

Report

Date	December 12, 2023	File:
Subject	Net New Staffing Request – Deputy Fire Chief - Training Officer/Operations	

PURPOSE

To consider funding for a Deputy Chief -Training Officer/Operations in the 2024 Operating Budget to develop and maintain the Fire Department's Paid On-Call Firefighters (POCF) training program.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, the BC Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) implemented mandatory minimum structure firefighter training standards for all fire departments in the province. Each authority having jurisdiction or local government must select a level of fire service provided to residents in their community/ jurisdiction, and the fire department personnel must meet the minimum structure firefighter training requirements for such service level adopted by Council. North Cowichan Council declared at its June 15, 2016, Council meeting that the North Cowichan Fire Department's service is at the Interior Operations level.

In September 2022, the OFC made further changes to its original 2014 "Playbook Training" with a competency matrix for fire departments' training programs. These include National Fire Protection Association standard job performance requirements, WorkSafeBC OHS Regulations, and Incident Command systems courses. The provincial training standards are now referred to as the BC Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards (the 'Training Standards').

Significant modernization of processes and procedures of how we track the training for individual firefighters has increased POCF and fire services staff workloads and is no longer sustainable.

DISCUSSION

The Tim Pley & Associates (TPA) Fire Services Review presented to Council in October 2023, which Council adopted, stated that North Cowichan consider creating a new position of Deputy Fire Chief – Training Officer/Operations as soon as possible. This new position was recommendation # 9 in the TPA review, with the Chief Administrative Officer recommending this request be brought forward for the 2024 business plan discussion for Council to consider.

Alignment with Council's Strategic Plan

This new position supports the 2019-2022 Council Strategic Plan and align with the community strategic priority of having safe, inclusive, and inspiring neighbourhoods. The Deputy Fire Chief – Training Officer/Operations will ensure that the minimum standard training of the POCFs is completed and maintained to provide qualified personnel to incidents throughout North Cowichan, keeping residents and communities as safe as possible during emergencies. As stated in the Council's Strategic Plan, Council is committed to continuously reviewing service levels to ensure they meet public expectations in protective services, including fire services.

The adopted Safer Community Plan directly impacts the Fire Department. This new position will address training needs and scheduling hours better, especially with the South End Firehall station. The firehall personnel response hours have been exacerbated due to the call volume within the Safety Corridor, taking time away from those POCFs who organize and implement required training.

Request Rationale

The provincial changes have increased the administrative responsibilities and surpassed the capacity of the Assistant Chief of Fire Inspections and the Fire Services Coordinator, who support the Fire Department Training Division. This new position will assist with the day-to-day development and maintenance of the training program and records for the POCF and newly hired recruits.

This request is also supported by the 2018 findings of Aegis Risk Management Ltd.'s Fire Services Review report with the recommendation of hiring one full-time position with the responsibilities to include a primary focus on managing a departmental training program.

The Fire Department currently has 100 POCFs within the four stations and is preparing to onboard nearly 30 applicants to the stations to fill vacancies. Each firefighter is required to achieve and maintain the Interior Operations service level, which is approximately 160 training hours, with ongoing skill maintenance in addition to specific specialties.

Resource Requirements

This net new position would require IT support and hardware, including software licensing and office space.

Role and Cost of this Position

This new position, Deputy Fire Chief - Training Officer/Operations, is a full-time exempt position in the Fire Department's Training Division. Reporting to the Fire Chief, the incumbent will undertake day-to-day operational, administrative, and supervisory responsibilities associated with the Training Division. The proposed organizational chart of the Fire Department with the net new position is included in Attachment 1.

The Deputy Fire Chief -Training Officer/Operations possesses extensive technical competence in firefighting operations and techniques, incident command system principles and functions, and current teaching and instructional methods. General responsibilities include, but are not limited to, planning, developing, coordinating, supervising, and evaluating department training programs and staff development activities. Leadership and supervisory competency for this position are significant. Extensive initiative and independence of judgment and action are required in this position. The incumbent also acts in the absence of the Fire Chief.

The cost of the Deputy Fire Chief – Training Officer/Operations is estimated to be \$125,000 annually, including benefits, with a potential start of April 2024. Therefore, the 2024 budget impact would be \$98,250.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Committee of the Whole direct staff to include the Deputy Fire Chief -Training Officer/Operations position in the 2024 Operating Budget.
2. (Alternative Option) THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to bring forward the request for a Deputy Fire Chief – Training Officer/Operations to a future budget process.

IMPLICATIONS

Approval of this position would significantly address the workload currently attached to the exempt Fire Services staff, Fire Services Coordinator, Paid On-Call Chiefs, Officers, and Training Captains. It would also maintain the current mandated training requirements set by the OFC to establish year-round training programs for existing POCF, assist with recruiting firefighters, and track and record training certification, meeting the provincial mandate.

If the position is not approved, it would create a significant backlog and potentially not meet provincial training requirements, which is work currently being looked after by the POCFs, the Fire Services Coordinator, and the Assistant Chief of Inspections. There would be a lack of oversight for POCFs, and WorkSafeBC standards may not be met with the increased growth of the Fire Department to approximately 135 POCFs in 2024. Municipal fire services staff (exempt and unionized) and POCFs' stress and overall health are of significant concern moving forward to maintain the status of programs and processes.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee of the Whole direct staff to include a Deputy Fire Chief - Training Officer /Operations in the Fire Services 2024 Operating Budget.

Report prepared by:



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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer

Fire Department Organizational Chart

