

Committee of the Whole (2) Report

DATE: Tuesday, April 21, 2020

WARD(S): ALL

**TITLE: STUDY OF POTENTIAL REGIONALIZATION OF YORK REGION
FIRE SERVICE**

FROM:

Mary Reali, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek Council's consideration to support a study for the potential creation of a Regional Fire Service as requested by the Regional Municipality of York.

Report Highlights

- Regionalization of fire services in the Regional Municipality of York (York Region) has been considered and studied several times since 1996.
- Vaughan Council is being requested to determine whether the study of a regional fire service is warranted.

Recommendations

1. That Council consider supporting a study to determine the potential amalgamation of all eight York Region Fire Services within the nine York Region municipalities; and
2. That Council's decision be forwarded by the City Clerk to The Regional Municipality of York.

Background

At its meeting of February 27, 2020, York Region Council adopted the following motion:

WHEREAS the consolidation of Aurora and Newmarket fire services into Central York Fire Service has resulted in efficiencies through enhanced levels of fire service and cost efficiencies;

WHEREAS a Regional Fire Service may achieve further operating efficiencies, improved department structure, increased service level(s), and cost avoidance opportunities;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Regional Clerk share this motion with local municipal Councils requesting a resolution by May 29, 2020 indicating whether they support proceeding with a study on the potential creation of a Regional Fire Service.

In an effort to consider the most efficient and effective ways of delivering vital services to City of Vaughan residents, a recommendation from Regional Council has been proposed to study the regionalization of eight fire services in York Region within the nine York Region municipalities.

In 1996 and again in 2002, regionalization in York Region was considered at a number of levels; including *(1) a regional model which envisaged local fire departments consolidated into one regional fire service, (2) a regional fully integrated model which included the ambulance service with the regional fire service model, (3) a regional/local model which included communications (dispatch), training, fire prevention and maintenance combined at a regional level, with fire suppression and emergency response remaining at a local level incorporating automatic aid* (City of Vaughan 1996).

The proposed study will review financial implications (including collection of development charges and cost avoidances), the governance model, labour implications, standardization of fire prevention, public education and training, standards of cover, key findings and other service delivery impacts.

York Region fire services have long standing **mutual aid agreements** (with no additional cost) in place when there is a surge in required suppression response.

Consultant Reports - Key Points

The summary below outlines the key points from various reports, including consultant's reports since 1997.

1997 ARA Consultants Group/Tri Data Corporation (ARA):

- The recommended structure for the consolidation of fire services in York Region was the Urban-Rural option which consolidated the urban fire departments of

Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Aurora, and Newmarket into one fire department and leaves the rural fire services in their current configuration.

- Operational and financial advantages were identified that would result from the consolidation of fire services.
- Human resources implications could have a negative impact on the use of volunteers in the rural areas.

Two options for a governance model:

- a) Use of a joint fire service board was recommended in the ARA study as the governance model for the consolidated urban fire department;
- b) Delegate the responsibility for the consolidated fire department to the Region and the Region would assume full authority and accountability for the delivery of the services.

At the April 10, 1997 meeting Regional Council endorsed the recommendations of the ARA study and referred the report to the area municipalities for consideration and development of implementation plans.

2001 Report No. 1 of the Regional Fire Services Committee:

- A recommendation to provide the Regional Municipality of York with the authority and accountability of the consolidated fire services which would serve all the residents of York Region.
- ARA projected that the Fully Consolidated option would start to accrue savings after the first year, mainly due to lower staff requirements in the areas of fire suppression, communications and administration.
- The recommendations identified in the 1997 ARA study to consolidate fire services are still valid.

2002 Consolidations of Newmarket and Aurora Fire Services:

- Central York Fire Services (CYFS) was formed by the consolidation of Newmarket and Aurora Fire Departments.
- Richmond Hill withdrew from discussions due to anticipated decrease in service levels.
- Additional concerns by Richmond Hill included potential increase in compensation and benefits, and the collection and use of development charges should they consolidate with other municipalities.

2013 Vaughan Council Meeting of April 23, 2013 (CW, Report 14, Item 35):

- That the City of Vaughan study and conduct a pilot project for a two-year period to implement automatic aid, being reciprocal fire, rescue, and emergency response support, with the City of Markham and the Town of Richmond Hill in response to emergencies.

2016 Dillon Consulting – Study for Richmond Hill Fire consolidating with CYFS:

- Limited opportunity to reduce already constrained staff resources.
- Opportunity for one Fire Chief (cost savings).
- Opportunity to increase non-unionized positions.
- Limited short-term opportunity to save money through staggered hiring of fire prevention staffing.
- Some opportunity for cost savings, enhanced flexibility for scheduling training and more training opportunities in the Training Division.
- No operational improvement for initial response capabilities in any of the municipalities.
- Limited depth of response improvement along the Richmond Hill/Aurora municipal border.
- Potential loss in revenue as CYFS contracts RHFS to provide their dispatch in the Communications Division.
- Additional costs required to standardize equipment.

May 2019 Finance, Administration and Audit Committee (FAA) - Provincial Regional Government Review Maintaining the City of Vaughan's Existing Governance Framework:

- Scenario 1: Amalgamation, the creation of One Single-Tier municipality for all of York Region (p.20). The analysis would suggest the potential to achieve significant cost savings over the medium to long-term for Fire Services.

There are opportunities to explore changes to the delivery of fire services. Aurora and Newmarket currently have a joint-fire service. Vaughan has had initial discussions with Markham and Richmond Hill on opportunities to leverage joint purchasing, joint training and an option of combining a communication centre.

Previous Reports/Authority

1997 ARA Consultants Group/Tri Data Corporation

[Report No. 1 of the Regional 9-1-1 Operating Committee Meeting held on March 7, 2001](#)

[Report No. 2 of the Regional 9-1-1 Operating Committee Meeting held on May 31, 2001](#)

[Deputation of the Region of York for the Establishment of a Steering Committee \(2011\)](#)

[Ottawa Community and Protective Services Committee, June 23, 2011.](#)

[Vaughan Council Meeting Minutes of April 23, 2013](#)

[Markham Fire Services Automatic Aid Pilot Project with the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill May 27, 2013](#)

[Richmond Hill Staff Report for Fire Consolidation Study Council Advisory Committee Meeting October 25, 2016](#)

[Richmond Hill Staff Report for Fire Consolidation Study Council Advisory Committee April 18, 2018](#)

[Regional Governance Review – City of Vaughan and York Region Fiscal Impact Analysis](#)

[Review of Regional Government – Scenario Impact Analysis](#)

Analysis and Options

Historically there have been several studies conducted in York Region, and Vaughan Council will determine whether further investigations will yield different results, whereby the potential improvements to service levels outweighs the financial costs. The Fire Services in York Region have a track record for collaboration to ensure efficiencies are realized by the separate entities, and a decision is required to be made on whether a study is required to determine if additional benefits could be realized by the regionalization of the fire services within York Region.

- a) City of Vaughan Council will determine if there is support to study the benefits of a consolidated fire service in York Region.
- b) Vaughan Council's resolution will be forwarded by the Clerk to the Regional Council.

Financial Impact

The Region has not advised of any potential financial implications for the City of Vaughan related to the proposed study of the regional consolidation of fire services.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

There are a number of implications to any establishment of regional service. If there is a support for regionalization of fire services, items that must be considered are: the type of taxation and its equality, political accountability, service levels, feasibility, resource utilization and distribution, standardization, economies of scale, labour relations, and standards of cover.

Conclusion

Although a Regional Fire Service has not been understudied, it has been some time since a regional study has been performed. From a City of Vaughan perspective, the growth and addition of infrastructure like the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) and Mackenzie Vaughan Hospital have created future challenges that this and future Councils will continue to face. If a study was to be performed, a portion of the scope should be ensuring current investments (personnel and equipment) will remain with those municipalities who have shown leadership in providing investment and planning for a particular level resourcing and service level.

Attachments

None

Prepared by

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