
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report EMS-04-2023 Fire Dispatch Agreement

For Consideration by Council in Committee on November 21, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

To receive council approval to enter into a Fire Dispatch Agreement with St. Catharines Fire Department for a fourteen (14) year period ending December 31, 2037.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EMS-04-2023 Fire Dispatch Agreement be received;
2. AND THAT staff be authorized to enter into an agreement with The Corporation of the City of St. Catharines for Fire Dispatch Services for a term of fourteen (14) years ending December 31, 2037, in the annual amount of \$120,243 for 2024, with annual increases calculated in accordance with Schedule A of the Fire Dispatch Agreement as outlined in Attachment 1 to Report EMS-04-2023;
3. AND THAT the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute all necessary documents.

Prepared by: Jason Gallagher, Manager of Emergency Services/Fire Chief

Respectfully submitted: Mike Evers, MCIP, RPP, BES, General Manager of Community & Development Services

Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Fire Dispatch Services (Services) play a critical role in ensuring that the Haldimand County Fire Department can respond to emergency situations through a coordinated effort, providing a rapid response and to ensure the safety of the first responders. These Services involve notifying first responders of the incident's severity, potential hazards, and identifying any special equipment or precautions needed.

The City of St. Catharines (City) has been providing Fire Dispatch Services (Services) for the Haldimand County Fire Department since 2003 under a Service Agreement that expires at the end of 2023. Staff are seeking approval to continue these Services provided by the City through the execution of a new 14-year agreement with the City, as permitted by the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Additionally, this will ensure the continuity of this critical service as the County's equipment is already compatible with the City's infrastructure ensuring no interruption of the Service. Additionally, the City has been actively implementing improved technology to ensure that the Services provided comply with the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) requirements as outlined by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

The County has received an acceptable level of service provided by the City under the current Service Agreement. Staff have been working with the City to update the Agreement to further clarify responsibilities, payment terms and the pricing index formula.

BACKGROUND:

The City of St. Catharines (City) has been providing Fire Dispatch Services for the Haldimand County Fire Department through their Fire Department since 2003 under a Service Agreement, which is set to expire December 31, 2023. The City has presented a new draft Service Agreement (Attachment 1) for the term of January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2037 (14 years), at a 2024 rate of \$120,243, with annual increases between 2.5% and 4% as itemized on Schedule A included in Attachment 1. These increases are aimed at addressing annual inflation and operating costs, as further explained in the Financial/Legal Obligations section of this report.

The *Municipal Act, 2001*, S.O. 2001, specifically Section 20, Chapter 25 permits a municipality to enter into an agreement with another municipality for their mutual benefit, allowing the County to enter into this agreement with the City. To ensure that the County is receiving good value, Emergency Services staff conducted an informal review of the marketplace, considering vendors who also supply Fire Dispatching Services. After reviewing the services offered by other vendors and their pricing structures, staff identified that there would be a capital budget impact to change the County's infrastructure to ensure compatibility with a new provider. Taking into account the consistent and satisfactory services provided by the City, that there will minimal to no capital budget impact and that the City is actively implementing improved technology for compliance with the Next Generation 9-1-1 requirements as outlined by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), staff recommends continuing with the Services provided by the City and are seeking approval to enter into a new Service Agreement with the City.

ANALYSIS:

At the request of staff, the City of St. Catharines has recently undergone a complete review of the Agreement including the costing structure and has presented a draft Agreement for Fire Dispatch Services (Attachment 1). The draft Fire Dispatch Services Agreement (Agreement) does not change any of the services that are being paid for, but clarifies responsibilities, payment terms, and the costing formula.

Fire Dispatch Services (Services) offered by St. Catharine's Fire Dispatch (City) include but are not limited to, dispatching and communication of fire services for Haldimand County, text to phone communications (so firefighters are notified through multiple means), notification through partnership with Iam Responding, (notification APP for mapping and call info), Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) upgrades, data, which includes reports, call grid updates, run assignment updates and quality assurance reporting. Additionally, a meeting is held twice a year to ensure that there are no issues or concerns with the performance expectations as outlined in the Agreement.

The Agreement (Attachment 1) is for a 14-year term with annual increases based upon the Bank of Canada, Consumer Price Index for the month of December along with stipulated formula as described in the Financial/Legal Obligations section of this report. If the City is successful in negotiating with additional users, there is opportunity for the pricing to be renegotiated to reduce the annual fee as the cost of the service will be shared with more users.

Due to the significant capital investment made by the City, the Agreement cannot be terminated for 10 years unless there is a breach of contractual obligations by either party. The agreement contains adequate provisions related to a breach, to ensure continued Services and allow staff to quickly source and engage another provider.

The City has been providing good service for approximately 20 years, which the firefighters have come accustomed to and rely on in stressful situations. They have completed improvements in staffing and upgrades to their CAD system that is compatible with the new NG9-1-1 DISPATCH system. The NG9-1-1 system is a newer IP-based system that can integrate a wider range of data sources and communication technologies to improve emergency response, for example, faster response times to

911 calls, text and video. This technology must be implemented by each communication center by 2025. St. Catharines have been preparing for this new technology for the past few years which allows them to spread costs out over the course of the Agreements compared to other dispatch centres that offer the same service but have not yet completed necessary upgrades and as a result will transfer those costs to their customers all at once.

Haldimand County dispatch infrastructure and hardware is compatible with St. Catharines equipment. Replacement schedules for the County's capital equipment has been forecasted using the technology and services St. Catharines Fire Dispatch currently provides and is expected to implement in the future. Fire Staff brought a list of capital expenditures to the budget in 2019 which identified a replacement cycle for County Dispatch infrastructure. If Haldimand County Fire Department were to change Fire Dispatch Centres there would be a cost to ensure equipment is compatible and functioning as required to provide this emergency service to Haldimand County Fire Department. Costs would also be incurred to set up the infrastructure to work with the new dispatch centres technology. These costs would be over and above the NG9-1-1 upgrades costs noted in the paragraph above and the annual contract cost which for other providers would be in-line with what is proposed by St. Catharines. Some costs associated with changing dispatch providers would include upgraded hardware and relocation of current equipment on communication towers. This would cause a delay in 911 responses as communications would be interrupted during the transition.

Staff is recommending entering in the agreement with the City for Fire Dispatch Services.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

The 2023 Tax Supported Operating Budget for fire dispatch services for 2023 is \$115,620, which is shown in the table below as Year 1. The contract amounts for the period from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2037 are outlined below as Year 2 to Year 15.

A summary of the costs has been included below:

Year #	Year	Contract YOY Increase	Contract Amount
1	2023	3%	115,619
2	2024	4%	120,243
3	2025	4%	125,053
4	2026	3.5%	129,430
5	2027	3.5%	133,960
6	2028	3%	137,979
7	2029	3%	142,118
8	2030	2.5%	145,671
9	2031	2.5%	149,313
10	2032	2.5%	153,046
11	2033	2.5%	156,872
12	2034	2.5%	160,794
13	2035	2.5%	164,813
14	2036	2.5%	168,934
15	2037	2.5%	173,157
Total Year Contract 2023-2037			\$2,177,000

The 2024 to 2037 Tax Supported Operating Budgets will include the costs as identified for 2024 – 2037 in Schedule “A” within the Agreement.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: Yes

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Fire Dispatch Services Agreement between Haldimand County and St. Catharines.