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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Memorandum EMS-M02-2025 Firefighter Stipends

For Consideration by Special Council on February 27, 2025

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**To:** Mayor Bentley and Members of Council

**From:** Jason Gallagher, Manager, Emergency Services/Fire Chief

### Recommendations:

1. THAT Memorandum EMS-M02-2025 Firefighter Stipends be received.

As per Report EMS-02-2024 Volunteer Firefighter Compensation, staff committed to review the current stipend process, to determine the suitability of the practice, and report back to Council as part of the 2025 Tax-Supported Operating Budget. This memorandum serves as the response to that commitment and is provided in support of the recommendations contained in the 2025 Tax-Supported Operating Budget, which are:

- to continue with stipends for existing positions (District Chiefs, Captains, Training Officers, Health & Safety Representatives) at the same annual rates currently in effect (\$2,500, \$1,500, \$1,500 and \$750 respectively); and
- introduce stipends for the newly created supervisory position of Lieutenant (\$750 annually per position).

Stipends serve as a modest acknowledgment of the contributions of Volunteer Firefighters (VFFs), which extends beyond regular emergency response duties, training, and fire prevention/education activities. Additionally, stipends contribute positively in supporting recruitment, retention and morale within the department. Continuing with the stipend program, and extending to the new Lieutenant position, ensures the continued functionality and effectiveness of our volunteer firefighters.

Currently, certain volunteer firefighting positions receive a stipend designed to offset costs related to post-call paperwork/debriefs, meetings, training preparation, and personal time commitment over and above regular duties. Although they are already paid an hourly rate of pay for regular duties, the additional duties are key responsibilities and should be acknowledged through modest lump sum compensation.

Through staff analysis, it was found that stipends remain common practice across other volunteer services in Ontario and the rates that have been established in Haldimand County are around the mid-point of those services surveyed. The stipends, along with the increased wages approved by Council in early 2024, combine to provide a total compensation package that is appropriate, competitive and near the average of other volunteer departments.

Recruitment and retention are persistent challenges for volunteer fire departments. Without stipends, existing volunteers may feel undervalued for the additional commitments they make, leading to higher turnover in our senior or specialized positions. Financial incentives, such as stipends, can help attract younger members who might otherwise be deterred by the uncompensated demands of specific positions. The issues of recruitment and retention can be summarized based on a number of factors including:

- **Economic climate:** During periods of economic growth, people may be less likely to volunteer due to better job opportunities and financial stability. In downturns, people may move away for better opportunities, reducing the potential number of volunteers. Volunteer firefighting saves the municipality significant costs compared to a fully staffed career fire department. Stipends, while a small expense, represent an investment in sustaining this cost-effective model.
- **Volunteer Feedback:** Informal surveys and feedback from current volunteers indicate that stipends are viewed as a token of appreciation rather than compensation. Volunteers expressed concerns that eliminating stipends could harm morale and make participation less sustainable.

Currently, volunteer firefighters are compensated for regular duties based on a per hour rate for time spent on each activity/task. This is monitored and approved by headquarters to ensure only eligible hours are compensated, and/or must be approved in advance. This includes activities/tasks such as responding to calls, training and attending any local schools to deliver education. Additionally, certain positions as outlined in Table A, receive stipends to recognize the additional responsibilities required of their position, which are not covered through their hourly wage. These responsibilities include meetings specific to their roles, administrative work, in example – documentation, preparing for training, and personal time commitment. Table B represents the proposed stipend structure, which maintains all existing positions and rates, with the only change being the addition of the new Lieutenant position rate.

**Table A – Existing Stipend Structure:**

Position	Stipends (Annual)
District Chief	\$2,500
Captain	\$1,500
Training Officer	\$1,500
Health & Safety Representative	\$750

**Table B – Proposed Stipend Structure:**

Position	Stipends (Annual)
District Chief	\$2,500
Captain	\$1,500
Lieutenant	\$750
Training Officer	\$1,500
Health & Safety Representative	\$750

The estimated budget impact for the change in stipend—which is fully attributed to the introduction of the Lieutenant—is \$16,000. In conclusion, to continue to support our volunteers and ensure the continued success of the fire department, it is crucial that the stipend structure be maintained and expanded to include the newly created position of Lieutenant, which takes on significant responsibilities, including additional time commitment. Ensuring competitive stipends will not only improve retention but also attract and retain the next generation of dedicated volunteers.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

None.