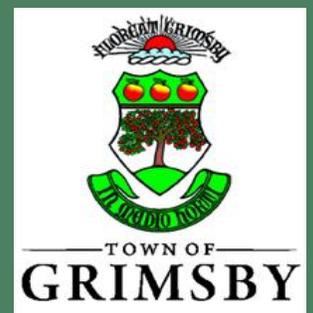


Shared Fire Services Report Summary

FOR THE TOWN OF GRIMSBY

MARCH 2021

Town of Grimsby



Shared Fire Services Summary Report

Context

In 2020, the Town of Grimsby (the Town) applied for and received funding through the Provincial Modernization Grant to explore the feasibility of sharing the delivery of fire services with other municipalities. Events that prompted the Town to apply for the grant included:

- A vacancy in the Town's Fire Chief's position, which resulted in a review of the current fire service management model in order to identify how administrative efficiency could be increased through shared services;
- Changes in current mental models to ensure a strategic approach in maintaining and sustaining a volunteer firefighter model is applied in Grimsby and Lincoln; and
- The recent Regional Government review initiated by the Province of Ontario, which underlined the necessity of a municipality reviewing its service delivery models with an eye to sharing existing services with other municipalities and/or at the Regional Level to realize cost efficiencies and reduce the duplication of services.

Currently, the Town of Grimsby shares an Emergency Management Coordinator with the Town of Lincoln (Lincoln), making Lincoln a logical partner for a shared fire service initiative.

By utilizing the funding obtained through the province's Municipal Modernization Grant, Emergency Services Strategy and Solutions Inc. (ESSSi) was contracted to determine the viability of a shared fire service between the Town and Lincoln. A working group comprised of Chief Administrative Officer's, Fire Chiefs, Deputy Fire Chiefs and Finance teams from both municipalities was established to determine if the adoption of a shared fire service would result in a more efficient, effective and affordable model that would ultimately preserve the volunteer firefighter model.

On Monday November 16, 2020, the municipal Councils of both the Town and Lincoln received a report regarding the sharing of fire services and possible outcomes. Both Councils unanimously endorsed the findings of the report and supported that each municipality proceed with the next step in developing a full shared service model. Both municipalities are targeting that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be completed by April 1, 2021.

Findings

Department Management Structure

The working group met numerous times to determine the most effective shared service delivery model that would result in cost avoidance for both towns. Four (4) options for a fire department management structure were identified, each with a varied level of shared services and implementation timelines ranging from one (1) year to four (4) years. Options included:

Option One	• Status Quo: a single Fire Chief for each fire department
Option Two	• A shared Fire Chief for both fire departments
Option Three	• An Area Fire Services Board
Option Four	• A Shared Fire Services Model combining both fire departments with following options: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Share the Fire Chiefb. Share the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chiefs and administrative staffc. Share the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chiefs, administrative staff and Fire Preventiond. Share the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chiefs, administrative staff, Fire Prevention and Traininge. Share the Fire Chief, Deputy Fire Chiefs, administrative staff, Fire Prevention, Training and Fire Suppression

A joint decision was reached, identifying **Option Four E (4e)** as the most efficient and cost effective option available to both municipalities. A three (3) year, two (2) stage implementation timeline was identified for the full shared fire service option between the Town and Lincoln. Administration, including Fire Prevention and Training, will enter into pilot shared service delivery during year one (1), while a suppression of firefighters is targeted for completion at the end of year three (3).

Financial Implications

All options proposed took into consideration the financial impacts for each municipality. The following financial pressures were identified, as well as mitigation options should a full shared fire service be adopted:

- The Town is planning to replace an aerial apparatus in 2021 at a cost of \$1.8 million.
 - Lincoln has an existing aerial apparatus that could serve both municipalities.
- Each municipality identified the need for future fire stations, with the average cost of a new station ranging from \$3.5 million to \$5.0 million.

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- Through a shared service agreement, a strategic location could be selected thus eliminating capital costs and resulting in improved response times.
 - Firefighters across Ontario are rapidly transitioning from a volunteer role to full-time career positions; this would increase operating costs for the Town from \$850,000 to a minimum of \$3 million annually.
 - A shared fire service model would result in a larger firefighter pool, thus preserving the volunteer firefighter model.
 - Both the Town and Lincoln are experiencing rapid population growth resulting in a greater pressures on emergency services.
 - A shared fire service model would allow for increased resource access for both municipalities.

Recommendation

ESSSi recommends that the Town and Lincoln enter into a shared fire service agreement with a two (2) phase, three (3) year implementation timeline. This will ensure a Master Fire Plan that identifies possible apparatus, equipment and fire station rationalization opportunities as well as any additional operational efficiencies in the suppression division can be created. Phase one (1) will allow for a twenty-four (24) month pilot program for fire administration, Fire Prevention and Training in order to examine and streamline existing operations. Phase one (1) will also include exit clauses at the twelve (12) and twenty-four (24) month mark. If deemed successful, full fire suppression is targeted to occur in phase (2), thus adopting a shared fire service model.

Financial Impact

The endorsement of a shared fire service model represents substantial cost improvements over the next five (5) years for both municipalities. The finance departments of both municipalities have examined the operating costs of both municipal fire departments and have created a financial model and a cost sharing formula for the shared service. The cost sharing ratio was established by using each municipalities total assessment, total population and total emergency responses.

A major benefit to sharing fire services is the lessening of demand on the volunteer firefighters. The volunteer firefighter model currently used is a very cost-effective method of providing suppression services, but increasing call volume, time to train and other duties are threatening this model. By having a larger firefighter pool, the shared service model will help prolong the use of the volunteer firefighter model.

Conclusion

Each municipality operates similar fire services and, given their long history of working together, adopting a full shared fire services model is a reasonable option. Both municipalities are identified as fast-growing areas with the Niagara Region, thus increasing the demand for municipal services. The fire services in both municipalities are currently challenged to provide increased services and maintain a cost-effective volunteer fire service. The adoption of a shared fire service allows both municipalities to maximize their resources without having to pay 100% of the cost, ultimately resulting in increased cost avoidance and service efficiencies for both municipalities, while simultaneously preserving the volunteer firefighter model.