

DATE: October 10 2017

FILE: 7200-01

TO: Chair and Directors
Electoral Areas Services Committee

FROM: Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

Supported by Russell Dyson
Chief Administrative Officer

R. DYSON

RE: Merville Auxiliary Fire Hall Project

Purpose

To propose a timeline for the Merville fire protection service to:

1. Obtain land for an auxiliary fire hall;
2. Construct an auxiliary fire hall;
3. Service the auxiliary hall with vehicles, firefighting equipment; and
4. Obtain the services of a fire fighting department to protect the Merville community.

Recommendation from the Chief Administrative Officer

THAT the Merville fire protection service auxiliary hall project proceed by:

1. Initiating discussions with the City of Courtenay Fire Department and Oyster River Fire Rescue to consider long-term service arrangements;
2. Establishing the minimum operational requirements for an auxiliary hall;
3. Conducting public engagement to obtain input and feedback on auxiliary hall requirements;

AND FURTHER THAT the 2018-2022 financial plans be developed for the Merville and Tsolum-Farnham fire protection services that consider a January 1, 2019 merger date and auxiliary hall construction process aimed at concluding by December 31, 2019.

Executive Summary

On June 15, 2017 the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) assumed responsibility for the former Merville Fire Protection District (MFPD) based, in part, on a report that proposes “a fire hall in Merville at or near Sackville Road and Highway 19A would provide optimal coverage for this area” (Mitchell and Banham, 2016), thereby providing fire protection coverage to the Merville area and enabling property owners to potentially find more favourable fire protection insurance rates. This report describes the timelines and expectations associated with building a fire hall and servicing the hall with vehicles and other equipment. Developing a partnership with a neighbouring fire department (either the City of Courtenay or Oyster River Volunteer Fire Department) is also paramount to this project given that the Merville fire hall can have auxiliary status and still provide the potential for more favourable insurance rates for property owners.

This report includes appendix A, which describes the timelines to construct and equip an auxiliary fire hall. Key points of information include:

- A public engagement process will be utilized to site the property on which the auxiliary hall will be built;
 - Minimum operational requirements for the hall site will be determined, including information such as road access, minimum parcel size, zoning, construction limitations;
 - The public will be invited to provide comments on a potential fire hall site;

- The CVRD will share the property details (based on operational requirements and public input) with the public before using a realtor to confidentially seek a suitable property;
 - The process of identifying potential properties, negotiating prices or other details and acquiring the land will not be public;
 - The CVRD will publicly announce the chosen property after obtaining the land.
- A professional engineer will be retained to develop performance specifications for an auxiliary fire hall;
 - A request for proposals will be issued to obtain services to design and build the fire hall based on the performance specifications;
 - A partnership will be sought with either the City of Courtenay or the Oyster River Volunteer Fire Department to provide services at the new fire hall, with local volunteers;
 - Regular updates will be provided to the public via the CVRD website, social media and mail addressed to property owners in the area;
 - A referendum will be required to obtain adequate funding for the hall construction and equipment purchases including two fire trucks (one tanker and one engine);
 - An auxiliary fire hall could be constructed and operational by December 2019.

Prepared by:

Concurrence:

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Stakeholder Distribution (Upon Agenda Publication)

City of Courtenay Fire Chief and Senior Staff	✓
Oyster River Fire Rescue Department	✓

Background/Current Situation

The MFPD was established in 1947 and provides for fire protection (via contract with the City of Courtenay fire department) to approximately 1,400 properties. A study was conducted in 2016 to identify options related to public interest for improving or maintaining fire protection levels and reducing insurance costs. The September 2016 Banham and Mitchell report contains two recommendations:

- 1) MFPD convert to a CVRD service – concluded on June 15, 2017;
- 2) CVRD develop an auxiliary fire hall facility in the Merville region, co-funded by the Merville and Tsolum-Farnham property tax local service areas and operate the auxiliary fire hall under contract with an established fire department as part of their fire response jurisdiction.

This report describes a project plan that would result in an auxiliary fire hall facility in the Merville area, thereby resulting in potentially reduced insurance costs for those property owners with insurance coverage. Appendix A provides a detailed timeline to achieve an auxiliary fire hall, including partnering with an established fire department and providing the new hall with two fire trucks (one engine and one tanker) and associated equipment.

Policy Analysis

The CVRD operates the Merville fire protection service under Bylaw No. 484. The project plan described in this report is authorized through the *Local Government Act* (LGA) and Community Charter.

Options

This report recommends supporting the timelines associated with constructing an auxiliary fire hall in Merville. The CVRD could choose other approaches to provide fire protection for the Merville service by a) maintaining the status quo by continuing to partner with the City of Courtenay fire department for fire protection or b) directing staff to develop a project plan that considers establishing a stand-alone fire hall and protection service that does not rely on a partnership with an established department.

Should the recommended project plan be implemented, there will be numerous points along the path where the elected officials and CVRD Board are required to make decisions associated with service levels, service delivery and funding requirements.

Financial Factors

Very high level estimates of land acquisition, hall construction and equipment costs are provided for this project at this time.

Land acquisition:	\$100,000
Hall construction:	\$500,000
Equipment costs:	\$500,000

It is anticipated that these costs may increase as details for the various components of this project are refined. These costs will be incorporated in the proposed 2018-2022 budgets for Merville and Tsolum-Farnham.

Of particular note, borrowing is anticipated for fire hall construction and fire truck (tanker and pumper) purchases. The timeline in appendix A briefly identifies the costs and process requirements associated with each stage. In the proposed timeline, a referendum is scheduled to coincide with the local government elections in October 2018.

Merging the Tsolum-Farnham fire protection service with the Merville service is one of the first tasks associated with this project. Doing so will more clearly identify the financial impact to property owners in Tsolum-Farnham and Merville service areas. The analysis will be conducted in the first few months of 2018 as financial plans are finalized, 2017 reserve fund balances are known and a better understanding is developed for project costs (i.e. land and equipment purchases and hall construction).

Legal Factors

Converting the MFPD to a CVRD service means the CVRD is responsible for service delivery. While the recommendations for an auxiliary hall, as presented in the Mitchell and Banham (2016) report, do not legally obligate the CVRD to construct such a facility, the analysis presented and public support and interest that was demonstrated indicate an auxiliary hall is advisable. Achieving the auxiliary hall for the area means the CVRD must undertake a number of legislative processes. The LGA describes the legislative requirements for various components in appendix A, including merging the Tsolum-Farnham and Merville fire protection services (section 349 of the LGA supports the directors consenting to this approach on behalf of the electors); borrowing funds from the Municipal Finance Authority through a five-year plan for land acquisition (section 403 of the LGA and section 175 of the Community Charter) if required; borrowing funds through a loan

authorization bylaw and using a referendum to seek elector approval (section 407 of the LGA supports this approach); and partnering with an existing fire department for service delivery.

Regional Growth Strategy Implications

The Comox Valley Regional Growth Strategy recognizes the value of fire protection within communities. Constructing an auxiliary hall for the Merville area would improve fire protection coverage and improve community resiliency when considering fire response and threats at the wildfire / community interface.

Intergovernmental Factors

The CVRD is currently under contract with the City of Courtenay for fire protection in the Merville area and separately with the Tsolum-Farnham area. During the development of the Mitchell and Banham (2016) report, discussions were held with City of Courtenay representatives to understand interests and perspectives. Similarly, concepts put forward through this report were discussed with City of Courtenay staff. Should the recommendation in this report be approved by the board, CVRD staff will work closely with the City of Courtenay to advance the decision-making associated with service delivery from the proposed auxiliary hall.

Given the potential for collaboration between the Merville service and Oyster River Fire Rescue, this report will be presented to the CVRD's Black Creek – Oyster Bay services committee for information and feedback purposes. Should Oyster River Fire Rescue consider partnering for fire protection in the Merville and/or Tsolum-Farnham areas, a more comprehensive report that considers the costs and benefits to Oyster River Fire Rescue would be presented to the Black Creek – Oyster Bay services committee.

Interdepartmental Involvement

Corporate Services Branch is leading this project with the support from the Community Services Branch.

Citizen/Public Relations

Engaging with the public in the Merville and Tsolum-Farnham communities is very important to the success of this project. Fire protection is recognized as a community asset. The proposed timeline (appendix A) considers the different points through this process where community outreach is contemplated. Under CVRD policy on public engagement and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), the “inform” engagement category will be used to ensure that the public is aware of where the project is at and ensuring that expectations are understood. Additionally, some “consultation” will be used to receive input from the public in regards to siting the auxiliary hall. The CVRD recognizes the public interest in the hall location is high and wants to incorporate public feedback in criteria for selecting a fire hall site. The CVRD also recognizes that identifying one or more specific properties and then negotiating for and purchasing the property cannot be achieved in the public realm. For this reason, the property acquisition process described in appendix C is proposed.

The CVRD is committed to keeping the public apprised of all steps through this project. Therefore, funds for direct mailouts to Merville and Tsolum-Farnham properties and other related advertising are included in the draft five-year financial plan.

Attachments: Appendix A – Timelines for constructing and equipping a Merville auxiliary fire hall
Appendix B – Merville auxiliary fire hall land acquisition process

The proposed timeline is broken into three components: land, building and services.

		2017		2018				2019				2020			
Task		Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Land	Determine auxiliary hall requirements (operational and with public input)		■	■	■										
	Traffic analysis (by MOTI or third party)			■											
	Land search				■	■									
	Funds for land acquisition (referendum proposed for Oct 2018 local government elections if required)					■	■								
	Acquire land						■								
Building	Hire engineer to develop performance specs for building					■	■	■							
	Borrow funds for construction (Oct 2018 referendum)					■									
	RFP based on performance specs for design/build							■	■						
	Construction								■	■	■				
Services	Contract with Courtenay for Merville to include 'extraordinary costs'			■											
	Merge Tsolum-Farnham and Merville with director consent including reserves and assets			■	■			*							
	Identify service provider (Courtenay or Oyster)				■	■	■								
	Volunteer recruitment and training (ongoing in partnership with service provider)							■	■	■	■				
	Obtain funding for equipment purchases (Oct 2018 referendum)					■									
	Equipment purchases (two vehicles, other)								■	■	■				
	Enter contract with service provider											■			

NOTES: * - Merville and Tsolum Farnham services to be merged effective Jan 1/19

The process to identify the parameters and requirements for a Merville auxiliary fire hall needs to include operational elements while also incorporating public interests. This flow chart describes how the public will be included in this process and notes where the CVRD will engage directly with a realtor to identify and acquire land. The work with the realtor will not be in the public realm.

