

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

Re: Elliot Lake Fire Service Volunteer Firefighter Wages

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopt schedule A to the Elliot Lake Volunteer Firefighter Policy; and

That the \$2.00/hr increase, as approved in the 2024 Budget, be retroactive to January 1, 2024; and

That the appropriate by-law be passed.

BACKGROUND

The Elliot Lake Fire Service currently has 16 Volunteer Firefighter positions within the department with five classifications.

When a Volunteer Firefighter is first hired, they start as a Recruit with an hourly rate of \$17.00. After 6 months of service and written exams with a practical portion, the Recruit would move up to the 4th Class and receive an hourly rate of \$17.50. There is a 50-cent increase in the hourly rate for each year of service and written test, up to the highest classification of 1st Class with an hourly rate of \$19.00.

The City budgets 3840 hours for all emergency calls and training time. Each Volunteer Firefighter is paid a minimum of two hours per fire call and is rounded to the nearest half hour after the first two hours of a call.

Each week, there is Wednesday night training for 2.5 hours. Additionally, training is scheduled on weekends as needed. For example, First Aid/CPR certification and Auto Extrication. All Volunteer Firefighters are permitted to attend all training and are paid their hourly rate.

ANALYSIS

For years, the department has faced a number of challenges to sustain a volunteer work force. Additionally, changes made in April 2022 to the Fire Prevention and Protection Act, Ontario Regulation 343/22 Mandatory Certification, has put more responsibility on the department's Volunteers to become NFPA Certified by July 2026.

The Elliot Lake Fire Service has intensified the level of training for Volunteers to prepare them to challenge the Ontario Fire Marshal certification tests. This has put more demand on Volunteer Firefighters to attend more Wednesday night trainings, weekend trainings and spend more time studying at home to prepare for the certification test to meet this new Regulation.

The last increase for Elliot Lake Volunteer Firefighters was April 2016 when the minimum wage in Ontario was \$11.60/hr. As of October 2023, the minimum wage in Ontario is \$16.55/hr., which is an increase of roughly 42.5%. If Council wishes to maintain the gap between minimum wage and the City's Volunteer Firefighter wages, this would put the new rate of 1st Class Volunteers to \$21.95/hr. and all other classifications would be adjusted with a \$2.95 increase.

Since this is a high increase for one year, it is the suggestion of the Director of Emergency Services that the City increases to wages over several budget years. For the 2024 budget year, a \$2.00 wage increase to the hourly rate of the Elliot Lake Volunteers is suggested. The current provincial average in Ontario for volunteer firefighters is \$25.42/hr.

A Canadian census done in 2022 on the number of Volunteer Firefighters that were in the country showed that, since the previous census in 2018, there was a reduction of 30,000 Volunteer Firefighters over those four years. The younger generation today are not coming forward to volunteer in the fire service. This reduction has caused amalgamation of some volunteer fire departments and also the need to hire fulltime firefighters to provide fire protection in some communities.

This increase in the hourly wage will assist in retention and the recruitment volunteer firefighters in the department.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

In the 2023 budget, the Temporary Salaries line showed \$93,098.72. This was to pay 16 Volunteer Firefighters for 313 hours each. The hours of work will be reduced in the 2024 budget to 240 hours per Volunteer Firefighter due to the average of the past two years of actual hours worked.

For the 2024 budget, the Temporary Salaries line will show \$70,560.00. This is a reduction of \$22,538.72 from the 2023 budget year.

A \$2.00 per hour increase would cost approximately \$78,240.00 if every volunteer firefighter attends all 240 hours. For the past two years, the average amount of hours paid to each volunteer firefighter has been \$123.91. If the average continues, this amount would be \$37,879.28 not including benefits.

The wage increase for Volunteer Firefighters as approved in the 2024 budget is outlined in Schedule "A".

LINKS TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The City of Elliot Lake will continue to provide appropriate levels of protective services through continuous training and maintenance of staff levels and equipment.

SUMMARY

It is recommended that Council adopt the attached Schedule A to the Elliot Lake Volunteer Firefighter Policy, that it replace the existing Volunteer Schedule of Remuneration and Employment Policies, Council Resolution and have the new rate retroactive to January 1, 2024.