



Department of Community
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The Town of Niagara-On-The-Lake

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Report: CDS-16-044

Committee Date: September 12, 2016

Due in Council: September 19, 2016

Report To: Community & Development Advisory Committee
**Subject: Niagara Regional Police infrastructure for communication hardware
for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended

- 1.1 that integration of our radio equipment with the Niagara Regional Police Services radio system through our partnership with the City of St. Catharines Fire Department be endorsed by Council; and
- 1.2 that \$345,000 be forwarded to the 2017 budget deliberations as a Capital project.

2. PURPOSE / PROPOSAL

The purpose of this report is to follow up on a motion approved by Council from the June 6, 2016 meeting as follows:

Moved by Councillor Paolo Miele, seconded by Councillor Betty Disero that Council requests staff to prepare a report, outlining possible costs for the use of Niagara Regional Police infrastructure for communication hardware for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services, for the September 12, 2016 Committee of the Whole meeting.

Further, staff wishes to advise Council of the recent sharing agreements that have been endorsed by St. Catharines and Niagara Falls Council in conjunction with the Niagara Regional Police Service for the integration of a Public Safety Grade communication system.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire and Emergency Services operates using a two-way radio system to communicate during emergency and non-emergency operations. It is the backbone of information transfer on emergency scenes and the Fire Department cannot

operate without this critical tool. The Fire Department currently operates using a VHF radio frequency system; this system, while robust, does have its limitations with regards to building penetration and radio coverage in the Niagara-on-the-Lake area. This, combined with the need to utilize a repeater at the Virgil water tower, leaves us vulnerable should an incident occur that would damage the system on the water tower.

The mobile radios and portable radios are various vintages, some being greater than 20 years old, and parts or repairs for these units are non-existent. While this was good equipment in its time, it is the opinion of the Fire Chief that we need to move to a supported public service grade radio system that is both robust and gives us redundancy should a component of the system fail.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire and Emergency Services purchases its dispatch and CAD services from the St. Catharines Fire Department. It should be noted that we are considered a partner in this system and have input and flexibility in how we are served. It should also be noted that the Niagara Regional Police Service has recently implemented a complete change-over of their emergency radio system to allow for a public safety grade; a completely serviced and dependable radio system that is in the 700 Mhz public safety range. The Niagara Regional Police Service has built capacity into the new system to allow for additional partners to be added to the system. This availability has led the Niagara Falls Fire Department and the St. Catharines Fire Department to enter into discussions with Niagara Regional Police for a cost-sharing formula to enhance the radio systems that we currently use. It should also be noted that both St. Catharines and Niagara Falls require this change-over and enhancement to allow for the dispatch system to continue to function, as the equipment that is currently being utilized is end of life in 2018 and, in fact, some of it is unsupported at this time due to age.

4. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire and Emergency Services requires public safety grade radio communications that are reliable and provide the highest level of safety. The radio communications equipment that we currently use has been purchased over many years and is, for the most part, unsupported when it comes to repairs or service. The VHF system that we use daily has issues with reception in areas of the town and also limited penetration into buildings where our staff operate. The dependance on the Virgil repeater to communicate with St. Catharines Fire is vulnerable should an incident or a failure of this equipment occur.

The Niagara Regional Police Service are currently implementing a new Project 25 compliant digital trunked radio system that will have coverage throughout the Niagara Region. The infrastructure has been designed to have capacity to accommodate additional partners, in particular, other emergency service providers in Niagara. The system is built to increase penetration in buildings, have 97% coverage across the region and also to have built-in redundancy should a portion of the system fail. It also presents the opportunity for inter-operability across the Region should a disaster or

multi-agency response be required. This is an attractive enhancement to our present system and an opportunity for cost sharing that should not be missed.

5. OPTIONS

1. That integration of our radio equipment with the Niagara Regional Police Services radio system through our partnership with the City of St. Catharines Fire Department be endorsed by Council; and that \$345,000 be forwarded to the 2017 budget deliberations as a Capital project (as recommended)
2. Lease or rent equipment - the Niagara Regional Police being the owner and maintenance provider at a cost of approximately \$107,000 per year as noted in the Perlstein report attached
3. Continue the status quo to operate on the present frequency, utilizing and replacing current equipment on an 'as need' basis. Install a second repeater in St. Davids to be activated should the Virgil tower be compromised. Install truck repeaters to boost portable reception in isolated areas of the Town.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Should Council recognize this \$345,000 Capital Project as a 2017 priority, other projects might be moved to a future year or the capital levy will need to increase.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

N/A.

8. CONCLUSION

By approving this recommendation, Council will ensure that a high quality mission critical system and inter-operable communications are a high priority in the continuity of the delivery of emergency services in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

This will also show Council's commitment to providing improved efficiencies between emergency service agencies, including St Catharines Fire Department, the Niagara Regional Police Service and the other regional Fire Services that contract with St. Catharines for the delivery of dispatching services. This will improve the personal safety of the first responders and consequently the safety of the public we protect.

Respectfully submitted,



R.A. (Alex) Burbidge
Fire Chief / CEMC



Milena Avramovic
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS



Perlstein report regarding SC Radio System.pdf

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