
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Report EMS-05-2023 Fire Master Plan

For Consideration by Council in Committee on November 21, 2023



OBJECTIVE:

The Fire Master Plan outlines the direction and strategies for the fire department for the next 10 plus years. The Fire Master Plan has been developed through an extensive process of analyzing the current situation, evaluating the current and future needs of communities, as well as examining future trends in the fire service.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. THAT Report EMS-05-2023 Fire Master Plan be received;
2. AND THAT the Fire Master Plan, included as Attachment 1 to Report EMS-05-2023, be received and serve as a guideline for future service delivery modifications and studies, and to inform future capital and operating budget proposals.

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Approved: Cathy Case, Chief Administrative Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Fire Master Plan (FMP) is a comprehensive and strategic document that outlines the fire department's approach to managing fire-related risks, emergency response, and community safety by providing a roadmap for the fire department's future direction. The FMP reflects the fire department's commitment to providing quality services to the community in a responsible manner while ensuring safety and well being of its personnel.

BACKGROUND:

In 2001, newly formed Haldimand County Fire Department participated in a Fire Department Service Review by a third-party consultant to assess its existing fire service operations in order to provide a clear operational direction for the department. The basic goal of the assignment was to define the most efficient delivery model based on volunteer firefighter contingent and paid management.

In 2005, Haldimand County, hired a consultant to undertake an Emergency Services Rationalization study for the provision of Fire and Land Ambulance Services. The goal of the study was to design a fiscally responsible Emergency Services Rationalization Plan based upon factual and support evidence of need, and to define and identify emergency and safety services that the County should be providing now and into the future. In December of 2005, this report was presented to Council through a special Council meeting and ultimately the positions of Fire Chief, and Manager of Land Ambulance became

redundant. This resulted in the hiring of the Manager of Emergency Services/Fire Chief as a combined position.

In 2013, a supplemental review was implemented to review the current locations of fire stations, and to recommend changes in fire station location options. As a result of that study 2 fire stations, Station 8 in Moulton and Station 10 in Byng were closed, with both Stations personnel being added to Station 6 (Canboro), Station 7 (Lowbanks) and Station 9 (Dunnville.) Also, as a result of the study, an ambulance was upstaffed 12 hours per day 365 days a year and posted at the Fishersville Fire Station.

Since the above-mentioned studies and reviews, no formal Fire Master Plan has ever been introduced in Haldimand County, despite Fire Master Plans being a regular occurrence in most municipalities, usually reviewed or updated every 5 to 10 years. Staff identified the need for such a plan to assist in long term planning within the Fire Department, which Council approved in the 2023 Capital Budget.

ANALYSIS:

The benefits of a Fire Master Plan are as follows:

- Having a clear vision of future needs.
- A guide that includes options for implementation.
- Prioritization of each project.
- The ability to communicate with staff, internal and external stakeholders about future goals of the organization.

The County's Fire Master Plan (FMP) encompasses a comprehensive review of the Haldimand County Fire Department's (HCFD) strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. The FMP also consists of a review of the community, along with identifying present and future population statistics and anticipated growth of the community. As a result of the review a 10 year FMP was created for the HCFD by a third-party vendor. Haldimand County Fire Department worked with The Emergency Management Group (EMG) who have worked with multiple fire departments and municipalities in Ontario. Staff provided EMG with data, which included call volume, response times, staffing, etc. Standard Operating Guidelines, policies, and procedures were provided for review which included suppression, education, and prevention. Consultations occurred with front line staff, Officers, Council and the public to determine the fire department's performance in relation to community needs. EMG also completed station visits which enabled them to assess condition and current apparatus within the County.

The FMP includes the following main elements:

- Community and Fire Department Overview.
- Planning – future community growth and related service needs.
- Risk Assessment of the community through the completion of the Office of the Fire Marshal's (OFM) Critical Risk assessment document.
- Fire Department Divisions – Non-Suppression.
- Fire Suppression, Communications, Recruitment and Retention and Health and Safety.
- Facilities, Vehicles, Equipment, and water Supply.
- Emergency Management Program.
- Mutual, Automatic Aid and Fire Service Agreements.
- Finance and Budgets.
- Review of Previous Strategic and/or Master Plans and Fire Underwriter Reports.

As part of the FMP, recommendations were made to assist the fire department for future service delivery modifications, to serve as a guideline for future studies, and to inform possible capital and operating budget proposals. At a high level some of the key recommendations for the HCFD include:

- Determining appropriate staffing levels required to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standards and its 5 year fire inspection schedule.
- Adoption of an educational progression plan. Education and succession planning is critical and although HCFD has a solid training program, having a formal progression plan is beneficial.
- Development of a formal health and wellness program, that includes fitness, cancer prevention, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), and EAP Support, over and above what HCFD is currently doing.
- Monitor the ability to meet response times as per NFPA Standards. Fire Chief is required to monitor and measure to ensure level of effectiveness of the Department.
- Ensure a strong and dependable dispatching service, which includes the review the need for digital capabilities as the NG911 program is digitally based. HCFD currently has identified this need and is working with dispatch partners to ensure a smooth transition both economically and operationally.
- Ensure current and future stations meet the needs of firefighters. Some current stations have been identified to include upgrading of specific features, i.e. addition of shower facilities, PPE storage, and infrastructure additions.
- Feasibility Study to review fire station locations, consider potential consolidation of station operations, review long term staffing needs to address staffing challenges (recruitment and retention) and community needs including potential for career firefighters.
- Consider implementing an electronic tracking software system for apparatus and vehicle maintenance.

It is important to note that the timelines noted within the recommendations are when the department should consider starting the review process which will generate further recommendations on individual items being contemplated, taking into account costing, the need for further consultation and other logistical challenges. The actual implementation of the recommendations may take much longer and extend the noted timelines. There are also numerous recommendations that could require significant capital funding or operating budget increases. These recommendations would be fully vetted in future as part of the typical budget review process, including consideration at Council.

Ultimately, the implementation of the consultant recommendations will depend on the Fire Chief and the direction County Council provides, as well as the allocation of associated resources and the ability to move forward with the associated recommendations contained within the document.

As per the review it was commented by the consultant that Haldimand County Fire Department demonstrated that staff are truly dedicated to the community they serve. Council, the County CAO, and the Fire Chief are sincerely committed to ensuring the safety of the community and all personnel of the Fire Department. Based on the present staffing, equipment, and fire station's locations, HCFD is endeavouring to offer the most efficient and effective service possible.

FINANCIAL/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

At the present time, there are no financial implications from this report, as it is to serve as the basis for future operational and capital planning and considerations. Both service delivery and personnel safety will continue to be assessed, and further recommendations for improvement will be brought forward by the Fire Chief. Should Council approve any of these recommendations in the future, the accompanying budget impacts, if any, will be identified at that time.

STAKEHOLDER IMPACTS:

Not applicable.

REPORT IMPACTS:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: No

Policy: No

REFERENCES:

None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Haldimand County's Fire Master Plan.