

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, APRIL 10, 2001

**FIRE COMMUNICATIONS OPERATORS
(BUDGET SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING OF MARCH 27, 2001)**

Recommendation

The Budget Sub-Committee recommends:

That the recommendation contained in the following report of the Deputy City Manager and the Fire Chief, dated March 27, 2001, be approved.

Report of the Deputy City Manager and the Fire Chief

The Deputy City Manager and the Fire Chief recommend that four (4) new fulltime complement positions of Communications Operators required to increase the on-duty staffing level in the Fire Communications Centre from one (1) to two (2) Communications Operators on-duty at all times, BE APPROVED.

Background

On February 26, 2001, the Budget Sub-Committee deferred hiring four (4) Communications Operators pending resolution of the Centralized Fire Communications Centre. The cost was included/approved in the 2001 Operating Budget.

The Council of the Region of York resolved on March 8, 2001 as follows:

WHEREAS in a series of reports dating back to March 1995, Regional Council and the area municipal Councils have supported improving Fire Services in York Region; and

WHEREAS a conclusion of the ARA study, as supported by the Regional Fire Services Advisory Committee, recommended a Joint Fire Service Board to implement an urban/rural Fire Service for York Region and immediate implementation of a Central Communication Dispatch System; and

WHEREAS an amalgamated Fire Service, in conjunction with Regional Police Services, Regional Ambulance Services and Regional 911 Dispatch Service would provide the citizens of York Region with a well co-ordinated Emergency Response System;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Regional Council request staff to re-examine the advantages and disadvantages of amalgamating Fire Services in York Region, either as an urban/rural service or as a one-department service for all of York Region, combining the use of professional fire staff and volunteer services; and

THAT staff report back to Regional Council within 90 days, and

THAT the staff report be circulated to the area municipalities in order that the area municipalities can receive the information as soon as possible; and

THAT the Regional Chair set up a new Fire Services Review Committee as soon as possible and the staff report be forwarded to this Committee.

Until this study is completed, the Region has indicated that it will not proceed to fund the capital costs associated with a central dispatch centre. Accordingly, it appears that there will be no further progress in this matter until the Region has made a decision whether to pursue an entire consolidation of Municipal fire services.

Vaughan's Communications Division

The Vaughan Fire and Rescue Service (VFRS) Communications Division provides 24-hour emergency call-taking and dispatching services for the City of Vaughan, and to King Township under contract. In 1999 and 2000, VFRS Operators handled almost 8,000 and 9,000 incidents respectively.

The Communications Division has an approved staff complement of five (5) Communication Operators and one (1) Communications Supervisor. Six full-time staff are employed as Communication Operators, in order to accommodate the modified work arrangements for one employee. The Communications Supervisor position remains vacant.

Five of the staff are assigned to work a 12-hour shift rotation system. For the past two years or so, the sixth person worked the normal "business-week" hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday (Statutory Holidays excluded) providing the second on-duty person to assist with the greater volume of call-activity. Thus, two operators were on-duty 25% of the time.

Since January of this year, five operators work the regular 12-hour shift rotation system, alternating between 'day' and 'night' shifts. Having retained the temporary employees hired to cover extended staff absences, two operators are now assigned to day-shift only basis, providing the second on-duty operator 12 hours per day, seven days a week. Thus two operators are on duty 50% of the time.

Approval to increase the staff complement from 6 to 10 operators would provide two on duty operators, essentially 100% of the time.

Conclusion

Due to the delay by the Region of York in the implementation of a central dispatch centre, staff recommend that the four additional positions be approved at this time to improve operational effectiveness and public safety by helping ensure that all emergency calls and dispatch functions are performed in a timely and accurate manner. If, due to an amalgamation of dispatch centres or of the entire fire service, they are no longer required, then they would be laid off at that point in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor Rosati
Chair
Budget Sub-Committee