



## **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

**FROM:** Harry Olivieri, Commissioner and Fire Chief

**DATE:** November 11, 2020

**MEMORANDUM NO.:** MEM-FIRE-2020-0003

**RE:** Fire Chiefs Update

### **PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a Fire Chiefs personal update to Members of Council.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The Fire Chief's retirement is approaching quickly and with my last day of work being November 27, 2020, it was thought to be prudent for a memorandum to provide a Chief's perspective on matters dealing with the fire department.

### **COMMENTS:**

#### **COVID-19**

As with other Town departments COVID-19 has impacted fire department operations as well. Stations were closed to the public with alternate ways to service the public; burn permits, fireworks permits and lawyers letters were processed electronically, to name a few. Administrative staff was asked to work from home with one Chief and an Administrative support member remaining in the station. Full-time (FT) suppression crews were all sequestered in their respective stations, only venturing out to respond to emergency calls. All Prevention/Public Education activities in the community were suspended, except where immediate threat to life issues were involved, and staff training were also initially curtailed. With enhanced personal protection equipment (PPE) and procedures in place, some of these services have been restored in a limited way. A video conference style application was acquired which allowed remote video training and testing. Eventually hands-on training was re-established with small group training pods and safe practices in place for both FT and Part-time (PT) staff. Prevention has resumed inspections, responding to complaints and conducting inspections of high risk occupancies.

As we prepared for the arrival of COVID-19, the Emergency Response Plan and appendices were reviewed and updated as required and since the emergency declaration, a Deputy Chief, the Senior Administrative Assistant and myself have participated in the Emergency Control Group (ECG) and Emergency Support Group (ESG) meetings. Documents created by members of the ESG and other corporate staff include, Recovery Plan, Employee Handbook, and Work from Home Policy, to name a few, as well as many updates to Council and the community.

### **Fire Service Master Plan**

The Halton Hills Fire Department is guided by its Fire Service Master Plan (FSMP), first implemented in February 2002 and revised in December 2004, January 2010 and lastly in November 2014. Many of the recommendations of the plan including full-time and part-time staffing, 24/7 full-time service in both Acton and Georgetown, prevention & public education programs as well as service delivery enhancements have been completed. A review of the FSMP including a Town Risk Assessment by a consulting firm was approved in the 2020 Capital Budget, but was postponed to 2021 due to fiscal restraints associated with the COVID-19 events. With the significant growth and changes that have occurred in Halton Hills, the FSMP review should be conducted as soon as possible in 2021 to create a new framework for the future of the fire department.

### **Staffing**

In 2019, nine new full-time (FT) recruits were hired. This was the largest one-time FT hiring in the history of the fire department. After the completion of their recruit training, this allowed the Acton station to be staffed 24/7 by FT staff in 2020. Previously the 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. period was covered off by the Acton PT staff and the Headquarters FT truck. A FT manned truck is required to respond within 90 seconds of receipt of a call but prior to this change, PT staff on average responded in 341 seconds. This is a significant improvement.

There is a need to increase our PT complement. PT recruitment is becoming more difficult with a diminishing number of applicants prepared to make the commitment. A committee was struck to find ways to increase our applicant numbers with a program designed to go out to the public with pop up displays to encourage prospective applicants. Covid-19 restrictions got in the way of this implementation but we have since begun a new recruitment program which saw 81 citizens apply for the information night and 61 of these people completed an application and are moving through the process.

### **Dispatch Amalgamation**

The amalgamation of our Communication Centre with Burlington was completed providing an enhanced dispatch service for our community. Burlington also provides dispatch services to Oakville. The Burlington Fire Dispatch Centre is manned by 3 staff 24/7. Dispatchers and their professionalism, training and expertise provides an exemplary service assisting our response and emergency scene operations. We continue to work with our partners to refine and improve dispatch services.

## **Training**

With the hiring of 9 new FT recruits, there was a need to develop a new recruit program. Previously, FT recruits were selected from our PT ranks and training could be accomplished on-duty by using a mentorship program. In this recruit class 7 of the 9 members were from outside of the department. Mentorship was not deemed to be appropriate and therefore a new training program was developed, which would prepare them to seamlessly move into their new shift assignments.

This year also saw the hiring of a new dedicated FT Training Instructor. He was instrumental in transforming our training program to meet the updated fire standards of our service. COVID-19 impacted our ability to conduct live training and thus new methods were needed to keep training going in some form. An online training platform, Moodle, was acquired, which allows staff to sign- in remotely and participate in live streamed classwork and practical sessions, testing and media conferencing. As the COVID-19 situation evolved we re-instated practical training in small groups on multiple days and nights.

The Training Instructor is assisted by on-duty staff. In the future another dedicated instructor should be considered.

## **Drone Program**

With the financial assistance of Terra Cotta Cookies, a drone program was implemented which permits us to take aerial video for fire ground tactical decisions and rescue operations to name a few. We currently have one trained operator and plans to train additional staff were put on hold due to the availability of course impacted by the COVID-19 situation. At this time, an additional staff member has successfully completed an Ontario Fire College course in November giving us two certified operators. A third candidate is hoped to attend a January 2021 course.

## **Emergency Response**

With the additional FT manned pumper, the community now has 24/7 FT staffed trucks available to respond immediately in both Acton and Georgetown. Having two FT manned trucks allows us to have a second truck immediately available for multi-station responses in each area. In other words, if a significant call occurs in Acton the Headquarters' truck is immediately also responding and vice versa, which has improved on-scene operations. If not required, the FT truck is placed on standby midway to provide back-up coverage. PT firefighters are paged for significant calls where multi-unit responses require a second and third vehicle responses such as alarm activations, structure fires and motor vehicle collisions.

## **Prevention and Public Education**

The prevention division is now manned by a dedicated FT Prevention Inspector assisted by on-duty FFs. His expertise in the field has greatly improved our inspection capabilities. COVID-19 reduced our inspection programs to only conduct inspections on immediate threat to life situations. As the COVID-19 situation evolved, inspection visits were re-instated in a limited way, conducting inspections of high risk occupancies such as schools and care homes, to name a few. In the future, a second dedicated FT Prevention Inspector should be a consideration.

Public Education has been considerably impacted by the COVID-19 situation. No station visits are allowed, visits in schools are postponed, and community events have ceased. Education still continues through media releases and social media such as twitter and our website. Public Education continues to be directed by an on-duty FF backed up by other on-duty FFs. In the future a dedicated FT Public Educator should be a consideration.

### **Emergency Management Program**

The Emergency Management Program is managed by a Deputy Chief who is the Town's Community Emergency Management Coordinator (CEMC) backed up by Alternate CEMCs who are the Chief and Deputy Chief. The ECG and ESG have been engaged throughout the Town's Declared Emergency. We have attended meetings both in-house and with various outside agencies to keep abreast of COVID-19 situations as well as participating in various working groups to complete assignments from the ECG. I should add we have received nothing but cooperation from corporate staff involved.

When the COVID-19 event finally passes, a review of the Plan and its appendices should be conducted.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Many of the topics discussed above will be addressed in the Risk Assessment and Review of the Fire Master Plan. This should be given the highest priority for implementation in 2021.

This memo has given Members of Council an insight into some of the successes and issues of the fire department. At this time I would again like to extend my thanks to the Mayor and Members of Council for their support and wish them much success in the future.

Reviewed and approved by,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Mills", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer