
HALDIMAND COUNTY



Memorandum EMS-M02-2021 Fire Dispatch Update

For Consideration by Council in Committee on November 16, 2021

To: Mayor Hewitt and Members of Council
From: Jason Gallagher, Manager, Emergency Services/Fire Chief

Since approximately 2003, St. Catharines Fire Department has dispatched the Haldimand County Fire Department. Over the years, Haldimand County Fire has been pleased with the service they receive from St. Catharines Fire Department and had hoped to continue as a customer as rates were comparative with other dispatch services, and planned on renewing the contract at the end of December 2022.

In June of 2021, St. Catharines Fire Department, hosted by their Fire Chief, held a meeting with all stakeholders who were dispatched by St. Catharines Fire Department stating that due to the possibility of an amalgamation with all dispatch services within Niagara Region, including Fire, Police and Ambulance, they would no longer be renewing contracts with Haldimand County and Norfolk County after they had expired in 2022 and 2024 respectively.

It was also communicated to all their dispatch clients that if the amalgamation did not occur, St. Catharines still would not be renewing contracts, including (Haldimand, Norfolk, Wainfleet, West Lincoln, Lincoln, Grimsby, Welland, and Thorold). This would mean that all clients would have to begin looking for other dispatch providers. During this meeting, a letter of intent was requested by all participants, but it was stated that such a letter could not be provided until a later date, once the service review decision had been made. The purpose of this memorandum is to advise Council of the likelihood of impending change to current fire dispatch services which will require the County to properly budget for a new provider, hardware, and possible costs associated with the New Generation 911 (NG911) noted below.

Since that meeting, Haldimand County Fire Department staff have been actively contacting other providers for quotes for dispatch services. Approximate cost for new providers range from \$150,000 to \$225,000. This is due to our call volume, current infrastructure, and NG911 costs. NG911 refers to an initiative aimed at updating the 9-1-1 service infrastructure in the United States and Canada to improve public emergency communications services in a growingly wireless mobile society. In addition to calling 9-1-1 from a phone, it intends to enable the public to transmit text messaging, images, video and data to the 9-1-1 center (referred to as a Public Safety Answering Point, or PSAP). The initiative also envisions additional types of emergency communications and data transfer. This NG911 infrastructure is intended to replace the current services over time, and has been legislated by the province of Ontario for dispatch providers beginning in 2022. These additions will carry a cost, however exact costs are unknown at this time. Also during this time, Haldimand County Fire staff took the initiative to have their third party contractor for maintenance of capital infrastructure which includes dispatch equipment, batteries, and towers, to provide a replacement schedule (Attachment 1) for the next 10 years due to age of equipment and upgrades required for new dispatch providers. This infrastructure will be built into the Capital Budget.

While we were informally advised earlier this year, formal notice will not be given until December of this year due to the need to complete a service review in Niagara. In the meantime, County Staff need to prepare budgets and in doing so staff intend to bring forward a new initiative in the budget process to

ensure continuity of dispatch services. Haldimand County Fire Department staff are preparing for both scenarios – remaining with St. Catharines Fire, as well as the move to a new dispatch provider. On the latter, work is being completed that would ensure any new required dispatcher would meet the needs of the department, residents and visitors, and will do so at a cost that will be satisfactory to taxpayers.