

**AGENDA
SPECIAL MEETING OF
FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Monday, 10TH June 2019
5p.m. EMO Room

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1. Call to Order	
2. Request for Decision/Direction - Recruitment & Retention Initiative	2
3. Adjournment	

REQUEST FOR DECISION/DIRECTION

REPORT TO: Fire and Emergency Services Committee

SUBMITTED BY: Chris Kennedy, Fire Services Coordinator,
Sarah Kucharski, Communications Officer,
Alex Dumaresq, Deputy CAO

DATE: June 10, 2019

RE: Discussion and Direction re: Recruitment and Retention Strategy

ORIGIN: Strategic Priorities 2017/18 and 2018/2019

PURPOSE

The purpose of today's discussion is to review the feedback received from the Lunenburg Regional Fire and Emergency Service Committee and recommend the Recruitment and Retention Strategy to Council.

The task before this committee tonight:

- Discuss the LRFESC engagement process and feedback
- Committee request to Council on the direction they would like supported

BACKGROUND

Recruiting and retaining active volunteers for the Fire Department has been a long running issue across Nova Scotia. The issue has been raised in discussion with departments, at LRFES meetings and at some FESC meetings in the past. Some of the issue stems from demographic trends affecting our county, including slow or no population growth in communities, and the aging population; however, there are also some concerns related more specifically to the fire service.

The provision of fire and emergency services through volunteer departments is a critical part of MODL's protective services, and provides an invaluable resource to our communities, often times serving as the heart of the communities that they serve. As a result, Council understands the value of a strong fire service that has high levels of volunteers. Council identified recruiting and retaining firefighters as a strategic priority in 2017/18 and again in 2018/2019. This report provides a blueprint for the development of a strategy to achieve this goal.

The Fire & Emergency & Emergency Services (FESC) subcommittee on Recruitment and Retention has worked very hard during the process and has worked closely with MODL's Communications Officer and Fire Service Coordinator. The Committee showed ownership and leadership, and the discussions around

the table from all Committee members, Councillors and Fire Service were engaging and brought different ideas to these discussions.

CONSULTATION SUMMARY

The FESC Chair, the Communications Officer and the Fire Services Coordinator presented the Strategy to Council for their initial thoughts. Next, the FESC Chair, the Communications Officer and the Fire Services Coordinator engaged with the LRFES for their feedback. The Strategy was disseminated before the meeting directly to all chiefs and in the agenda package, and attendees had the opportunity to review the Strategy and ask questions or make suggestions for improvement. Those who could not attend were encouraged to send a written submission. At the meeting, we received 12 suggestions for tactics, all of which were either in the Strategy already, or were considered for inclusion by the FESC, and the FESC decided against including at this time.

Approach schools to provide Level 1 in high schools	Add WCB coverage	EAP	What have firefighters done this month – type + # of calls
Add & pay insurance coverage	Add pension plan (RRSP) contributions	WCB for all firefighters	Tax rebate for volunteer hours in VFD
Emotional intelligence?	I think service clubs are in the same position the Fire Service is in	Invite groups & Clubs into the department	Doing most of these now and like the rest of the ideas

The Communications Officer and the Fire Services Coordinator returned to a second LRFESC meeting to gather additional feedback, and asked attendees to rank the tactics in order of importance.

Recruitment - Municipal Responsibility (1-4)		Recruitment - Fire Service Responsibility (1-4)	
1	Develop recruitment marketing materials	1	Develop/maintain social media presence
2	Run a marketing campaign	2	Increase marketing materials in Fire Halls
3	Expand content on modl.ca	3	Assign recruitment responsibilities
4	Increased community presence	4	Engage in speaking opportunities
Retention - Municipal Responsibility (1-4)		Retention - Fire Service Responsibility (1-2)	
1	Thank you BBQ for Fire Service volunteers	tied	Create a mentor program
2	Soft skills training/online training	tied	Be alert to burnout
3	Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP)		
4	MODL to annual banquets		

ALTERNATIVES

If significant revisions are identified, it is recommended that the Committee direct staff to prepare a revised Strategy for consideration at the following FESC meeting.

CONCLUSION

The Volunteer Fire Service in Lunenburg County provides a critical protective service function for residents, and is a core part of our communities. A healthy volunteer base is essential for the continued success of our departments. The proposed Recruitment and Retention Strategy is intended for use through the partnership of the Municipality and the Fire Service to grow the volunteer ranks of these important community institutions.

RECOMMENDATION

“Move that FESC recommend the Recruitment and Retention Strategy to Council.”

Or

“Move that amendments are made to the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and brought back to FESC for further discussion.”

**Fire Service Volunteer
Recruitment and Retention Strategy**

DRAFT

Prepared by: Fire and Emergency Services Committee

June 10, 2019

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Executive Summary

In 2017, the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg's Fire and Emergency Services Committee (FESC) identified the need for a Recruitment and Retention Strategy that would assist fire departments in recruiting and retaining Fire Service volunteers. For the purpose of this strategy, Fire Service volunteers includes firefighters and all supporting personnel (truck drivers, event organizers, Auxiliary, etc.).

FESC brought forward their request to Council, and through Council's annual strategic planning process, the development of a Recruitment and Retention Strategy was identified as a strategic priority by Council.

This document is the culmination of information obtained through:

- surveys conducted with members of the public and the Fire Service
- facilitated meetings with the Fire and Emergency Services Committee
- discussions with Fire Service chiefs
- ideas gathered through a scan of the best recruitment and retention practices used by fire departments in Lunenburg County and throughout Canada

The strategy offers tangible steps to improvement recruitment and retention outcome and a toolkit the Fire Service and the Municipality can use to improve various aspects of the recruitment and retention process.

Process

Recruiting and retaining active volunteers for the Fire Department has been a long running issue across Nova Scotia and rural communities nationwide. The issue has been raised in discussion with departments, at LRFES meetings and at some FESC meetings in the past. Some of the issue stems from demographic trends affecting our county, including slow or no population growth in communities, and the aging population. However, there are also some concerns related more specifically to the Fire Service that we can and will address.

This year's Registration Package collected the number of active firefighters in our 24 departments (plus the Town of Lunenburg's 48 members, the Town of Mahone Bay numbers were not available at the time of this memo), with 631 active firefighters we get an average of roughly 25 active fire fighters per department.

The provision of fire and emergency services through volunteer departments is a critical part of MODL's protective services, and provides an invaluable resource to our communities, often times serving as the heart of the communities that they serve. As a result, Council understands the value of a strong fire service that has high levels of volunteers and identified recruiting and retaining firefighters as a strategic priority in 2017/18 and again in 2018/2019.

Audience Research

The project began with independent audience research. This allowed us to create an evidence-based

plan. We typically make assumptions about why people may or may not join the Fire Service based on our own experiences or the opinions of those in our social circle. Third-party audience research allowed us to identify the main motivators for why people join the Fire Service and why they leave.

The research involved a statistically representative public survey of Municipality residents on their beliefs about volunteerism and the Fire Service, a self-selected survey of current firefighters, and two focus groups with Fire Service volunteers and non-Fire Service volunteers in attendance.

The audience research, along with information already developed by fire organizations across Canada, helped to guide us through discussion at two FESC meetings. After a presentation on the market research, and a brainstorming and a prioritization exercise, the group selected targeted and strategic initiatives that the Fire Service and the Municipality can use to improve recruitment and retention.

What we learned

Throughout our research, a number of positive aspects were brought to light.

- Firefighters are well-respected. The most common words top-of-mind for respondents when thinking about firefighters are “dedicated,” “brave,” and “courageous.”
- More than 75% of all respondents say they would find the time to volunteer if there was a cause they believed in.
- Current firefighters cite “giving back to my community” as the most common reason why they joined the Fire Service, and 90% rate their overall volunteer experience with the Fire Service as Very Good or Good.

Our research identified some external realities that affect recruitment:

- Time commitment. There are increased demands on volunteers’ time, and many different ways to spend free time. Parents in particular are challenged with the increased focus on extracurricular activities and volunteering demands from their childrens’ sports teams and schools.
- Employer-related. Younger adults especially cite getting out of work as a primary obstacle to volunteering with the Fire Service.
- Availability of people. Aging and decreasing rural populations make recruitment a challenge.

Our research also identified the following misconceptions about volunteering for the Fire Service:

- A high percentage of people do not believe there is a shortage of volunteer firefighters.
- People believe it takes a lot of training to become a firefighter and a lot of time to be one. There is a misunderstanding in the public about the degree of training needed, the time commitment required, and the types of non-firefighting volunteer opportunities available (i.e. truck driver, event assistance, office help).
- The most common reason for those in their 40s and older for not applying is feeling they’re not in good enough physical shape.

Objective

The objective of this strategy is to assist the Fire Service in overcoming barriers to recruitment and retention of Fire Service volunteers. To do this, the recommended tactics in the strategy are designed to support the following objectives:

- Increase Fire Service volunteer recruitment by 5% within two years of this Strategy being adopted by Council.
- Increase Fire Service volunteer retention.
- Increase overall awareness of the need for Fire Service volunteers.
- Provide all Lunenburg County fire departments with a basic recruitment toolkit that they can use and adapt as they see fit.

Target Audiences

There are two primary audiences targeted in this strategy: residents, and members of the Fire Service. Within the community-at-large, several key audiences have also been identified, and specialized nuanced tactics have been developed for them.

Residents

A typical community resident may not think about the volunteer fire department on a regular basis. He or she may be aware that it exists, but unaware of the direct and indirect benefits the community receives from the presence of the fire department. **Residents, especially newcomers from cities and countries that only have career firefighters, also may not realize that their fire department is run by volunteers.** Communications with residents will be aimed at increasing general awareness of the volunteer fire department and generating interest in being involved in volunteer firefighting.

Key message: Firefighting can be for you.

While targeted communications will take place to recruit both traditional and non-traditional volunteer demographics, the following demographics were identified as audiences of specific interest.

- Among those who say they are likely to volunteer in the future, men, and 18 to 34-year-olds (male or female) are the most common prospects.
- Youth (16 to 21-year-olds).
- Employees at companies that let their staff leave their shift for firefighting calls.
- Newcomers who want join the community and build connections, who may not know there is a need for Fire Service volunteers.
- 35-50 year-olds

Youth

We believe that by providing youth with age-appropriate responsibility and training, if they stay in the area they will stay in the Fire Service. If you start them in training, even if they leave, they will find a department where they go. Their commitment to the Fire Service typically leaves a strong impression on them, offering them a sense of importance and value. Parkview and New Germany School both offer a credit course through the Coop Credit program. Students 16 years of age or older can receive one credit

for 100 hours as a member of the Junior or Regular member roster. There is an application process and studies involved besides the training, etc., at a given Fire Department.

Key messages:

- Students over 16 earn school credits for students for contributing to the Fire Service
- Help you learn new skills, you can learn how to use fire fighting equipment.
- Improve your resume.
- It's prestigious – you're a hero!
- Camaraderie, it's somewhere you will feel like you belong, and are part of a team.

Employees

A number of local employers permit their staff to leave work with pay to respond to fire calls. Employees of these employers who are not currently Fire Service volunteers would be a good potential audience for our marketing. We will need to be cautious and respectful about targeting employers who are being charitable so as not to strain their generosity.

Key messages:

- Employers – get recognition for letting your staff leave to fight fires
- Camaraderie

Newcomers

An effort must be made to welcome newcomers to the community and invite them to join the Fire Service. The very nature of a rural community can make it hard to make connections because of the strong ties that already exist, and the distances between homes. Volunteering with the Fire Service can help new residents join the fabric of the community.

Key messages:

- Become part of the social fabric
- Built in networking with your neighbours
- Camaraderie – it's a family
- We need you – fire fighters and other Fire Service members are all volunteers
- There's a role for everyone

35 to 50-year-olds

Once small children have grown, parents have a bit more time to pursue interests of their own. Often, they've volunteered for their children's schools or sports teams, and may be open to different volunteering pursuits more focused on their personal interests.

Key messages:

- Volunteering with the Fire Service is flexible
- There's a role for everyone
- Help the community with meaningful work
- Camaraderie and friendship

Overall Approach

The strategy consists of a partnership approach, sharing the responsibilities of recruitment and retention between the Municipality and the individual fire departments and related committees or associations. As a committee, the FESC brainstormed a large list of potential tactics to improve recruitment and retention, then prioritized the ones they felt would be most impactful. The complete list of potential tactics is available in Appendix A.

Fire Service Responsibility

The tools and tactics identified in the Fire Service section can be adapted and used by individual Fire Departments. This enables each Department to select the tools and tactics that they feel would be most effective in their community, and with the teams they have.

Municipal Responsibility

The Municipality has an obligation to support Fire Departments in their local activities with a number of centralized initiatives.

Recruitment Tactics

Fire Service Responsibility

The following are potential initiatives for individual Fire Departments. Each department is free to select the initiatives that they feel they can implement with the resources they have available, and that they believe will work in their community. Should a Fire Department choose to pursue any of the methods noted below, they are encouraged to reach out to the Municipality for additional direction or support if desired.

1. Assign recruitment responsibilities

There is great value in inviting current Fire Service volunteers into the recruitment process. In our survey of active firefighters, it was identified that the majority of Fire Service volunteers learned about the opportunity through a friend or family member. Our current volunteers are our best ambassadors, and their recruitment by word-of-mouth advertising is invaluable.

Existing Fire Service volunteers should be offered the opportunity to contribute to the planning of any recruitment initiatives. This will improve involvement in the initiatives, and it can also alleviate the pressure on the chief, and utilize the unique skill sets of individual Fire Service volunteers.

Each Department might choose to put one member or more in charge of recruitment in each Department, who will work with the Fire Service Coordinator to introduce new tactics. *(no cost)*

2. Increase marketing materials in Fire Halls

Fire Halls are important community gathering spaces in our Municipality. Many events run by the Fire Service or by other community groups take place in our Fire Halls. This offers a unique marketing opportunity. By increasing the marketing materials displayed at the Fire Halls and by integrating one on one contact by trusted and approachable firefighters at events, we can amplify our key messages.

At any breakfasts, suppers or other community events, consider offering facility tours or having a Fire Service volunteer speak to the group for two or three minutes about the need for volunteers. If your Fire Hall has a roadside sign, add regular recruitment messages to the sign. *(no cost)*

3. Develop a social media presence

A high percentage of our residents use social media. While the use of social media should be balanced with the need to ensure it does not create department inefficiencies, Fire Service volunteers can engage in social media in small windows of time as available. Individual Fire Departments can create a basic Facebook page that allows them to spread recruitment messages, share first-hand accounts of what it is like to be a Fire Service volunteer, and provide fire safety information to residents. *(no cost)*

4. Engage in speaking opportunities

Active engagement with community groups can support recruitment and retention. Involvement with community groups raises the profile of the fire department in the community and provides recruitment opportunities to those who are already volunteering for other organizations. The intent is not to "poach" volunteers from other organizations, but to seek out people who have the capacity to add more volunteering into their lives and welcome them to the Fire Service. Department Chiefs could speak at local Service Clubs about the need for volunteers, specifically with regards to support personnel. Individual Fire Departments should continue to participate in Fire Safety Week activities and talk about recruitment at these events. *(no cost)*

Municipal Responsibility

The Municipality is committed to supporting the local recruitment and retention initiatives undertaken by individual Fire Departments, and to leading the centralized initiatives noted below that are selected by the FESC and approved by Council. These initiatives are well suited to being managed by the Municipality for the benefit of all. We recognize the limited time and resources available to individual Fire Departments. These Municipally-managed initiatives are intended to complement the local initiatives.

1. Develop recruitment marketing materials

The Municipality will develop a professional Fire Service volunteer brand. The brand would include visual and thematic elements that could be provided in a template form and customized for each Fire Department.

Using this branded material, the Municipality would produce posters, brochures and online content that can be requested by the Fire Service for their use at their events or on their social media channels. *(Estimated cost \$3,000 one-time expense, \$200 annually). This is a labour-intensive tactic.*

Additionally, the Municipality could create a recruitment package and distribute it to realtors, have the building department hand it out with occupancy permits, and provide it to the military base. *(Estimated cost \$500 one-time expense, \$100 annually). This is a labour-intensive tactic.*

2. Run a marketing campaign

Once a brand is developed, a Municipal-wide awareness campaign will be implemented to improve general awareness of key messages. Mass media advertising would be coordinated as follows:

- Produce an annual recruitment and recognition newsletter distributed with Municipal Matters. *(Estimated cost \$2,000 annually)*
- Add longer articles in Municipal Matters that highlight various aspects of volunteering with the Fire Service. *(no cost)*
- Paid newspaper ads. *(Estimated cost \$2,000 annually)*
- Paid radio ads. *(Estimated cost \$3,000 annually)*
- Add regular recruitment messages and profiles of Fire Service volunteers on Municipal Facebook page. *(Estimated cost \$500 annually)*
- Editorial stories submitted annually to local media. *(no cost)*

This is a labour-intensive tactic that would require a new staff resource.

3. Expand content on modl.ca

Content created for the marketing campaign would be added to modl.ca. Additionally, we would add a fillable PDF or online form to the MODL website. Completed forms would be forwarded to the appropriate Fire Department. The Fire Service section of modl.ca would include links to every Fire Department website and Facebook page. *(no cost)*

4. Increased community presence

In conjunction with Fire Safety Week, the Municipality would promote the student bursary through local media, social media and presentations at the schools. The presentations will consist of defining the bursary and highlighting the fire services in a positive light and explain how students can get involved. The Fire Services Coordinator would build a relationship with guidance counsellors to encourage a relationship, and suggest they refer students to the Junior Firefighter program and make posters and brochures available to the school.

We would set up a booth at highly attended fairs, shows and conferences in our community, staffed with the Fire Services Coordinator and a Fire Service volunteer. Use this opportunity to connect to individual residents and reach the broader audience. Greet people that pass: “We’re in need of new volunteers for the Fire Service in the community. Can I give you this brochure to read, and to pass on to a friend if you’re not interested personally?” *(Estimated cost \$1,000 annually) This is a labour-intensive tactic that would require a new staff resource.*

Retention Tactics

As noted earlier, our current volunteers are our best ambassadors, and their recruitment by word-of-mouth advertising is invaluable. As such, current Fire Service volunteers should be treated in ways that

make them want to continue supporting the Fire Service and inspire them to support recruitment through their personal connection.

Current firefighters cite “giving back to my community” as the most common reason why they joined the Fire Service, and 90% rate their overall volunteer experience with the Fire Service as Very Good or Good. Of the firefighters who responded to the survey, the primary tactics they believe would increase their commitment to the Fire Service are a pension, more training, more recognition and increased tax rebates.

Fire Service Responsibility

The following are potential initiatives for individual Fire Departments. Each Department is free to select the initiatives that they feel they can implement with the resources they have available, and that they believe will work best in their community. Should a Fire Department choose to pursue any of the methods noted below, they are encouraged to reach out to the Municipality for additional direction or support if desired.

1. Create a mentor program

A strong camaraderie can be intimidating to new recruits. Chiefs could assign each new volunteer a “buddy” that checks in on them regularly and builds a strong, respectful relationship.

2. Be alert to burnout

Chiefs could be more cognizant of the potential for volunteer burnout and support their volunteers when they need to step back from their regular responsibilities for short periods of time.

Municipal Responsibility

The Municipality is committed to supporting the local recruitment and retention initiatives undertaken by individual Fire Departments, and to leading the centralized initiatives noted below. These initiatives are well suited to being managed by the Municipality for the benefit of all. We recognize the limited time and resources available to individual Fire Departments. These Municipally-managed initiatives are intended to complement the local initiatives.

1. MODL to host an annual thank you BBQ for Fire Service volunteers

A number of municipalities host an annual appreciation event for the Fire Service. An annual BBQ could be organized and funded by the Municipality, offering Fire Service volunteers an opportunity to strengthen their relationships with each other and communicate the Municipality’s appreciation. *(estimated cost \$8,000) This is a labour-intensive tactic that require a new staff resource.*

2. Continue to send MODL Fire Services Coordinator and Councillors to annual banquets/awards ceremonies. (no cost)

3. Soft skills training/online training made available for Fire Chiefs

- Emotional Intelligence
- Conflict resolution
- Leadership skills

4. Explore the opportunity to make Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) counselling available to all Fire Service volunteers (\$24 per member annually)

FSANS has been looking at a Family Members Assistance Program that would cost \$24 per member per year. This gives access for the entire family to life skills help, counseling, and legal assistance. The Municipality could offer to pay for this service, or explore how this could be added to the insurance program under review.

Budget

The budget below is the commitment made by the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg. Individual Fire Departments will be responsible for any items under their responsibility.

	One-time expense	Annual expense
Develop recruitment marketing materials	\$3,000	\$200
Developed and distribute recruitment package	\$500	\$100
Print & distribute annual recruitment & recognition newsletter		\$2,000
Paid newspaper ads		\$2,000
Paid radio ads		\$3,000
Paid Facebook ads		\$500
Increased community presence		\$1,000
Annual thank you BBQ		\$8,000
Online soft skills training		\$1,000
EFAP		\$16,000
Additional staff resource – dependant on tactics selected		\$22,500
Total		\$59,800