



## Committee of the Whole Report

### For the Meeting of February 7, 2019

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**To:** Committee of the Whole **Date:** January 21, 2019  
**From:** Paul Bruce, Fire Chief  
**Subject:** Renewing Opportunities for Citizen Involvement in Emergency Preparedness

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### RECOMMENDATION

That resources be dedicated to the continued enhancement and opportunities for citizen involvement in the Emergency Social Services (ESS), Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) support, Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS), and Cyclist Response Team (CRT) volunteer teams as well as public education programs and initiatives such as Connect and Prepare, as identified through the Emergency Management BC Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Program.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the *Emergency Program Act*, local authorities are responsible for ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of their citizens. In 2009, in an attempt to further supplement the legislated requirements, recognizing that the City of Victoria is at risk of experiencing a structurally damaging earthquake, the Ground Search and Rescue team of the City of Victoria, transitioned to an Urban Search and Rescue team under direction of the Emergency Program Coordinator and the Fire Chief, in absence of Council direction or resolution. In 2015 an Operational Review of Victoria Emergency Management was conducted and staff have worked diligently on rebranding, renewing and revitalizing the emergency program for the City of Victoria in accordance with previous Council direction.

Since 2015, under direction of the Fire Chief, the Emergency Management Division budget has been integrated into the Fire Department budget. The three FTE positions in Emergency Management previously consisted of an Emergency Program Coordinator (EPC), Deputy Emergency Program Coordinator (previously Emergency Social Services Director) and administrative support through a clerk position. Through the restructuring process, the FTE complement is now EPC, Deputy EPC and Emergency Management Community Liaison (CUPE) to better deliver and motivate enhanced corporate and community educational programs focused primarily on preparedness, planning and neighbourhood connections. The previous Victoria Emergency Management Agency (VEMA) has been renamed to Emergency Management Victoria (indicating it is not a stand-alone agency), with the out-facing branding of "VictoriaReady", empowering volunteers and citizens to get involved in emergency preparedness activities and recognize that emergency preparedness is a shared responsibility, ultimately increasing our community's resilience.

Staff remain focused on integrating emergency preparedness workshops with Fire and Life Safety education to schools, rest homes, cooperatives, high rise multi-occupancy residences, businesses, and community groups to ensure efficiency and messaging in regards to life safety issues, and ensuring all population groups, including vulnerable groups, are incorporated into emergency planning.

The focus on the renewal of volunteer opportunities has included review, risk analysis, cost benefit analysis and development of strategy on the realistic “response” and “management” capacity of staff, with oversight of volunteer programming. The recent partnership with the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) is an example of the renewed strategic direction of the City’s Emergency Social Services (ESS) programming. Increased focus on issues such as neighbourhood connectedness and preparedness, public education, ESS, auxiliary communications, cyclist response, and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) teams training to align with coordinated and realistic response objectives, with respect to costs, risk management and regulatory framework, remains the key focus of the emergency management division in preparation and planning for an extraordinary event of any type.

Emergency Management BC provides support and protection for local government using volunteers and provides the essential legal authority to recognize volunteer groups in responding to emergencies and disasters. Registered Public Safety Lifeline Volunteers are eligible for some benefits and basic response expenses. There is additional support available in the way of coordination and training.

The following volunteer teams are recognized through EMBC’s Public Service Lifeline Volunteer Program:

- Emergency Social Services (ESS)
- Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR)
- Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue (RCMSAR)
- Provincial Emergency Program Air Search & Rescue (PEP Air SAR)
- BC Road Rescue Service
- Emergency Radio Communications/ Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS)
- General Service Volunteer (this is where our Cyclist Response Team fits)

City of Victoria volunteers have been provided increased opportunities through roles and education with the ESS Canadian Red Cross Team, Cyclist Response Team, UAV program, EOC support team, auxiliary communications services, and Geographic Information Science (GIS) projects. Staff in Emergency Management Victoria have focused on the improvement and identification on enhanced training and opportunity through alignment with all stakeholders and, through adherence to the regulatory oversight of EMBC, WorkSafeBC and Public Safety Canada.

The Emergency Management Division maintains as many of these teams as possible providing extensive opportunities for citizen involvement in emergency preparedness through ESS and ACS, as well as thinking outside the box in the general volunteer category through the Cyclist Response Team (CRT), Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) support team, public education and tabling volunteers, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) pilots. The City of Victoria also trains and collaborates with Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue (RCMSAR), the Vancouver Island Search and Disaster Dog Association of Canada (VISDDAC), St. John’s Ambulance therapy dogs, and the South Island Pets team. The Emergency Management Division also recognizes the value of citizen involvement in community preparedness and resilience and has developed the Connect and Prepare program which provides opportunities for community members to connect in order to work on emergency preparedness initiatives for their neighbourhoods.

Through investigation and review of liability and injury protection insurance for volunteers, staff received notification from EMBC that Victoria USAR volunteers are not protected by the province for any injuries incurred as the result of response to incidents nor, are they considered Public Safety Lifeline Volunteers under the legislation. The awareness that our volunteers did not have any liability or WorkSafeBC coverage for responses, prompted staff to suspend training and further review the regulatory and operational concerns related to this component of the volunteer program. Staff contacted WorkSafeBC who confirmed the USAR volunteers are not covered through WorkSafeBC and, through further application to have them included, were denied coverage.

On January 18, 2019 staff received a revised Workers' Compensation Coverage and Liability Coverage Policy from EMBC, but unfortunately this revised policy still does not provide response coverage for USAR volunteers as it does not include them as Public Safety Lifeline volunteers. As such the roles of volunteers had to be re-examined.

## **PURPOSE**

The Purpose of this report is to articulate and report on the ways in which the Victoria Fire Department (VFD), through the Emergency Management Division, has been renewing opportunities for citizen involvement in Emergency Management and preparedness activities, such as through the following programs:

- Emergency Social Services (ESS)
- Auxiliary Communications Services (ACS) volunteer team
- Cyclist Response volunteer team (CRT)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) program
- Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) support volunteer team
- Connect and Prepare Program
- Geographic Information Science (GIS) projects
- Public education and outreach activities (tabling at festivals)
- Collaboration with the Vancouver Island Search and Disaster Dogs Association of Canada (VISDDAC) and the South Island Pets team.
- Collaboration on training and exercises with external stakeholders and regional partners

Through direction of Council on implementation of the recommendations of the Operational Review in 2015 and, through the restructure and revitalization of the Emergency Management Division, staff have focused on renewing opportunities for “volunteers” through non-operational and tactical roles, in alignment with provincial oversight to emergency preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. The opportunities available to residents of the City of Victoria are considered robust by industry standards. Staff have included the use and training of volunteers with the Cyclist Response Team, the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) programming, EOC support team, Connect and Prepare, and include all other programs available for volunteer opportunities traditionally associated with Local Government roles such as Emergency Social Services, Auxiliary Communications, and general-purpose volunteers.

A component of the programming identified as a risk through the Operational Review and, through post review risk analysis by staff, surrounds the inclusion of Urban Search and Rescue as a role for volunteers. Traditionally, this service is delivered through federal government programs which are highly structured and focus on specialized skills and training, including certified training courses delivered through a robust professional, following a standardized training schedule where skills

such as rope rescue, confined space entry and air quality monitoring are included as “crossover” skills. The Province of British Columbia does not recognize Urban Search and Rescue as a Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer program. Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR) is a federally run program, with five recognized teams across the country. At this point in time the Federal government does not recognize the need for a HUSAR team on Vancouver Island. The closest team currently is Canada Task Force 1 in Vancouver. Staff will continue to investigate opportunities for Victoria Fire Department to train with Canada Task Force 1 in order to build local USAR capacity among first responders with existing WorkSafe and liability coverage.

## **BACKGROUND**

In part, this report arises from the Motion adopted by Council on August 8, 2018, that:

1. Requests that staff engage Emergency Management BC, WorkSafeBC, Victoria Firefighters Local 730, and Victoria Emergency Program volunteers and report back to Council in the Quarterly Update in December 2018 with recommendations to renew opportunities for citizen involvement in emergency preparedness, giving consideration to issues including:
  - effective coordination of volunteers with command structures and responsibilities of professional first responders in the Victoria Fire Department and other municipal, provincial and federal agencies;
  - insurance coverage for volunteers providing assistance during emergencies;
  - opportunities for training and skills development for volunteers; and
  - public education opportunities to broaden citizen engagement in emergency preparedness and response efforts.
2. Requests that the Mayor, on behalf of Council, write to the BC Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, requesting that the Province of British Columbia and its agencies Emergency Management BC and WorkSafeBC work with the City of Victoria to renew opportunities for citizen involvement in emergency preparedness, including Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer certification of urban search and rescue volunteers to ensure eligibility for insurance coverage

Based on the above motion, staff recommend that Council review this report and further direct staff in relation to Council resolution of the meeting of August 8, 2018; Renewing Opportunities for Citizen Involvement in Emergency Preparedness.

to continue to provide opportunities for citizen involvement in Emergency Preparedness roles within the scope of Emergency Management British Columbia’s (EMBC) Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer (PSLV) program. Staff have made significant progress in providing enhanced opportunities for training and skills development for volunteers (through exercises, cross training and the Red Cross partnership); and public education opportunities which have broadened citizen engagement in emergency preparedness and response efforts (such as the Connect and Prepare program and EMBC’s Partners in Preparedness program).

Unfortunately, Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) does not fall under EMBC’s PSLV program and it is therefore not recommended that this team be maintained as an all-volunteer team under the Emergency Management Division. The lack of liability and WorkSafeBC coverage for volunteers on the USAR team is a major concern, and because of the high risk associated with this team, options for private insurance coverage are either inadequate or extremely expensive.

**Definition of USAR:** Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) is a general term for a group of specialized rescue skills that are integrated into a team with resources that include search, medical and structural assessment capacity. USAR teams are trained to locate trapped persons in collapsed structures and other entrapments using specially trained dogs and electronic search equipment, as well as breach, shore, lift and remove structural components, use heavy construction equipment to remove debris, and medically treat and transfer victims (Public Safety Canada, 2018).

The City of Victoria transitioned from its original Ground Search and Rescue (GSAR) team over to an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team in 2009. This decision was based on the rationale that our region already possessed GSAR capacity through regional teams, the City of Victoria doesn't have the forests, mountains, and rivers in which GSAR is typically required, yet we remain vulnerable to potential injury and fatalities based on identification of building stock and seismic risk in Victoria which acceptingly, provides a basis for USAR programming. The initial operational strategy of the USAR team was to form a team composed of City staff with personnel from Parks, Engineering and Fire in order to build the necessary capacity to deliver a Medium Urban Search and Rescue team, capable of responding to a structural collapse within the City of Victoria. Despite initial plans the USAR team was created and composed solely of volunteers, most of whom had no previous experience or training, and was not supplemented by city staff.

USAR teams fall under the jurisdictional oversight of Federal legislation and programming, through Public Safety Canada and do not operate under the policies, procedures, and guidelines set out by Emergency Management BC, nor are they considered PSL volunteers. Protection for workers, whether volunteer or contractual, is covered through Public Safety Canada. Public Safety Canada recognizes and supports five Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (HUSAR) teams across the country, and the City of Victoria's team is not one of these. Public Safety Canada feels that these five teams provide the necessary response capacity for Canada.

A citywide seismic vulnerability assessment for the City of Victoria outlined significant risks and vulnerabilities associated with our seismic risk. Due to these risks and vulnerabilities, the City of Victoria recognizes the need and benefits of developing local USAR capacity to minimize this risk and be able to respond quickly and effectively to local and potentially regional emergencies. Our building stock make it most suitable for the City to build capacity for Medium USAR capabilities as outlined in the Canadian USAR classification guide.

A response of this type, in the event of a "structural collapse", requires skilled and tactical operational specialties including rope rescue, concrete cutting and lifting, shoring and other operational tactics and skills usually completed through professional, qualified instruction and, adhering to strict industry standards and regulations, including NFPA and WorkSafeBC.

As an example, Structural Collapse Level 1 instruction includes training and effective familiarization with:

- Risk Management
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Site evaluation and size-up including identification of hazards
- Structural engineering systems
- Familiarization with basic structural collapse rescue tools
- Shoring tools & lumber
- Rotary saw with a mix of blades or a universal blade for wood, metal & concrete
- Breaking tools (sledges etc.)
- Airbags (high pressure preferred, low pressure can be utilized if necessary)

- Shoring, breaching, lifting and rigging techniques
- Applicable technical rope skills
- Incident Command System (ICS) as it pertains to structural collapse
- SOG's for structural collapse

Much of this training aligns with the training that is presently provided to professional responders and firefighters for rescue, technical rescue operations, specialty rescue operations and are guided through regular requirements of documentation of training, recertification's and equipment testing, replacement and inspections. Through regular training and specialty team composition, these tasks are usually accomplished over many hours of cohesive and specific training protocols and guidelines.

## ISSUES & ANALYSIS

In correspondence dated January 2009 from City of Victoria Emergency Management staff, titled "USAR talk to Directors", the 2009 team was outlined as follows:

*"The City currently supports a small Urban Search & Rescue Team. This team is comprised of volunteers. The team's size is about 20 people, but its capability is somewhat less due to a steady turn-over in membership. A high percentage of volunteers tend to be transient and volunteer recruitment, and particularly retention, have proven to be difficult. As a result of the challenges of maintaining a volunteer-based team, the current volunteer-based team does not have the full capacity and capability it needs to fulfill even a basic level of urban search and rescue."* (Unknown City of Victoria Author, 2009).

This letter provides some fundamental clarity of the challenges of volunteer recruitment, retention, and maintenance of training levels of an operational or tactical capacity, referencing USAR and, was at the time, proposing that the team be comprised of City staff with key skill sets (including fire dept., engineering and public works, police, parks, recreation & facilities), dedicated volunteers with key skill sets, and key partner agencies such as engineers and BC Ambulance Service (BCAS). The proposal in 2009 was that the team would use the federal guidelines set out by Public Safety Canada as its basic standards when defining Light, Medium and Heavy USAR.

Despite the lack of Council direction, the GSAR was migrated to the role of USAR. The VictoriaUSAR Team became an "all-volunteer" based team which trained twice per month at the CFB Esquimalt training grounds under the guidance of a volunteer team leader who, had no trainer or instructor certifications in Search and Rescue skills. Staff did not provide any direct oversight of the team and in 2016, an Emergency Program Specialist was hired to sort the regulatory and training issues identified. Staff met with the Municipal Insurance Association of British Columbia (MIABC) to determine the scope of insurance coverage and liability issues associated with continuance of the program.

### Correspondence from WorkSafeBC:

*"Along with the attached voluntary application form please include (in a separate document) written evidence with respect to how the Victoria Urban Search and Rescue organization applies to each of the listed 12 terms and conditions. Once received, the Board will review the application, and should it find that the undertaking meets each of the terms and conditions a recommendation will be sent to the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council for a final decision."*

Five of the terms and conditions specifically highlight the importance of the program being supported by the Provincial Government. Due to this fact, staff met with EMBC staff to discuss.

Although EMBC stated they see the importance of not only the City of Victoria, but also the region building capacity in the area of USAR, due to the high risk associated with structural collapses from seismic events, they are unable to support or extend coverage to volunteers responding in this capacity. EMBC provided a letter stating these facts which was included with an application for coverage for volunteers to WorkSafeBC on October 16th, 2018. On November 7th, 2018, staff received notice that the application for coverage was declined:

As section 3(5)(b) of the Act's extension of coverage is an exceptional exercise of authority, it requires strict compliance with the policy and the terms and conditions set forth in the application. The first such condition is that the organization seeking coverage must be a legally constituted non-profit organization. Since the Emergency Management division is part of the City of Victoria's Fire Department, and the City of Victoria is not a non-profit organization, this condition is not met. Thus, as the VUSAR does not satisfy the terms and conditions for extended coverage under section 3(5)(b) of the Act, the volunteers do not have coverage under the Act for those services.

As directed by Council motion, the Victoria Fire Department (VFD) engaged with the Victoria Firefighter's Association and received the letter attached at Appendix C, in response to a request to include any concerns with the Council motion, specifically related to the "effective coordination of volunteers with command structures and responsibilities of professional first responders in the VFD and other municipal, provincial and federal agencies." The Union does not support coordination of volunteers with the command structure of professional first responders due to concerns related to training, experience and safety. These concerns are similar to what the administration of the Fire Department and any other first responder agency, responsible for the coordination of planning and response, would identify as potential risk management issues related to personnel management.

As with the other identified issues, concern related to the management of Critical Incident Stress Management and mental health issues is another potential risk associated with maintenance of volunteers in an active tactical response role within the department. In the absence of WorkSafeBC coverage, disability benefits and/or employee assistance for psychological care, exposing volunteers to potentially traumatic events may give rise to additional liability risk for the City.

If the City of Victoria wishes to maintain volunteers in rescuer roles, staff recommend that a robust recruitment standard is put in place which involves a process similar to what Victoria Fire Suppression members go through, in order to ensure:

- That volunteers possess the foundational skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to succeed in this high-risk role. Staff also recommend that training procedures and standards are put in place which follow Public Safety Canada USAR classification guide for a medium team, NFPA standards and INSARAG guidelines.
- Volunteers are properly protected as there is a high level of risk associated with USAR
- That the significant additional resources are allocated by Council to develop a recruitment and training program which addresses the risks of a USAR program.

### *Accessibility Impact Statement*

As a component of the Emergency Plan and the associated response plans, staff have taken the approach of developing all-inclusive plans which include the recognition of accessibility issues in order to represent the diversity of residents in the City.

## *2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan*

Victoria's Emergency Management objectives are consistent with and complement the 2015 – 2018 Strategic Plan objectives, specifically to:

- innovate and lead through our internal city planning as well as community programs;
- engage and empower the community through our neighbourhood, volunteer, and education programs;
- facilitate social inclusion and community wellness by consulting with key stakeholders such as the Disability Alliance of BC (DABC) and using the functional needs framework for activities that promote community resilience; and
- plan for emergencies including climate change short and long-term, by taking an all-hazards approach.

## *Impacts to Financial Plan*

The recommended course of action can be accommodated within the current financial and human resources of the Department.

## *Official Community Plan Consistency Statement*

Our Emergency Management activities align with the Official Community Plan goals outlined in Section 18 – Emergency Management:

- Victoria is prepared to deal with known hazards and emerging threats, to limit the adverse impacts of events, and effectively manage emergencies;
- Victoria is able to respond rapidly and effectively to all emergencies, including events with long-term impacts and recovery times; and
- Residents can rely on significant local sources for food, energy and materials to meet daily needs under emergency conditions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Emergency Management Division of the Victoria Fire Department provides a wide range of opportunities for volunteers to participate in the active planning, response and assistance to residents of the City and to ensure an effective, proficient and efficient response is the primary objective of both staff and those donating their time. The volunteers associated with this programming are dedicated to a high level of cooperation within the volunteer communities of all the regional municipalities and maintain a very good relationship with all staff. The department is very respectful of the time committed by all those who provide their services and regularly review recognition strategies to confirm the appreciation of these services.

Through contractual agreement with the Department of National Defence (DND), access to the structural collapse training ground is available to City of Victoria. As a result of this arrangement, increased alliance and planning for response to structural collapse events and cross training of teams has been achieved. Staff from the City of Victoria have trained under direction of DND instructors and, have worked with staff from CFB Esquimalt and other regional fire service groups to train in this function. Since the Operational Review of 2015, staff have worked well in promoting and creating opportunity for City of Victoria residents with regards to assistance and roles to fellow citizens during an extraordinary event. Additionally, the establishment of the Regional Emergency Management Planning group through the CRD has assisted in establishing greater clarity to regional issues for Emergency Management in regards to preparation, planning, mitigation and



response. A key factor in this alliance is the information sharing and collaboration of servicing based on each municipality's ability to contribute. As an independent and non-supported program, USAR remains as a program which is not supported through EMBC's Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer program, therefore, it is recommended that structural collapse response training remain in the care and control of the region's first responder community or, through staff assigned to this particular tasking through Council direction. It is recommended that opportunities for training and skills development for volunteers and public education opportunities to broaden citizen engagement in emergency preparedness and response efforts are continued through the many other opportunities outlined in this report.

Respectfully submitted,

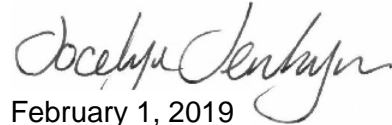


Tanya Patterson  
Emergency Program Coordinator



Paul Bruce  
Fire Chief

**Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:**



**Date:** February 1, 2019

#### List of Attachments

- Appendix A - Response from WorkSafeBC
- Appendix B - Canadian Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Classification Guide
- Appendix C - Victoria Fire Fighter's Association letter
- Appendix D - Connect and Prepare overview
- Appendix E - Interested in Volunteering?
- Appendix F - City of Victoria Emergency Program Bylaw
- Appendix G - EMBC Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Safety Policy 2.06  
EMBC Search and Rescue Policy 2.12  
EMBC Public Safety Lifeline Volunteer Code of Conduct 1.02  
EMBC Terms and Definitions
- Appendix H - Revised policy suites 5.07 Workers' Compensation Coverage and 5.08 Liability Coverage