2014 was a catalyst that the Municipality could not ignore.<sup>6</sup> The “Playbook” stipulated that local governments providing funding to fire departments are the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the “AHJ”) for those departments. As the AHJ, local governments are obligated to determine the level of service provided by their fire departments and obligated to ensure that those departments meet minimum training standards.

The Playbook essentially put local governments on notice that they had an obligation to oversee and manage their fire departments, and that the local governments were responsible for all matters related to those departments. Taken in context with other emerging legislative changes including more stringent WorkSafe BC requirements and the passage of Bill C-45, which addresses criminal liability for negligence in workplaces, the Municipality and many other local governments in BC began to take steps to apply a greater degree of oversight to their fire departments.

In response to the various regulatory change drivers, in 2018 the Municipality retained a third party to undertake a review of its fire services.<sup>7</sup> That report included four broad recommendations:

1. Centralizing and standardizing the Department’s administrative functions and structure;
2. Updating the employment relationships between volunteer firefighters, the Department and the Municipality;
3. Setting service levels, and meeting training and other related requirements; and
4. Continuing the “evolution” to one North Cowichan Fire Department.

Over the five years since the report was written, the Municipality has largely completed the work related to those recommendations and should be commended. However, of the four primary recommendations, the first one, which amounted to the integration of essentially four separate fire departments into a single entity, has probably generated most of the change management challenges.

## 4.2. Department Changes over Recent Years

Since the *North Cowichan Fire Services Review* report in 2018 (the “2018 Report”), the Department has gone through a series of administrative and governance changes – more than most fire departments given the historic practice of four fire halls functioning independently. With few exceptions, individuals and groups engaged with for this review indicated that they generally recognized the necessity of the changes and many spoke positively about some of those changes. When asked if they were experiencing change-fatigue, members were quick to

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<sup>6</sup> *British Columbia Fire Service Minimum Training Standards: Structure Firefighters – Competency and Training Playbook* (September 2014; second edition – May 2015) (the “Playbook”).

<sup>7</sup> Aegis Risk Management Ltd., *North Cowichan Fire Services Report* (2018).

clarify that it is not the *changes* that they are fatigued by, but rather the *manner* with which those changes have been communicated and implemented.

Leading the Department through the transformative change that it has experienced in recent years, would be a difficult task at best. In many respects the current communication and leadership situation within the Department is a result of a failure of the FDLT to function as intended. That failure was likely a result of the changes the Department has been through since 2018, the way changes have been implemented and communicated, and the way that some FDLT and Department members responded to the implementation of change. The task of change leadership was made more difficult by:

- the long-established hands-off approach that the Municipality had taken for decades prior to 2018, cementing local practices and expectations that later conflicted with the new direction;
- understaffing the new central administration relative to the workload involved in developing centralized systems and leading the department in the adoption of same;
- combining responsibility for Bylaw Services under the Fire Chief's span of responsibility;
- the communication challenges inherent within a paid on call department, compounded by the challenges of communicating with personnel from four fire halls; and
- the failure of the FDLT to function as intended as a leadership forum and communication conduit.

Implementation of change was flawed in terms of the absence of a written and broadly communicated plan, which eventually resulted in a directive style of leadership to assert change when a collaborative approach, if conditions had enabled that, may have been more successful. While many Department members now acknowledge that the centralization processes were necessary, when the changes were rolled out, they were initially perceived as being a loss – of autonomy, authority and deeply embedded historical practices. The changes may also have been perceived as reflecting negatively on the value of the work and effort of the past.

While the 2018 North Cowichan Fire Services Review report did include a listing of key actions and corresponding target years for implementation of same, the implementation of some of those action items necessitated other actions not identified in that report. Some of those changes have impacted members and Associations.

Captain Greg McRea of the Department introduced the Consultants to the Bridges Transition Model.<sup>8</sup> As Captain McRea noted, the Bridges Transition Model provides a simple explanation of response to change within organizations. The Bridges Transition Model identifies that every change implementation begins with a loss. Organizations implementing change often focus on the positive attributes of the new model, while failing to fully appreciate that stakeholders may be grieving the loss of what they had and were comfortable with, and not be ready yet to embrace the new.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/> included in Appendix D

The Consultants did not observe evidence that the Municipality had adequately considered and prepared for Department members experiencing feelings of loss, resulting in some cases in members actively opposing the changes and those implementing the change. It appears the Municipality did not have an adequate level of administrative support to develop and effectively communicate new procedures that would replace those being discontinued. The Bridges Transition Model helps to explain why Department members would oppose change initially, given that they first experienced a sense of loss. The Municipality was not able to maintain adequate leadership influence among Department members during “the time between the old reality and sense of identity and the new one” during the period which Bridges describes as the “Neutral Zone”, a time of “flux [when stakeholders] may feel confusion and distress.”<sup>9</sup> The Consultants observed that many Department members have not progressed beyond the Neutral Zone, and have not yet entered the third and final phase of change, New Beginnings. The Department and its members remain somewhat in limbo as a result.

Implementation of change was made more challenging by several factors, including:

- The lack of a pre-existing centralized North Cowichan fire administration team, and the need to establish and make adjustments to one while the changes were being implemented;
- The absence of centralized administrative systems and supports, and the need to establish those as the changes were being implemented (proverbially flying the plane while building it);
- The absence of a broadly-understood road map for the Department which could have prevented or reduced speculation among the members and perhaps negated some of the negative behaviour that occurred; and
- The impact of the changes on long-established autonomous structures and community relationships associated with each fire hall that supported maintenance of the status quo prior to 2018.

All the factors noted above have not yet been fully addressed. Recommendations in this report are intended to support closing these gaps.

Specific aspects of Department operations are reviewed separately below, and the findings derived from broad engagements are summarized.

## **Fire Department Leadership Team**

The Fire Department Leadership Team (the “FDLT”) is the Department’s leadership working group, tasked with and positioned to advise the Fire Chief, and lead in standardizing operations while ensuring that the needs of specific fire halls and communities continue to be met. It is intended to fulfill critical leadership and communication roles within the Department.<sup>10</sup> FDLT

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<sup>9</sup> <https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/>

<sup>10</sup> The current Terms of Reference for the FDLT are attached to this report as Appendix C.

membership comprises the Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, CAO, Station Chiefs and Deputy Station Chiefs, and the Fire and Bylaw Services Coordinator.<sup>11</sup>

The FDLT Terms of Reference indicate that the “*overarching role of the FDLT is to provide leadership to the entire fire department; to provide input and recommendations and, where applicable make decisions, in the best interest of the organization.*” Table 1 below, from the FDLT Terms of Reference provides guidance on the levels in the organization at which decisions are made.

Table 1: FDLT Roles and Responsibilities (excerpt from FDLT Terms of Reference)

Type	What it looks like	Responsibility
<b>Strategic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerned with the long-term future of the department</li> <li>Includes service levels</li> <li>Department-wide impact</li> <li>Often has budget impacts</li> <li>Occurs rarely</li> </ul>	Municipal council with input from SLT and FDLT
<b>Tactical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plans, projects, initiatives to implement the strategic direction</li> <li>Service delivery approach</li> <li>Creating and or [sic] revising processes</li> <li>Occurs regularly</li> </ul>	Fire Chief with input from FDLT
<b>Operational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing business of the operation</li> <li>Task focused</li> <li>Implementation of the tactical</li> <li>Occurs very regularly</li> <li>No budget impact</li> </ul>	FDLT (subject to Fire Chief override)

The intended role of FDLT meetings is:

1. Directions from Council and the CAO are communicated, and the Department’s response in implementing those directions are discussed;
2. Department planning, projects, service delivery approaches and processes are discussed, and the Fire Chief takes advice and input from Department senior officers prior to making final decisions;

<sup>11</sup> The Fire and Bylaw Services Coordinator was intended to be a part of the FDLT but not actively participate in FDLT discussions. The Fire and Bylaw Services Coordinator’s attendance at FDLT meetings has been discontinued.

3. Station Chiefs and Deputies discuss ongoing operational business and implementation of direction, support and learn from one another, as well as receive coaching/mentoring guidance from the Fire Chief; and
4. Written communication is developed to support the Station Chiefs in communicating clearly and concisely to Department members.

The FDLT, however, is not working as intended, nor is it approaching its potential as a pivotal communication and decision-making hub for the Department. During engagements, stakeholders consistently described the FDLT as being a critical body for the Department in terms of communication and leadership, and stakeholders, including FDLT current and past members, acknowledged that the FDLT has not been effective in that role.

It may be that the FDLT is not fulfilling its potential for additional reasons than those noted in this report, such as differences in personal approaches, opinions, and/or agendas. Notwithstanding these potential factors, the FDLT, going forward, should operate in accordance with the following precepts:

1. The Fire Chief chairs a round table working group where consensus is sought;
2. Matters are discussed collaboratively prior to the Fire Chief making a final decision. Input is taken and considered. Consensus is sought. Once a decision is made, members of the FDLT need to communicate and implement that decision without undermining it. Not all matters need be brought to the FDLT. The Fire Chief should exercise discretion on which matters do not require FDLT input and which matters should be given consideration by the FDLT;
3. Meetings should be held monthly until such time as there is consensus that a lower frequency is warranted;
4. Meeting agendas should be prepared and circulated at least three business days prior to each meeting in order that participants can be prepared to discuss agenda topics in the meeting;
5. Meeting minutes should be taken, adequate to provide a record of matters discussed, resolutions passed or decisions made, and ongoing business that will continue to remain on agendas for future meetings;
6. Agendas, meeting minutes and meeting discussions should be treated as confidential to the FDLT group, and that confidentiality enforced if required;
7. After each FDLT meeting;
  - a) Meeting minutes should be completed and circulated to all FDLT regular participants and the CAO; and

- b) A written communication for all Department members should be prepared, and that written document should form the basis of the update that Station Chiefs provide to the members during fire hall meetings;
- 8. Membership on the FDLT should be limited to the Fire Chief, the Assistant Chief, Station Chiefs and Deputy Station Chiefs;
- 9. An administrative support staff person should attend FDLT meetings for the purpose of supporting the meetings administrative needs, not participating in meeting discussions; and
- 10. At the discretion of the Fire Chief, and preferably with consensus from the FDLT participants, from time-to-time guests may be invited to attend a portion of an FDLT meeting.

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**Recommendation #1**

The Terms of Reference for the Fire Department Leadership Team should be revised. The FDLT should act as a round table Department leadership forum, chaired by the Fire Chief. Output communications from the FDLT should be written, and form the basis of the communication from Station Chiefs to Department members after each meeting.

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The FDLT is currently the nexus of discussion on matters related to operations as well as personnel-related issues. Department members feel, and may have been directed, that all their concerns should be communicated through their Station Chief to the FDLT where they can be reviewed. This has resulted in some frustration for members who feel that their individual concerns are not being addressed or their questions answered. The FDLT should deal only with matters that are operational in nature or that relate to Department leadership. Station Chiefs should be empowered to manage the needs of individual members within the scope of Department Operational Guidelines, the Municipality's Procurement Policy, and direction from time to time from the Fire Chief.

The Department is lacking a functional process through which the non-operational interests of Department members (Employees) can be expressed to the Municipality (Employer), and vice versa. A process should be established for this purpose. Given that the Municipality is in the collective bargaining process at the time of the writing of this report, specific recommendations on the structure of a non-operational employee engagement process will not be offered here.

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**Recommendation #2**

A process should be established for the purpose of enabling Department members (the "Employees") and the Municipality (the "Employer") to communicate on non-operational matters.

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## Mayor and Council

The municipal chain of command begins with the policy setters – Mayor and Council and ends with the service providers – the Department members. In order for the chain and unity of command to function as intended, processes that are transparent and effective need to be in place and followed so that the necessary information flows in both directions. In the absence of a functioning, two-way communication corridor, stakeholders may create their own pathways that may be less effective or have unintended negative consequences. During the review, it was observed that some *ad hoc* communication pathways currently exist between Department members and Council. If individual members of Council meet with line staff to discuss management issues, that undermines the ability of management at all levels in the organization to implement the policy directions set by Council, and undermines the authority of Council itself.

Mayor and Council were observed to be, as a group, very aware of their role as the primary policy-setting body, including that they should not be involved in operational matters or day-to-day administration. Individually, they have been making best efforts to not be drawn into non-policy matters affecting the Department. However, it was observed that, at times, it has been difficult for members of Council to not engage in conversations about Department matters given that they live in communities served by the Department and where Department members live. Regular reports from the Fire Chief on Department operations would help members of Council to be informed, and to remain out of Department non-policy matters.

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### Recommendation #3

The Fire Chief should report regularly (quarterly) to Council. The written report could include a summary of calls for service, response metrics, training status, promotions, recruitment and retention matters, progress on capital and strategic initiatives, and seasonal fire safety matters.

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Regular reporting to Council will support elected officials in being better informed and therefore less inclined to be drawn into operational and internal administrative matters. It will also be helpful for Department members to observe the regular reporting in public meetings, and members may then feel less inclined to create their own communication channels to Mayor and Council, or to take part in engagements organized by others.

Department members expressed that, in the past, there had been social events to which the elected officials and municipal senior staff were invited. Recognizing the organizational significance of Mayor and Council, members miss these recognition and engagement events. The recent COVID pandemic likely contributed to the discontinuation of some effective socializing opportunities, and those initiatives have not restarted. Celebratory, and open house events provide an important opportunity for elected officials and senior staff to interact with Department members, in their official capacity, in a positive and mutually appreciative manner.

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### Recommendation #4

The Department should explore opportunities for Mayor and Council as well as senior municipal staff to interact with Department members at Department functions such as open

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houses and ceremonies. Given the Community of Communities nature of North Cowichan, such interactions might occur on a station-by-station basis, with a goal of transitioning to a department-wide basis.

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## Information Sharing Within the Department

Many individuals who participated in the review reported an absence of a structured approach to information sharing within the Department. The absence of an effective information sharing process has created a vacuum that has been filled, at times, with speculation and rumour, making the implementation of change more difficult and the response to that change more negative. Recommendations for changes in the FDLT process should help to provide more regular and consistent communications between Department leaders and the members, through the chain of command. A method is needed for sharing of FDLT and other Department information in a manner that enables members to access that information at their convenience.

Although an online SharePoint platform is already in place for the sharing of Department information, that platform does not appear to be functioning as intended.

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### Recommendation #5

The use of a functional read-only, online platform should be established where Department members can access Department documents, information, and regular updates.

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Members who participated in the review reported that the Department's Operational Guidelines ("OGs") are incomplete and/or not easily accessible. OGs are a critical communication tool in a fire department, informing and empowering members within stated parameters and enabling the safe and effective provision of emergency services. OGs essentially set the boundaries within which Department members operate, sometimes during emergency situations where there is not time to seek direction from senior officers. An absence of clear and complete OGs, or lack of awareness of those documents, can contribute to freelancing (members making judgement decisions in real time without guidance), an increase in disciplinary actions and an increase in risk related to liabilities.

Where possible, OGs should be reviewed in draft form by the FDLT prior to being signed by the Fire Chief and being implemented. A procedure for reviewing and signing-off all new Department OGs and updating those OGs on a regular basis – e.g., a set portion of them annually, with other updates as required to meet any changes required to address operational, regulatory or administrative issues – should be formalized and implemented. The goal should be to ensure that each OG is reviewed at least once every three years.

Some members reported that the Department's recent communication practice has involved what were referred to as "policy directives" being sent via email to all Department members. Members reported that they were not aware if these directives had been incorporated into

Department OGs, and that there is not a consolidated summary of directives that can be reviewed by members.

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**Recommendation #6** The Department should review and update its Operational Guidelines. Gaps in the existing Operational Guidelines should be addressed. New OGs should continue to be reviewed by the FDLT prior to being signed by the Fire Chief and new approved OGs should be reviewed by Station Chief's with the members prior to being implemented.

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**Recommendation #7** The Department should make Operational Guidelines readily available to all members, both in hardcopy and electronic form.

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**Recommendation #8** The Department should develop and implement a process for formally reviewing and updating its OGs.

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### 4.3. Matters Requiring Clarification

Several matters were raised during one or more sessions with the participating stakeholders. They are referenced in this report, not for their operational or administrative substance, but rather because uncertainty among Department members about these and other matters impedes the development of trust, and fuels speculation that the Municipality has an uncommunicated agenda for the Department. This reflects considerably on the state of communications and leadership within the Department. Several of those matters are identified below.

#### Member Input into Appointment of Officers

During several of the stakeholder sessions, both in group settings and individually, concern was expressed about the discontinuation of members electing Station officers. The Municipality has implemented a centralized program for selection of Station officers, a process that reportedly did not include input from Department members.

This matter is one that is being addressed by local governments in volunteer and paid on call fire departments across Canada. Where such departments were once very community-based, and operated like associations, they are now being folded into local governments and, rightfully, treated like their other service providing departments, with the local government recruitment and selection processes being applied. The rationale for moving to a standardized promotion process, one clearly based on qualification levels, is understandable, and should be continued. However, there may be benefit to enabling some method of integrating member input into the system. This will likely continue to be an evolving matter, one in which the Municipality and senior Department officers will need to exercise due diligence when selecting members for promotion.

As the Department moves forward and as processes and trust are developed, the Municipality may be in a better position to incorporate input from Department members on the skillsets that the members desire to see personified in Station officers. Some other local governments have succeeded in threading this needle by creating opportunities for members to provide input into the process of appointments to key fire department roles. As trust between the Municipality and Department members develops, it may be possible to integrate member input into promotional policy, including perhaps qualification requirements and leadership qualities.

## **Recruitment Program**

Fire departments that rely upon volunteer or paid on call firefighters experience a greater rate of personnel turnover than those that utilize career firefighters. This higher turnover rate requires such departments to recruit new firefighters at a considerably higher rate than is experienced in the career sector, making recruitment critically important to a volunteer or POC department, and significantly increasing related workloads.

The Municipality has centralized the firefighter recruitment process. Rather than new recruits being engaged at the fire hall level as they once were, recruits are now engaged by the Municipality, and introduced at the fire halls later. There are several advantages to the Department and the Municipality in utilizing a central recruitment process. However, some Department members expressed frustration with their lack of awareness of the particulars of the new recruitment process. A process had been established in 2018 to enable Station Chief input into centralized recruitment, but that process appears to have not been successful. Notwithstanding previous experience, recruitment should continue to be centralized, and renewed efforts should be undertaken to increase member awareness of that process.

Some members are not sure if they should be encouraging people to join the Department as they used to do, and not sure how to refer individuals expressing interest to the proper channel. Word-of-mouth recruiting by Department members is critical to support the recruitment of new members. As such, better communication with members on the relevant processes, and active encouragement of such a recruitment approach, will better support the new centralized recruitment process.

As with other administrative matters, the centralizing of service delivery can result in improvements, a reduction in liability, and a reduction in administrative workload on paid on call officers. However, centralizing means that some work steps that may have not been taken previously will now be taken by career Department staff or Municipal staff, and those work steps may be multiplied by a factor of four. In the area of recruitment, as in some other administrative areas, it was observed that centralizing of services has not fully succeeded in part due to an absence of new staff resources to undertake that new work. An increase in staffing may be warranted in the Municipality's Fire Administration and Human Resources Department.

## **Recruit Training**

The Department has begun to centrally organize the training of new recruits. This presents many potential advantages over the former practice of recruit training being organized at the fire

hall level, and the centralized approach should be continued given that it provides several considerable advantages. Department members identified some positive aspects that they perceive in centralized recruit training, and several unanswered questions about the recruit training process that could be easily resolved with improved communication.

## **Recognition and Celebrations**

The matter of interacting with Mayor, Council and senior municipal staff was addressed earlier in this report. The most effective volunteer and paid on call fire departments have robust traditional methods of recognizing and celebrating achievements and milestones. These practices enhance the sense of “team”, and provide part of the incentive for members to continue to contribute in a capacity for which financial compensation is not commensurate with the required commitment. Even fire hall open house events provide community recognition that can be an important motivator for continued contribution as a volunteer or paid on call member.

During engagement sessions Department members expressed their desire to restart celebratory events in their fire halls, and to have the Mayor, Council and senior Municipal staff attend those events. Recommendation #4 of this report addresses that matter.

## **Fire Hall Identity**

The consolidation of four independently operated fire stations into one department operating out of four fire halls has resulted in concerns about loss not only of autonomy but also of identity. The Municipality describes itself as a “community of communities”, which reflects the fact that there are distinct feelings of localized community within the Municipality. The Municipality likely experiences this aspect of community personality in service areas other than Fire. The Department has recently taken steps to identify fire halls and apparatus by numbers rather than, or as well as, community names (for example, Chemainus fire hall may now be referred to at times as North Cowichan Station #1).

There are operational aspects necessitating the identification of fire apparatus by numeric call signs. The fire hall from which apparatus respond is less important than the ability of dispatch and incident commanders to track and assign those resources within standardized resource tracking systems. During non-emergency response times however, people and fire halls can more readily be referred to by their given names and community names, not numbers. The level of concern expressed to the Consultants on the matter of fire hall identities is in part related to the perception that the Municipality is pursuing an agenda to homogenize the Department beyond that required to meet actual operational and regulatory needs. The matter of fire hall and apparatus names seems to be one that can be resolved through a discussion at the FDLT level.

## **Associations and Families**

The fire service, especially in the volunteer and paid on call sector, is known for involving family and community in fire station activities. Traditionally, families of Department members and

former members have been welcomed into the North Cowichan fire halls. This practice was reported to have been discontinued during the COVID pandemic, and not restarted since.

There is a separate association connected with each fire hall that is supported by that hall's members, as well as by retired members and local residents. These types of not-for-profit associations are common in the fire service, often providing support to firefighters and communities through fundraising activities, social events and community engagement. Some of the equipment and furniture in Department fire halls may have been purchased by the affiliated Association. Department members reported that Associations are no longer permitted to conduct business in Department fire halls or borrow equipment that was originally purchased by the Association. This concern was not verified by the Consultant.

From a local government perspective, it is problematic to have individuals who are not actively engaged as employees or volunteers of the local government accessing local government fire department facilities and utilizing equipment in those facilities. Clearly, a legacy situation exists wherein the Associations have previously had access to that equipment and facilities. No documentation was observed by the Consultants that would provide insight into which equipment was purchased by which Association, the current ownership of those assets, or whether or not the Associations are registered legal entities. These matters should be resolved.

Given that Department members have become certified as a collective bargaining unit, the union representing the members will need to be involved in any discussions about the future involvement in workplaces of the different Associations. It is possible that the union will fulfill some of the roles previously performed by the Associations. The three sets of stakeholders (Municipality, Associations and Union) will need to define the new lanes within which each will operate going forward.

## **Community Engagement**

Community engagement is an important aspect of a volunteer or paid on call fire department. The Municipality's fire halls are community-based. Enabling fire hall open houses and the presence of Department personnel and equipment at community events would result in positive outcomes in areas of recruitment, retention, and community support for the Department. These engagements can also facilitate fire prevention education, improving public safety.

Like many other local governments, the Municipality has a history of fire department/station associations being the functional arm of the Department's community engagement. The centralization of the Department's administration, the change management issues in evidence, and the effect of the pandemic, have served to lessen the Associations' work and engagement with their respective communities. As a result, some of the connection between the individual halls and their immediate communities has been lost.

As the Department moves forward in defining/redefining the roles of Associations and the Union, the matter of effective engagement between fire halls and the communities that they serve is one that should be considered. The Department may desire to take a more active role in Department community engagement.

## 5. Fire Department Direction

The Municipality and the Department have made considerable forward progress on implementing needed changes since 2018. While the path may have been understandably bumpy during some periods of that time, considerable progress has been made, and all current members should be proud of what has been accomplished and the Department that they have helped to create. The series of change management issues identified, including the role of the FDLT, effective two-way communication with members, thoughtful and proactive engagement on issues of concern, provision of adequate staffing, and the creation of a clear road map for the Department, need to be addressed.

### 5.1. Staffing

Since 2018, the Municipality has created some new staff positions related to the Department, including:

- Fire Chief
- Assistant Fire Chief (Inspections)
- 0.5 FTE Fire and Bylaw Services Coordinator.

While the Consultants have not undertaken a detailed staffing needs assessment of the Department, it is clear that some new staff resources are required to support the Department's operations, including the following matters:

- support the proper functioning of the FDLT;
- assist with recruitment, training, and records keeping;
- build out a comprehensive fire prevention program; and
- provide additional administrative support.

The additional resources will better enable the Municipality to maintain the paid on call staffing model by ensuring that members can focus on delivering emergency response services, with the various administrative functions and regulatory matters handled by staff. Effective communication and leadership going forward are dependent upon the staff resources necessary to complete administrative work, as well as communicate and lead.

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#### **Recommendation #9**

The Municipality should consider creation of the following staff roles as soon as possible:

- One Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief in charge of training and operations;
  - Increasing the ½ FTE Fire and Bylaw Services position to full-time in support of only the Fire Department;
  - One full-time Human Resource position designated to support Fire Department recruitment and labour relations;
-

- 
- A full-time Payroll position; and
  - Enhanced Communications Department staffing to support Department fire prevention and community engagement efforts.
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The effective centralization of recruitment, training, and records keeping, and meeting regulatory obligations in these and other areas, will require additional staffing. While it may seem that the centralizing of administration creates the need for additional staffing, it would be more accurate to say that meeting regulatory requirements is the cause of the additional work, and centralizing that work is the most efficient way to accomplish the tasks. Alternatively, if the Municipality was to decentralize fire administrative services and still meet regulatory requirements, full time staffing would need to be hired to provide administrative oversight in each of the four fire halls.

Centralizing of fire administration and leadership is the most effective and efficient method for the Municipality to meet its regulatory obligations, and the recommended increase in staff resources reflects meeting of critical immediate needs.

By providing support from career officers and full-time administrative support staff, the Municipality can ensure that the Department is not only able to meet its regulatory requirements, but also that members are free to concentrate their time on emergency response services rather than paperwork. The current career staffing of 2.5 FTEs, with the added responsibility of overseeing Bylaw Services, is not adequate to meet the needs of the Department. From a strictly staffing capacity perspective, the Municipality should consider separating the Fire Chief from supervising Bylaw Services. Some of the current challenges related to communication and leadership are related to the sheer workload relative to the limited staff available to undertake that work. Communication and engagement are often the first aspects of leadership to drop off in situations where there is more work than staff capacity.

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**Recommendation #10**      The Municipality should consider separating the reporting relationship between the Fire Chief and Bylaw Services.

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Department members participating in group and individual engagement sessions expressed their strong belief that the paid on call model can continue to work for the Department. Two factors were observed by the Consultants that might challenge the ability of the paid on call model to continue to meet the needs of the community:

1. Increasing calls for service in the South End fire hall area; and
2. At times low turn out of members to emergency calls.

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**Recommendation #11**      The Municipality should explore options to enable the continued use of the paid on call model, including mitigating both the increase in calls for service in the South End fire hall area and the periodic low turn out of members to emergency calls.

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## 5.2. The Road Map

During every engagement session as part of this review, participants reported that going forward there needs to be a road map (some said with timeline indicators), outlining where the Department is headed.

For context, the 2018 Report provided the basis for the creation of a five-year road map, but an actual road map (or workplan or strategic plan) was either never created, or not shared with Department members or the Consultants. Given that five years have passed since the 2018 Report and that many of its recommendations have been addressed, the timing for the development of a new plan is ideal. Further, given that trust and engagement are fragile and require cultivation, the development of a new plan through a Strategic Planning process would enable the Municipality, the Department and its members to meet in a facilitated environment and together plan the Department's future course.

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**Recommendation #12**

The Municipality should undertake a strategic planning process, to develop a road map outlining the Department's path over the next five years, through which undertaking the longer term needs and goals can be identified and the members made part of the process. Representatives from all levels of the Department should be included in the process of developing the road map.

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## 6. Appendix A – Email dated May 12, 2023 from CAO Ted Swabey to all Department Members, introducing the project and the Consultant

**Subject:** NCFD Communication and Leadership Effectiveness Review

**Date:** Friday, May 12, 2023 at 3:30:30 PM Pacific Daylight Saving Time

**From:** Ted Swabey

Good afternoon,

I am writing to inform you of a project that will be undertaken over the next few months relating to the North Cowichan Fire Department (NCFD).

From time to time, North Cowichan has engaged the services of third-party consultants to review matters related to fire protection services, most recently Arjuna George in 2022. Arjuna's report provided a summary of his interactions with fire department members, which indicated that, in several areas, personnel rated the department very highly. The report also included a summary of some specific department communications and leadership concerns.

While I was pleased to learn of the high ratings submitted in response to the survey conducted by Arjuna, I wanted to explore further the expressed concerns regarding communications and leadership within the department. To this end, the Municipality of North Cowichan has retained Tim Pley & Associates Ltd. to undertake a specific, in-depth review of department communications and leadership. The review will include:

- A review of related documents
- Interviews with individual members of municipal Council
- Interviews with select municipal staff
- Interviews with select previous Fire Department members
- Separate group sessions with the Fire Department Leadership Team, Station Officers, and firefighters

The topics covered in all interviews and group sessions will be restricted to communications and leadership. Tim Pley will conduct all interviews and group sessions. Tim is a retired local government CAO who served for 26 years in the municipal fire service, with eight years as a fire chief. Tim's background is provided in further depth at [www.timpley.ca](http://www.timpley.ca).

I want to take this opportunity to thank all department members and other stakeholders who have been supporting the NCFD and have shown a continued commitment during considerable changes, many of which have occurred during the uncertainty of the COVID pandemic. I am very proud of what we have achieved together so far but I recognize there is still work to be done to realize our vision of developing the department that our communities need. For this reason, I am undertaking this project to better understand the concerns raised regarding communication and leadership within the NCFD so that we can continue to move towards this goal.

Ted Swabey (he/him)  
Chief Administrative Officer

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# 7. Appendix B – Schedule of Stakeholder Interactions

Group or Individual	Date	# of Individuals
Municipal Council	May 3	7
Individual members of Council – one on one meetings	Various dates	5
CAO <sup>12</sup>	Various dates	1
Director of Human Resources & Health and Safety	Various dates	1
Fire Chief	Various dates	1
Assistant Fire Chief	Various dates	1
Fire Department Leadership Team (Chief and Assistant Chief not in attendance)	June 20	5
Captains	July 17	13
Crofton Firefighters	July 26	14
South End Firefighters	August 2	16
Maple Bay Firefighters	August 3	10
Chemainus Firefighters	August 10	10
Former Department members – one on one meetings	Various dates	4
Individual Department members – one on one meetings	Various dates	4
Previous consultant		1

<sup>12</sup> While the Consultant interacted with the CAO and Director of Human Resources, those individuals were not formally interviewed as part of this review

## 8. Appendix C – FDLT Terms of Reference (2021)

### Terms of Reference for the North Cowichan Fire Department Leadership Team

Developed Spring 2021

#### The WHAT

##### 1. Who is on the fire department leadership team?

The fire department leadership team (FDLT) has the following members:

- The municipality's chief administrative officer<sup>13</sup>
- The fire chief (manager fire and bylaw services)
- Assistant chief(s)
- Station chiefs
- Deputy station chiefs
- Fire and bylaw services coordinator<sup>14</sup>

##### 2. Why does the fire department leadership team exist?

The fire department leadership team exists to inspire purpose and provide unified leadership to the North Cowichan fire department.

##### 3. What is in-scope for the team and what is out of scope for the team?

The overarching role of the FDLT is to provide leadership to the entire fire department; to provide input and recommendations and, where applicable make decisions, in the best interest of the organization. It is expected the station chiefs and deputy station chiefs will advocate for the interests of the fire hall they represent; however, their first responsibility is to provide input, recommendations, and decisions that are of the greatest benefit to the North Cowichan Fire Department.

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<sup>13</sup> There will be occasion where corporate administrative decisions are mandated. These decisions are made by the CAO and informed to all affected departments. In the case of FDLT decision making, there will be occasion where agreement cannot be reached, and this will require the CAO and or the Fire Chief to provide direction.

<sup>14</sup>The fire and bylaw services coordinator serves as the team's administrative support and his/her input is valued during discussion. This position does not participate in team decision-making.

The following activities are the responsibility of the FDLT:

### **Strategic direction and service levels**

- To be aware of the content of the strategic documents that guide the municipality and by extension the fire department. Examples of these documents include the council strategic plan, the organizational strategic plan, the 2018/19 fire services review, and recent fire department business plans and budgets.
- To provide input into the department's strategic direction, service levels, business plans, priorities, operating and capital budgets, and organization structure prior to these going forward to the municipality's senior leadership team (the CAO, DCAO, and department heads) and subsequently to council.

### **Continuous Improvement**

- To identify opportunities to provide fire services in more effective and/or efficient ways.
- To prioritize such opportunities and ensure action plans are in place to implement the priorities.

### **Standardization and centralization**

- To provide input to the fire chief on how the department's goal of standardizing and/or centralizing service delivery, facilities maintenance, apparatus maintenance, fire prevention activities, and personnel programs (recruiting, training . . .) can be achieved.
- To provide options that allow for some flexibility to modestly vary from the department standard where the goal(s) of the initiative can be achieved through a modification to the standard that works more effectively/efficiently in a particular hall(s).

### **Administrative (municipal) Policies**

- To be aware of the administrative policies that apply to the FDLT. Such policies include record keeping, purchasing, media communications, IT security, conflict of interest, leave approvals . . .
- To educate the membership on the administrative policies applicable to the members' work.
- To provide input to the fire chief on the fire department's perspective on new policies under consideration and existing policies being reviewed by the senior leadership team

### **Operational Guidelines**

- To develop, review and implement new operational guidelines.
- To review, as required revise, and implement existing operational guidelines.

## Service Delivery

- To provide input to the fire chief on the department's approach to service delivery including activities such as command and control of large operational incidents; inspections and investigations; training requirements, standards and evaluation; facility, fleet and equipment planning, specking and tendering; and fleet and equipment maintenance.
- To research and review successful practices in other fire departments and industry trends in the delivery of fire services.

## Leading the PoC Members

- To establish and, as required, participate in the process to recruit new members including the onboarding of the members.
- To establish and, as required, participate in the process of investigating and potentially disciplining members.
- To work in collaboration with the municipality's human resources department to develop and implement both recruiting and discipline processes.
- To provide input to the fire chief and municipal senior leadership team on the pay and benefits applicable to the members. Council makes the final determination on pay and benefits.
- To advocate to the fire chief and the municipality for programs and initiatives that will increase the engagement and retention of the members.
- To discuss and collectively agree what to communicate and how best to communicate (who, when, through what medium) issues that will have a higher degree of sensitivity with the membership.

## External Agreements

- To understand the fire protection services agreements in place for contracted services/mutual aid; including what the activities/services the department will provide and will not provide to those we have contracted with.
- To continue to build strong working relationships with those to whom we provide contracted service.

### 4. How does the team make decisions?

The FDLT has input into decisions that are ultimately the responsibility of municipal council, the municipal senior leadership team, or the fire chief. The FDLT has decision making authority for operational decisions, subject to the (occasional) veto of the fire chief. The responsibility for different types of decisions is presented in the following table:

Type	What it looks like	Responsibility
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerned with the long-term future of the department</li> <li>Includes service levels</li> <li>Department wide impact</li> <li>Often has budget impacts</li> <li>Occurs rarely</li> </ul>	Municipal council with input from SLT and FDLT
Tactical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plans, projects, initiatives to implement the strategic direction</li> <li>Service delivery approach</li> <li>Creating and or revising processes</li> <li>Occurs regularly</li> </ul>	Fire Chief with input from FDLT
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing business of the operation</li> <li>Task focused</li> <li>Implementation of the tactical</li> <li>Occurs very regularly</li> <li>No budget impact</li> </ul>	FDLT (subject to fire chief override)

**5. What are the team’s fundamental anchors or pillars for success? What are the criteria against which decisions and opportunities should be assessed?**

Does what we are considering (or, in reviewing past actions, did we) . . .

- provide for the safety and health of fire department personnel?
- save lives?
- protect the environment?
- strike an appropriate balance between the risk or action taken and the potential outcome of that action?
- fall within the legal and regulatory parameters (bylaw, policy, procedure, OGs) within which we operate?
- demonstrate fiscal responsibility?

**6. What resources are available to the team?**

The fire department’s annual budget is approved by Council. In addition to the approved budget the department has access to the support services (HR, IT, Communications) those departments provide to all the municipality’s operating departments. The municipal senior leadership team can, on occasion, also reallocate funding between different operating departments to meet emerging needs.

**7. What are the roles and responsibilities of each member of the team? What are the logistics of the team meetings?**

Team meetings are chaired by the fire chief and recorded by the fire and bylaw services coordinator. For the remainder of 2021 the team will meet every six weeks and meetings are scheduled for a maximum of two hours. The team will review the frequency of meetings at the end of 2021 and consider moving to a quarterly meeting schedule. Representation from each hall is expected at each meeting. Generally, the station chiefs and deputy station chiefs do not send other members to replace them at meetings unless both the station chiefs cannot attend.

The FDLT has two ongoing sub committees: the training committee and the apparatus committee.

**8. What are the teams' top three work priorities for the next quarter?**

The table in appendix A lists the department's priorities for the current short-term (three- or four-month horizon) and the FDLT's role in each of these priorities:

**The HOW**

**9. What knowledge, skills, and abilities (ksa's) are required to achieve the outcomes and priorities? Is the team missing any critical ksa's?**

Upon review of:

- day to day operations
- the immediate (appendix A) and long-range (FD service review) priorities
- the role of this team in the success of the above

as of spring 2021 the team is largely comfortable it currently has the required knowledge, abilities, and skills to deliver on its responsibilities.

The team does recognize it is transitioning from a focus on operational leadership of individual halls to responsibility for administrative leadership of the entire department. The team will have an increased role in business planning and budgets, policy development and implementation, process reviews and enhancements, standardization and centralization initiatives, and consistent communication across the organization. As such, the volume and sophistication of administrative responsibility will increase and, in the short and medium term, there will be a need to increase administrative capacity and capability.

The team also recognizes it will require the support of the municipality's communications, HR , and payroll groups to deliver on the Facebook, recruitment, vaccination, and PoC pay responsibilities.

## 10. What is the personality profile of the team?

The team, in the spring of 2021, has a large majority of members whose natural tendencies are to be:

- Competitive, demanding, determined, strong-willed, purposeful, and
- Cautious, precise, deliberate, questioning, and formal

The team has a significant deficit of individuals whose natural tendencies are:

- Caring, encouraging, sharing, patient, and relaxed, and

To a lesser degree, a deficit in members whose tendencies are:

- Sociable, dynamic, demonstrative, enthusiastic, and persuasive.

The combination of the top two bullets above will allow the team to make logical and well-analyzed decisions while still acting in a focused, bold, and timely way.

The risk of this team profile is there will be a lack of attention paid to the need for greater inclusion in decision making and consideration given to the impact of the decisions on individuals. The profile is consistent with skill sets that lead to great success in responding to emergent situations and problem-solving. The team's administrative leadership responsibilities require it to think big-picture, to collaborate within the department and the municipality, and to communicate broadly and consistently. The team will need to find ways to make sure it is being inclusive in its decision making, to think about who is impacted, and to think about the broader implications of its decisions and actions, not just the immediate challenge it is facing.

## 11. What are our foundational behaviours? The competencies we would look for when promoting or recruiting?

The team most values the following competencies:

- **Collaboration.** We will work well with others within and external to the organization, and participate effectively in cross-functional initiatives to support the achievement of the department's and the municipality's objectives.
- **Judgement and decision-making.** We will assess situations and determine a course of action by applying knowledge, experience, logic and insight, including in cases where discretion is required because the situation is ambiguous, or information is limited.
- **Managing change.** We will understand and apply organizational change processes to support or lead organizational change initiatives.
- **Negotiation and conflict management.** We will resolve disputes effectively and reach agreements to support the achievement of organizational objectives.
- **Verbal communication.** We will clearly and effectively express information, ideas and opinions through the spoken word to deliver messages that are clearly understood by the intended audience.

## 12. How shall we create an engaged and inspiring team environment?

- A member's **basic needs** (materials and equipment to do our work, fair compensation, and recognition/appreciation of our contributions) must first be met before higher levels of engagement are possible. In the spring of 2021, the team does not believe the compensation and recognition/appreciation components are "in the ballpark" of reasonable.
- **Autonomy:** It is very important to team members, especially the station chiefs and deputies, that they feel their voice has been heard, their input solicited at the appropriate time, and given due consideration. Members also feel it is important the chain-of-command be respected (with some flexibility) to avoid PoC members going over the head of their station chiefs, directly to the fire chief.
- **Mastery:** administrative (as opposed to operational) leadership was a skills gap identified through this process. The team is interested in continually improving their administrative leadership capabilities. The team also believes there is value in team members attending conferences and participating in professional associations. The team, itself, can continue to grow and improve how it operates by participating in regular (annual?) off-site meetings to reflect, correct, and celebrate how the team is functioning.
- **Purpose:** team members (and department members) can maintain a "line of sight" connection to the valued service they provide to North Cowichan by formalizing processes by which the good work of the department is shared with all members of the department, members of SLT, and members of council. Department awards nights and municipal recognition lunches are also ways to reinforce to the members the impact they have on the community. Hosting open houses at the fire halls is another way to help the members relate to the greater purpose they are serving.

## 13. How shall we behave in meetings? (language, tone of voice, body language, emotional content, involvement/participation, distractions, timeliness . . .)

The FDLT's meeting guidelines are provided in appendix B.

## Appendix A: Current Priorities List

This list should be reviewed and updated every three or four months.

Priority (April 1 to Aug 31, 2021)	FDLT's Role	Timing
<b>Implement Fire Inspection Service</b>	Read the consultant's report. Presentation by the consultant to the team and input from the FDLT	Middle of June
<b>Crofton Fire Hall</b>	Design input and forward recommendations	Fall 2021
<b>SCBA replacement</b>	Input into the RFP specs, assessment of products	Spring 2021 (started last week)
<b>Transition to North Island dispatch service</b>	Providing input on what each hall responds to and what the hall "should" respond to	Process started last week switch over is June 30th
<b>New Recruitment Process</b>	Input into the new process	End of July
<b>Vaccinations Policy</b>	Input into policy and implementation of policy	Immediate
<b>NCFD Facebook Page</b>	Input into policy (policies) governing content and who can post.	Fall 2021
<b>(Revised) Fire Bylaw</b>	Input into the Bylaw before it goes to Council	End of Aug
<b>2022 Budget Input</b>	Input to fire chief and SLT as it prepares preliminary 2022 budgets	Summer
<b>Closing the administrative skills gap</b>	Input to the fire chief and CAO on ways to increase the level of administrative capacity and capability of the team.	Immediately and ongoing

## Appendix B: FDLT Meeting Interaction Guidelines

Topic:	Expectation:
Language	The language used in meetings will be “relaxed professional.” We will speak to each other respectfully, the occasional “swear word” may creep in but we will not accept language that is derogatory towards each other or individuals or organizations/agencies not on the team.
Tone of Voice	Conversations will be calm, controlled, and respectful. Raised voices and sarcasm directed at an individual are not acceptable to the team.
Body Language	Team members are expected to be engaged in the meeting and open to hearing everyone’s thoughts and opinions. Body language should reflect this openness and respect of what is said. Disrespectful responses such as eye-rolls and deep sighs are not acceptable.
Emotional Content	Passionate debate is a hallmark of effective teams and thus a degree of emotion is expected and accepted as team members share their views. Theatrics and gross exaggerations go beyond the acceptable level of emotion.
Involvement	Team members are expected to come to the meetings having completed whatever reading and preparation was expected. Members are expected to actively participate, and it is the chair’s responsibility to ensure all voices are heard and to not allow individual members to dominate the conversations.
Distractions	Members are asked to turn-off non-essential devices and place essential devices (essential for work and emergency contact) on vibrate. Members are asked to step out of the meeting to accept essential calls/pages. Sidebar conversations, including sidebar texting, is not appropriate.
Timeliness	Meetings will start at the scheduled starting time and end no later than the scheduled ending time. Members are asked to notify the chair if they are running late.

## 9. Appendix D – Bridges Transition Model

William Bridges Associates

Transition Management Leaders

<https://wmbridges.com/about/what-is-transition/>

### **Bridges Transition Model**

The *Bridges Transition Model* helps organizations and individuals understand and more effectively manage and work through the personal and human side of change. The model identifies the three stages an individual experiences during change: Ending What Currently Is, The Neutral Zone and The New Beginning. Developed by William Bridges, the ***Bridges Transition Model*** has been used by leaders and management consultants for more than thirty years.

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### **What is the difference between change and transition?**

*Change* is the external event or situation that takes place: a new business strategy, a turn of leadership, a merger or a new product. The organization focuses on the desired outcome that the change will produce, which is generally in response to external events. Change can happen very quickly.

*Transition* is the inner psychological process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings about. Empathetic leaders recognize that change can put people in crisis. The starting point for dealing with transition is not the outcome but the endings that people have in leaving the old situation behind.

Change will only be successful if leaders and organizations address the transition that people experience during change. Supporting people through transition, rather than pushing forward is essential if the change is to work as planned. This is key to capitalizing on opportunities for innovation and creating organizational resilience.

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## **What are the stages of transition?**

### **1. Endings**

Transition starts with an ending. This is paradoxical but true. This first phase of transition begins when people identify what they are losing and learn how to manage these losses. They determine what is over and being left behind, and what they will keep. These may include relationships, processes, team members or locations.

### **2. Neutral Zone**

The second step of transition comes after letting go: the neutral zone. People go through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. It is when the critical psychological realignments and repatterning take place. It is the very core of the transition process. This is the time between the old reality and sense of identity and the new one. People are creating new processes and learning what their new roles will be. They are in flux and may feel confusion and distress. The neutral zone is the seedbed for new beginnings.

### **3. New Beginnings**

Beginnings involve new understandings, values and attitudes. Beginnings are marked by a release of energy in a new direction – they are an expression of a fresh identity. Well-managed transitions allow people to establish new roles with an understanding of their purpose, the part they play, and how to contribute and participate most effectively. As a result, they feel reoriented and renewed.

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## **What is the transition management process?**

Transition management in organizations addresses the inner psychological process that people experience during change. Successful transition management involves these steps:

1. Communicating with the organization about why the change is needed.
2. Collecting information from those affected by the change to understand its impact on them. Gaining their investment in the outcome.
3. Doing an audit of the organizations' transition readiness.

4. Educating leaders about how the change will affect individuals in the organization to manage the transition effectively.
5. Monitoring the progress of individuals as they go through the three stages of transition.
6. Helping individuals understand how they can positively contribute to the change and the importance of their role in the organization.

## 10. Appendix E – The Desired Fire Department – Visioning for the Future

During facilitation of six group meetings with Department members and some individual engagements, the Consultants ended those meetings with a “blue-skying” session, wherein participants were asked to describe aspects they would desire in a future North Cowichan Fire Department. Responses were inspiring, generally not complex, and earnest. The many responses are summarized and categorized below:

### 10.1 Leadership

Members were asked what attributes Department leadership should employ. Approximately halfway through completion of the group sessions, members became aware that the Fire Chief had announced his pending resignation. The comments below include input provided prior to that awareness and afterwards. That awareness did not substantially change the attributes stated as desired in the Department’s leader. It should be noted that input on the topic of leadership applies to all Department officers.

Desired leader attributes included:

- Good two-way communicator;
- Calm and patient;
- Process focussed;
- Collaborative, consensus seeking;
- Previous experience as a paid on call firefighter; and
- Family oriented (as it relates to understanding the needs of paid on call firefighters).

Members expressed that they would want their Station Chiefs to have more autonomy and authority than is the current practice, but not so much as pre-2018. The analogy of a pendulum was used, and a modest return of the pendulum toward center desired in terms of Station Chief authority and autonomy. “*Station Chiefs as the Captains of their ships, but not the Admiral*<sup>15</sup>”.

### 10.2 Staffing Model

Participating Department members expressed strongly that they believe that the paid on call model still works for the Department (acknowledging call volumes pressures in the area of the South End fire hall), and that the paid on call model can continue to work if fostered and supported by career administrative staff. Members expressed pride in the contribution they make to their communities through their involvement in the Department, and want that contribution to be valued.

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<sup>15</sup> A statement expressed by a firefighter during one group session

There was concern expressed that the Municipality might be moving toward installing a career chief officer in each Station, and a preference stated for continuation of senior station officers being paid on call rather than career.

### 10.3 Trust

A number of comments were made about the need for trust. Many members expressed that they felt undervalued and not trusted. Members aspire to a Department in which they feel trusted and they trust their leaders. Members engaged did not appear to have considered that previous actions may have impacted the level of trust the Municipality holds for Department members.

To achieve deeper trust, members expressed their desire for the following:

- A process for clear and effective two-way communication within the Department;
- Up to date and current OGS;
- A Road Map for the future (with timelines for each step);
- Acknowledgement for accomplishments and milestones, structured with the availability of paid on call members in mind;
- Increased administrative support;
- The FDLT used effectively;
- Valuing, *but not being driven by*, department history; and
- Exercise the chain and unity of command.

### 10.4 Local Identities and Community Engagement

Considerable input was provided on the matter of local community and fire hall identities. Members expressed that in their ideal future department the fire halls and apparatus would be clearly marked, identifying the community that is primarily served. Members expressed that when they are out of the fire hall and in their communities, they wanted community members to be able to identify which fire hall they were from. For example, Maple Bay fire apparatus could be clearly marked as North Cowichan Fire Department – Maple Bay.

Members were generally indifferent as to the call signs that are attached to apparatus during emergency events, at which times it would make operational sense to use numeric or alpha-numeric calls signs.

Members expressed that in a future, desired North Cowichan Fire Department, all fire halls and personnel would belong to the same team, there would be operational consistency across those fire halls and apparatus, and each fire hall would be able to access the equipment and training needed to meet any unique needs of each community. While uniformity and inclusiveness were expressed as desirable, members expressed that they also wanted to have a sense of team attached to their home fire hall, and they would want there to be healthy and friendly rivalry between fire halls, just as there is within all thriving teams and families.

Members want to be connected to their communities, and active in events going on in those communities. Pride in community and recognition from community members is important.

Lastly, several members expressed that an ideal, future North Cowichan Fire Department would enable the safe and meaningful involvement of their family members in fire hall non-emergency activities.