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# HALDIMAND COUNTY

## Report EMS-01-2025 Emergency Expenditure – Septic Replacement – Selkirk Fire Station



For Consideration by Council in Committee on April 29, 2025

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### Objective:

To inform Council of an Emergency Expenditure in regards to the replacement of the Selkirk Fire Station Septic System, due to a failure of the infrastructure of the system.

### Recommendations:

1. THAT Report EMS-01-2025 Emergency Expenditure – Septic Replacement – Selkirk Fire Station be received;
2. AND THAT the Revised Budget, as outlined in Report EMS-01-2025, be approved.

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

**Reviewed by:** Rodger Hill, Deputy Fire Chief

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

**Approved:** Mark Merritt, CPA, CA, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

### Executive Summary:

On February 7, 2024, contractors were on-site at the Selkirk Fire Station to investigate reports of a toilet in the men's washroom backing up. While repairs were completed at that time issues continued throughout 2024 which required the contractor to return. Through a more detailed investigation it was determined that the septic system was not working as designed and required replacement due to its inability to drain septic waste properly. The age of the system, putting it at end of life, also informed this requirement. This system also serves the Selkirk Library and Community Center. An Emergency Repair to replace the septic system occurred on December 2024 through January 2025.

At this time, staff recommend that the emergency costs in the amount of \$100,000 be funded from the CRR – General.

### Background:

Selkirk Fire Station located at 38 Main St. W. is an older station with aging infrastructure. The facility is a 3-bay fire station with 2 washrooms, 1 for males and 1 for females, with a shared deacon shower, which also houses an extractor washing machine for decontamination of Fire PPE. Access to proper water and sanitation is key to the support of the firefighters and the operation of the station. This septic system also serves the adjacent Selkirk Library and Community Center and so its proper function is essential for public use of those community facilities. In January 2020, a contractor had inspected the septic system, stating that there were issues at the time with the need for emergency repairs or replacement. Repairs were deemed the appropriate route to take at that time and were completed. No

additional issues were experienced until early 2024. As issues persisted between February and September 2024, it was ultimately determined through a detailed assessment that the system was failing and was no longer suited to repairs – a full replacement was required. The issues included the septic tank maintaining a level well above the incoming sewer from the Firehall; the septic bed no longer taking effluent from the septic tank to the bed as it should; the area where the bed is located was also flooded and left nowhere for the effluent to go. Magnifying the issue—and prompting the emergency replacement—was the incoming winter season which would have led to freezing the system which would have left the entire building without effluent drainage, affecting all washrooms, decontamination shower and extractor for washing PPE.

### **Analysis:**

Per the Procurement Policy (No. 2023-02) an emergency repair must meet the following requirements:

## **6.4 Emergency Purchase**

**6.4.1** An Emergency Purchase may only be used when it is required to:

- .1 Prevent or alleviate serious delay;
- .2 Maintain essential County Services;
- .3 Maintain security or order;
- .4 Protect public property;
- .5 Protect human, animal, plant life, health or prevent/alleviate a threat to same;
- .6 Comply with official orders issued by upper levels of government; or
- .7 Comply with the Emergency Response Plan or respond to a State of Emergency.

**6.4.3** The User Division shall submit the information outlined below to Council in accordance to **Article 8.0, Council Reporting**, within three (3) months once the Emergency is declared over:

1. Purchase Particulars,
2. Source of Funding, and
3. Conditions that constituted an Emergency Purchase.

In determining the necessity for using the Emergency Purchase provisions, staff relied upon 6.4.1.2 and 6.4.1.4 as follows:

6.4.1.2. Maintain essential County services: *The septic system serves the fire station, library and hall which are all essential services utilized for life safety (fire) and community wellness (library, hall).*

6.4.1.4. Protect Public Property: *The continued deterioration of this system will impact the use of the fire station, library and hall, which will cause further damage to the property. e.g., property damage including additional flooding, waste run-off contamination; and, facility damage including to the buildings (structural damage with backups/floods) and assets such as furniture, fixtures, etc.*

## **Additional Rationale for Emergency Repair or Replacement of a Septic System**

Staff also completed a best practice review relative to this type of issue as additional supportive rationale to proceed with the emergency replacement. In the event of a septic system failure or malfunction, an emergency repair or replacement may be necessary for several important reasons. The rationale for such action typically includes the following key considerations:

### **Health and Safety Concerns**

#### **1. Risk of Contamination:**

- A failing septic system can lead to the release of untreated wastewater into the environment, potentially contaminating nearby groundwater, surface water, or soil. This contamination can pose serious health risks to residents, neighbors, and the surrounding ecosystem. Exposure to raw sewage increases the risk of waterborne diseases, including E. coli, Salmonella, and giardia.

#### **2. Environmental Impact:**

- Soil and Water Pollution: A malfunctioning septic system can leach harmful chemicals, pathogens and nutrients into the soil and water table. This can damage local ecosystems, degrade water quality, and affect wildlife. Contaminated groundwater can spread pollution to nearby wells or bodies of water, threatening public and environmental health.

#### **3. System Failure or Inefficiency:**

- Septic Tank Overflows or Backup: If the septic tank is unable to handle the volume of waste, or if the drain field is saturated or blocked, raw sewage may back into the facility or spill out into the yard, creating an immediate need for intervention.
- Drain Field Failures: When a drain field fails to effectively treat effluent, wastewater can pool on the surface or leak into surrounding environment, signaling a complete failure of the system.
- Structural Issues: Cracked or corroded pipes, tank leaks, or damaged components that are beyond repair could compromise the ability of the system to function properly, necessitating replacement.

#### **4. Regulatory Compliance:**

- Local Health and Safety Codes: Many local, and provincial, regulations require that septic systems meet certain standards to prevent environmental contamination and safeguard public health. Failing to repair or replace a malfunctioning septic system may result in fines, legal action, or even a forced closure of the property.
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### **Conclusion:**

An emergency replacement of a septic system in this case was not only a critical step to restore sanitation and maintain health and safety standards but also necessary to protect the environment, ensure legal compliance, and prevent further property damage. Quick action helped mitigate the risks associated with untreated sewage and wastewater, ultimately protecting both human and environmental health and ensuring that all municipal facilities (fire, library, community hall) could continue to operate.

### Financial/Legal Implications:

The 2024 Tax Supported Capital Budget did not include a budget for the emergency septic replacement. As a result, a revision to the budget is recommended as follows:

<b>212406 – Selkirk Station/Library/Hall Emergency Septic Replacement</b>	<b>Current Approved Budget</b>	<b>Proposed Revised Budget</b>
<b>Expenditures:</b>		
Engineering	\$0	\$1,900
Permits	\$0	\$1,580
Construction	\$0	\$86,400
Contingency	\$0	\$10,120
<b>Total Expenditures:</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>
<b>Financing:</b>		
CRR – General	\$0	\$100,000
<b>Total Financing:</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

As presented to Council during the 2025 Tax Supported Capital Budget deliberations, there are financing concerns over the 10-year forecast specifically with respect to CRR-General. Approved measures to address this reserve included a one-time transfer from the Contingency Reserve of \$1.2 Million in 2025, as well as increased capital contributions from the tax levy. While these measures were sufficient to fund the 10-year forecast at that time, any additional projects impacting this reserve will put its balance at risk of being over-committed.

Future financing strategies will require a thorough review to keep reserve balances funded appropriately to meet ongoing infrastructure needs.

### Stakeholder Impacts:

Not applicable.

### Report Impacts:

Agreement: No

By-law: No

Budget Amendment: Yes

Policy: No

### References:

None.

### Attachments:

None.