



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of July 13, 2023

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** July 13, 2023
From: Daniel Atkinson, Fire Chief
Subject: Amended Reciprocal Fire Services Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreement

RECOMMENDATION

That Council authorize the Mayor and the City Clerk to execute, on behalf of the City of Victoria, the amended Reciprocal Fire Services Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreement with the District of Saanich, the District of Oak Bay, and the Township of Esquimalt, generally in the form appended as Appendix A, and in a final form to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to provide Council with updated information related to the existing Fire Service Mutual and Automatic Aid Arrangement Agreement held between the City of Victoria and the Township of Esquimalt, and the Reciprocal Fire Services Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreement held between the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the District of Oak Bay.

There are no material changes to the amended agreement beyond the addition of the Township of Esquimalt as a party to the new agreement. The addition of the Township of Esquimalt has been agreed to by each of the other participant municipalities and will be mutually beneficial to all parties to the agreement.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to withdraw from the existing bilateral Fire Service Mutual and Automatic Aid Arrangements Agreement held between the City of Victoria and the Township of Esquimalt and to update and amend the existing trilateral agreement between the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the District of Oak Bay to include the Township of Esquimalt.

BACKGROUND

On March 5, 2020, Council directed staff to advise the participants of the 1980 Firefighting Mutual Aid Agreement on the decision of Council to seek a renewed agreement, subject to formal notification on departure from participation within the terms of the original 1980 agreement. Staff were directed to work with the core municipalities (Oak Bay, Saanich, and Esquimalt), on the implementation of an acceptable updated Mutual Aid Agreement(s) between the parties.

On January 25, 2021, the trilateral agreement presently held with the District of Saanich and the District of Oak Bay was officially executed followed by the bilateral agreement presently held with the Township of Esquimalt on March 29, 2021.

It remains the position of staff that each of these agreements provided improved value when compared to the previously held and outdated 1980 Firefighting Mutual Aid Agreement. Since the establishment of each of these agreements, staff have remained focussed on prioritizing fire service collaboration between the “four-core” departments and to establish further efficiencies and opportunities for mutual benefit. These include the need for further training integration, the development of standard operating guidelines, sharing of pre-fire plan information and documentation, and an agreed system of governance.

There are no material changes to the amended agreement beyond the addition of the Township of Esquimalt as a party to the new agreement.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Firefighting Mutual Aid Agreements are a common operational tool employed by many municipalities. The principal benefit of Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreements is to provide access to supplemental firefighting supports during extraordinary or rare events where the local municipal resources are insufficient.

The addition of the Township of Esquimalt to the agreement is mutually beneficial to all four-core municipalities and establishes a framework for enhanced cooperation and the sharing of specialty resources when available.

It should be noted; however, that the establishment of Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreements does not replace the need for each municipality to adequately resource their emergency services departments based on an assessment of their individual community risk profile, occupancy types, building stock, or other unique municipal characteristic. Additionally, the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) requires each municipal fire department to establish a service level and accompanying training curriculum specific to the needs of its community. With increasing call volume in all jurisdictions, and the increased likelihood of concurrent events, consecutive events, extreme weather events and other emergency situations with the ability to impact entire regions and exhaust the capacity of regional emergency services, the availability of external resources is both unreliable and uncertain and should not be solely relied upon as a risk mitigation strategy.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan

The recommendation aligns with the priorities identified by council in the 2023 - 2026 Strategic Plan including Community Well-Being and Safety.

Impacts to Financial Plan

There are no projected impacts to the financial plan.

CONCLUSIONS

The existing bilateral agreement between the City of Victoria and the Township of Esquimalt and the trilateral agreement between the City of Victoria, the District of Saanich, and the District of Oak Bay, mark significant improvement from the long outdated 1980 Firefighting Mutual Aid Agreement; but further improvements are possible. With the addition of the Township of Esquimalt to the existing trilateral agreement, the four-core departments will have a unified agreement, shared between all parties, for the purpose of establishing joint training initiatives, information sharing, and other operational efficiencies which will benefit all participant municipalities.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniel Atkinson
Fire Chief

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager

List of Attachments

Appendix A – Amended Reciprocal Fire Services Mutual and Automatic Aid Agreement