

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, September 14, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

TITLE: INCREASE IN THE VFRS FTE COMPLEMENT OUTSIDE OF
NORMAL BUDGET CYCLE

FROM:

Nick Spensieri, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek approval for an immediate increase in the complement of fulltime firefighters and to provide an overview and context for the request of the addition of the 8 (eight) Full Time Equivalents (FTE).

Report Highlights

- Historical/legacy gaps related to collective bargaining have led to an understaffed operational posture.
- Request and background context for the immediate addition of 8 (eight) fulltime firefighters.
- Coupled with attrition hires and operational changes to vacation scheduling, we should be better positioned by the end of 2022.
- An estimated financial impact of \$979,416.

Recommendation

1. That the request for an immediate addition of 8 (eight) fulltime firefighters and the appropriate budget increase to the Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS), be approved.

Background

Over the past two decades there have been many changes that impact firefighter staffing levels and how many firefighters it takes to staff one fire apparatus 24 hours a day/7-days a week. These changes have been a result of collectively negotiated leave

provisions, provincial decisions related to workplace injuries and operational pressures. These changes include the following:

- Sick time leave provisions
 - Over the past two decades improvements to firefighter sick leave provisions (including the introduction of critical leave) have improved which results in increased time away from work, which impacts daily staffing levels. Improvements in sick leave entitlement was never reflected in changes to historic staffing calculations.
- Vacation entitlement
 - Firefighters receive vacation entitlements as outlined in the collective agreement of up to 7 weeks annually. This vacation entitlement has increased over the past two decades but was never reflected in changes to historic staffing calculations.
- Statutory holidays
 - Firefighters receive lieu time (in lieu of statutory holidays) as outlined in the collective agreement of 13 days (day=12 hours) annually. This entitlement has increased over the past two decades but was never reflected in changes to historic staffing calculations.
- Bereavement leave
 - Firefighters receive bereavement leave as outlined in the collective agreement. This entitlement has increased over the past two decades but was never reflected in changes to historic staffing calculations.
- Workplace injuries & presumptive legislation
 - In the time since the historic 20 firefighters equals one fire apparatus staffing calculation was implemented there have been several significant changes related to the management of workplace injuries and illnesses.
 - Not only are firefighters entitled to the same WSIB provisions as all other workers, in addition they have been granted presumptive legislation in three areas (occupational cancers, heart injury and post-traumatic stress disorder). Presumptive legislation entitlements assume that the firefighter has suffered a workplace injury/illness as long as all conditions (different for each case) are met. This has dramatically increased the prevalence of firefighter leaves related to WSIB claims.
- Pregnancy & parental leaves
 - The provisions related to pregnancy and parental leave have grown exponentially over the past two decades. This includes both bargained

changes at the local level, as well as provincial and federal changes that impact pregnancy and parental leaves.

- These leaves, as they currently apply, were not considered in historic staffing calculations.
- Modified work
 - There is an obligation of the employer to provide modified work for non-occupational injury and illness. This has a daily impact on staffing as these firefighters are in the workplace, but not assigned to fire apparatus.
 - These leaves, as they currently apply, were not considered in historic staffing calculations.
- Operational pressures
 - The operating pressures of fire departments have changed dramatically over the years, especially for departments like the Vaughan Fire & Rescue Service that grew so much, so fast.
 - When the 20 firefighters per fire apparatus staffing calculation was first surmised most fire department training was done in the form of “drills” at the station when in service. The historic training was not as technical, did not involve third party certifications, rarely involved examinations, and did not require a fire apparatus to travel to a central training facility or require firefighters to “come off the trucks” to take specific courses.
 - As firefighter training evolved, modernized and improved the staffing calculations were never adjusted to reflect the modern needs.

The analysis of fire apparatus staffing calculations concludes the following:

- The historic calculation of 20 firefighters equaling one fire apparatus is no longer accurate and was never adjusted to meet modern staffing demands.
- The modern staffing calculation requires hiring a minimum of 22 firefighters to staff one fire apparatus 24 hours a day/7-days a week. Even using 22 firefighters to equal one fire apparatus will result in overtime and operational inefficiency at times.

Additional Actions Being Taken

In 2022, we will be utilizing a new selection method for vacation that should allow an additional 8 staff on duty across four platoons. This, coupled with the 8 new hires, would give us added flexibility with an extra 16 firefighters in the workplace and hopefully offset the overtime cost and the staffing shortage we are currently facing.

Previous Reports/Authority

N/A

Analysis and Options

- A fire apparatus staffed with only 20 firefighters will not, on average, be able to operate around the clock without incurring overtime. The result is that the historic fire apparatus staffing calculation is drastically understaffing our fire apparatus resulting in increased overtime costs, apparatus being out of service and reducing operational effectiveness.
- Callback overtime is barely allowing us to keep the absolute minimum of apparatus in service (13), and at times with below the normal number of staff, with technical assets/resources being down staffed just over 50% of the time.
- This request would permit the addition of 2-3 firefighters per platoon by December 2021.
- In the 10-day period from Monday, August 1, to August 9, the VFRS spent \$147,000 on callback overtime.

Financial Impact

Each additional firefighter is expected to cost approximately \$122,427 annually, including \$116,257 in labour costs (including OT and benefits) and \$5,900 in related non-labour costs for bunker gear, training, etc. The total estimated financial impact of hiring 8 firefighters is \$979,416.

The prorated 2021 financial impact of hiring these additional firefighters, assuming a hire date of November 1, is expected to be \$159,686. If required, any budget overage in 2021 may be offset by a transfer from Corporate Contingency.

Although some overtime cost is expected to be avoided with these additional firefighters, the exact amount is difficult to estimate due to the fluctuating operating pressures (e.g., leaves taken) described further above.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

N/A

Conclusion

For the reasons noted above, it is recommended that this report be actioned as recommended and the VFRS be permitted to immediately add a complement of 8 fulltime firefighters.

For more information, contact: Andrew Zvanitajs, Fire Chief, ext. 6301.

Prepared by

Andrew Zvanitajs, Fire Chief, ext. 6301

In consultation with

Michael Coroneos, Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services, City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer.

Christine Gianino, Chief Human Resources Officer.

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Spensieri', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nick Spensieri, City Manager