



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (March 29, 2018)

Prospects for Integrated Fire Dispatch still alive

A CRD staff report, prepared in consultation with several local fire chiefs, was received and discussed yesterday by the CRD Planning and Protective Services Committee. The report offered the following conclusion:

"Without exception fire leaders in the region stated that there would be significant and operational and economy of scale benefits to the establishment of a regional fire dispatch system ultimately leading to improved emergency response and firefighter safety".

The report was in response to a CRD Board Directive at the December 13, 2017 meeting asking staff to provide an analysis to determine how a regional fire dispatch service for all 13 municipalities and surrounding unincorporated areas could be established.

Committee members discussed and generally supported the concept of one regional fire dispatch centre and approved a motion to forward the report to the CRD Board, along with a recommendation that staff provide costing models for three potential facility locations:

- (1) The new 9-1-1/Police Dispatch Centre
- (2) Saanich Fire
- (3) Langford Fire

The report identifies benefits of a single dispatch centre, including:

- savings through reduced staffing level requirements from the present four staff per shift in three centres, to three staff per shift in a single centre
- improved response times
- enabling supplementary mutual aid agreements to dispatch the closest hall to each incident, without regard to municipal boundaries

All committee members agreed it was premature to make decisions, but they supported the recommendation for a single regional centre, subject to receiving further information on costing.

Currently fire dispatch is provided by three separate dispatch centres. Victoria has its own, but has been in discussions to merge its operations with the Saanich centre. Langford, under contract with the CRD, provides for Sooke, Highlands, Metchosin and all fire departments in the unincorporated areas. The Saanich centre provides contract services for 7 other municipalities, 5 of which are operating on short-term contracts until the end of April, at which time higher rates may come into force.

Unfortunately, negotiations for renewal of those 5 agreements with Saanich at substantially increased rates has led the 5 municipalities to seek other service alternatives, including a bid from Surrey that was significantly lower than the Saanich rates. The 5 councils are in various stages of contractual negotiations with Surrey and are seeking a connection to the CREST system for that purpose.

This places the prospects of an inclusive regional dispatch service at risk.

Time is of the essence. A special CRD Committee meeting has been called for late April.

Amalgamation Yes has been following this debate with great concern and suggest several actions to keep the goal of a regional fire dispatch moving forward. These include:

1. That Saanich extend their temporary agreements with the 5 fire departments for a period of 3 - 6 months from the end of April.
2. If Saanich agrees to extend the current agreements, that Colwood, Esquimalt, North Saanich, Sidney and View Royal councils agree to delay formalizing any agreements with Surrey while the CRD carries out their additional work and until the CRD Board and the 13 municipalities reach an agreement on creating a single fire dispatch centre. This is clearly in the region's best interests.
3. That Saanich extend their agreement with Central Saanich for fire dispatch (after it terminates in August) until the CRD initiative is complete.
4. That Victoria and Saanich actively pursue negotiations and formalize their previous announcement to either transfer Victoria fire dispatch to Saanich or to a third party facility, e.g. [E-COMM](#) that is slated to operate the new 9-1-1/Police Dispatch Centre.
5. That, when selecting a fire dispatch service provider, consideration be given to contracting the operation to E-COMM.

We urge all parties to delay a rush to judgment, and to take time to step back and await a report that can provide more detail on possible cost savings.

There is an opportunity for all parties to reconsider that instead of a singular pursuit of short term financial gains, that they instead consider the benefits of inter-municipal operational arrangements to improve both response effectiveness and public safety.

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