



**SUBJECT:** Volunteer Firefighter Compensation Proposal

**TO:** Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

**FROM:** Fire Department

Report Number: BFD-04-22

Wards Affected: All

File Numbers: 755-07

Date to Committee: December 8, 2022

Date to Council: December 13, 2022

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### **Recommendation:**

Approve the compensation model for Burlington Volunteer Firefighters be changed from the honorarium remuneration (point system) to an hourly rate that would compensate volunteer firefighters in accordance with the minimum wage provisions of the Employment Standards Act as generally described in report fire department report BFD-04-22.

### **Vision to Focus Alignment:**

- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment
- Deliver customer centric services with a focus on efficiency and technology transformation.

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### **Background and Discussion:**

As of October 1st, 2022, the Burlington Fire Department consolidated volunteer fire operations and merged volunteer staff from Station #1 to Station #5 – Kilbride.

This consolidation added some much-needed depth to the response capabilities in the rural areas of the City of Burlington as well as gave us the ability to elevate the skills of our volunteer firefighters who are now required to be certified to NFPA 1001 – Level 2 to perform duties customarily done by them.

Fire station #5 in the community of Kilbride receives approximately 120 calls per year with most of these calls being medical, alarm conditions or motor vehicle collisions. To

service these types of calls, a single volunteer fire apparatus is responded from the local fire station and is always backed up with a career staffed apparatus from the urban core to guarantee a response.

Although the current community risk and demand for service does not warrant the expense of a career staffed fire unit, maintaining a viable volunteer response is a priority to meet our mandates under the Fire Prevention and Protection Act. Currently Burlington's volunteer fire fighters are remunerated by way of an honorarium, as approved by Council. The current system has been in place since 1999 and has served the department well over the years. Remuneration is calculated based on a points system. Volunteer firefighters accrue points based on their attendance at training nights, incident calls and public relations events.

That said, we are one of very few departments who still calculate the remuneration of their volunteer firefighters by this method and Station 5 Volunteers have in recent years expressed a desire to move to an hourly rate which is the system used by the majority of Fire Departments in the Region utilizing volunteer firefighters.

### **Proposed Pay Structure:**

The recommended compensation model is an hourly-based model whereby volunteer firefighters are directly compensated for time worked to facilitate:

- Operational readiness (i.e., training, apparatus & equipment checks),
- Providing fire safety information to citizens as part of our public education mandate under the FPPA
- Respond to emergencies in the rural community.

Moving to an hourly model ensures full transparency specific to the cost of deliver for rural volunteer fire operations and ensures that volunteer firefighters are appropriately compensated when they step away from their regular employment to help their neighbors in their time of need.

The new pay model also simplifies the administrative efforts needed to support the day-to-day administration of volunteer fire operations. The predictive wage model is based on the following assumptions that predict future budget impacts related to the shift towards an hourly model versus the current points-based system.

- Volunteer firefighters rarely attend 100% of all activities (alarms, training, and other duties) and as such the 2/3 rule is applied for budgeting.
- 2023 OMERS pressure would be managed corporately like that of the rest of the city that utilize part-time staff.

- Recruit training only occurs when there is a need to fill vacant spots. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The table below summarizes the forecasted costs to implement the proposed hourly pay rate system.

RANK / JOB CLASS STRUCTURE				BASE WAGE COSTS PER INDIVIDUAL & RANK/JOB CLASS		
STATION 5 VOLUNTEER COMPENSATION	Hourly Rate	% Offset	# per Rank	Annual Base Cost Per VFF	Anticipated Cost Per VFF based on 2/3	Base Budget Based On Anticipated Attendance
Volunteer Firefighter	\$ 25.00	100%	30	\$ 9,700.00	\$ 6,466.67	\$ 194,000.00
Volunteer Captain	\$ 28.75	115%	2	\$ 11,155.00	\$ 7,436.67	\$ 14,873.33
Volunteer Training Officer	\$ 30.00	120%	1	\$ 11,640.00	\$ 7,760.00	\$ 7,760.00
Volunteer Station Captain	\$ 31.25	125%	1	\$ 12,125.00	\$ 8,083.33	\$ 8,083.33

  

PREDICTIVE MODEL PER VFF	Annual	Anticipated
<b>PLANNED ACTIVITIES</b>		
Weekly 2 hr training session at Station	104	69.33
Additional Training & Certifications	64	42.67
Monthly Station & Equipment Maintenance	48	32.00
Public Education Events Approved By FD	12	8.00
<b>RESPONSE RELATED</b>		
Approximately 120 per with majority less than 1hr	160	106.67
<b>ANNUAL HOURS PER VFF</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>258.67</b>

  

VOLUNTEER RECRUIT TRAINING (as Required)	Ttl Hours	Hourly Rate
10 recruits @ 12 hrs per week for 16 weeks	1920	\$ 15.50

  

<b>Base Wages</b>		<b>\$ 224,716.67</b>
8% Labour Burden	\$	17,977.33
4% Vacation Pay	\$	8,988.67
<b>(A) Subtotal Annual Wages</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>251,682.67</b>

  

Recruit Training	
Base Wages - Recruits	\$ 29,760.00
8% Labour Burden	\$ 2,380.80
4% Vacation Pay	\$ 1,190.40
<b>(B) Subtotal Recruit Wages</b>	<b>\$ 33,331.20</b>

  

<b>(A) + (B) Total Budget Pressure:</b>	<b>\$ 285,013.87</b>
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## Strategy/process:

Effective January 1, 2023, the Volunteer Firefighter Compensation will change to an hourly rate. This hourly rate will form the basis of a compensation scale that incorporates the position (rank) and experience of the individual volunteer firefighter.

## Options Considered

A review of Volunteer Fire Department Compensation Comparators has been conducted and is included below for your review

### Volunteer Fire Department Compensation Comparators:

Rank / Job Class	Proposed Hourly	Hamilton	Milton	Halton Hills	Essa	Orangeville	Gravenhurst	Avg Comparator	Regional AVG	Proposed Rank Offset	% of FF for Officer AVG	Off from AVG	Diff % of Regional	Diff % of Hamilton
Probationary	\$ 15.50	\$ 20.97	\$ 17.84	\$ 26.61	\$ 18.59	\$ 20.17	\$ 18.23	\$ 20.40	\$ 22.23	62%	65%	76%	70%	74%
Volunteer Firefighter	\$ 25.00	\$ 26.21	\$ 35.89	\$ 40.94	\$ 24.80	\$ 47.10	\$ 26.91	\$ 33.64	\$ 38.42	100%	100%	74%	65%	95%
Volunteer Captain	\$ 28.75	\$ 30.14	\$ 38.42	\$ 42.98	\$ 26.50	\$ 50.87	\$ 28.43	\$ 36.22	\$ 40.70	115%	108%	79%	71%	95%
Volunteer Training Officer	\$ 30.00	\$ 31.46	\$ 40.92	\$ 43.98	\$ 27.28	\$ 50.87	\$ 29.95	\$ 37.41	\$ 42.45	120%	111%	80%	71%	95%
Volunteer Station Captain	\$ 31.25	\$ 32.77	\$ 42.37	\$ 45.03	\$ 28.52	\$ 54.17	\$ 31.90	\$ 39.14	\$ 43.70	125%	116%	80%	72%	95%

**Benefits** - Implementation of the hourly compensation model will simplify the positive time reporting model for payroll:

1. Volunteer Fire – Alarm Response (VFA)
2. Volunteer Fire – Training (VFT)
3. Volunteer Fire – Other Duties (VFO)

From a budget control standpoint, an internal fire department policy would drive the allotment of hours available specific to training and other duties on a weekly/monthly basis. This includes but is not limited to:

- Facilitates a higher degree of transparency to see how much it costs to operate station 5, and better understand the type of activities occurring there.
  - Facilitates an accurate view of the funding required to facilitate volunteer firefighter training, response to alarms and other duties (i.e., administration, operational readiness – truck and equipment checks, station maintenance & cleaning).
  - Facilitates the ability to track hours worked by a volunteer is also needed as it relates to a Revenue Canada requirement that entitles a volunteer firefighter a \$3000 tax credit if they have worked 200 hours of eligible service.
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## **Financial Matters:**

### **Total Financial Impact**

The total estimated cost of implementing the hourly compensation system is estimated at \$251,682, an increase of \$8,300 over the existing points-based system. If approved this minor cost increase would be incorporated into the 2023 budget.

It is anticipated that the transition to the new compensation model should be able to be accomplished within the current funding envelope or at most a minor increase in funding to cover additional labor costs identified through the Employment Standards Act (ESA).

This proposal is somewhat like the structure of the current points system and facilitates mapping out budget pressures specific to volunteer fire operations. The training and other duties lines are easily planned for in the budget because they are based on a known amount of effort. Alarm response activity

is somewhat constant year-over-year with slight variations in actual cost depending on type of call and time of day.

The type of call and time of day will dictate the number of volunteer firefighters responding and as a result will directly flow through to the budget.

## **Source of Funding** - Existing Operating Account

### **Other Resource Impacts**

The costs associated with running a recruitment process for new Volunteer Firefighters has been identified as a potential budget impact. The need for recruitment will be assessed on an annual basis. It is not anticipated that a recruitment process will be required in 2023. The cost of this is estimated at \$33,333.

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### **Climate Implications**

Climate change has resulted in hotter summers, increased risk from flooding and increased risk to wind and ice storms. Part of the city's adaptation strategy is emergency preparedness both within the urban and rural areas. The Volunteer Fire Fighters serving the rural community from station #5 in Kilbride are an important component of the city's emergency preparedness response to these events.

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### **Engagement Matters:**

The Fire Master Plan (released in May 2022) details the need for a recruitment and retention plan; including a review of the compensation model for the Volunteer Division which is before you today.

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### **Conclusion:**

The Fire Management team concludes that the total compensation package for the volunteer firefighters including the described incentives is appropriate for this particular employee group.

Ensuring that all staff groups – including our volunteer firefighters - are treated with respect and are afforded the appropriate compensation demonstrates a tangible commitment to them as individuals and as a group. Finally, being proactive, rather than reactive to such matters is in the best interest of the Corporation and will serve to strengthen already strong and positive relationships.

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Respectfully submitted,

Karen Roche

Fire Chief

905-335-7600 ext. 6205

**Appendices:**

A. Proposed Administrative Procedures for Hourly Fire Fighter Compensation

**Report Approval:**

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Council.

## **Appendix A**

### **Proposed Administrative Procedures for Hourly Fire Fighter Compensation**

#### **Facilitating Capture of Payroll Activity:**

All volunteer fire operations activities shall be positively reported into the payroll system. Work being conducted by volunteer officers or firefighters will be against the appropriate payroll code based on the activities being conducted. simplified payroll codes will be as follows:

- Volunteer Fire – Alarm Response (VFA)
- Volunteer Fire – Training (VFT)
- Volunteer Fire – Other Duties (VFO)

All volunteer officer and firefighter activities will be entered into the payroll system noting:

- Employee who conducted the activity
- Start time of the work by noted Volunteer Officer / Firefighter
- End time of the activity by the named Volunteer Officer / Firefighter

*NOTE: Only actual times are to be reported there shall be no rounding up or down of hours worked y the volunteer officer/firefighter or by the person entering the time into the payroll system.*

All time shall be entered on the day the activity was completed. At no time will separate activities be consolidated into one event and entered the system noting a different time then what was worked.

A minimum of one hour pay shall be paid out by the payroll system after 15 mins of work activity has been entered. Should the activity be greater than one hour it shall be rounded up by half- hour increments by the payroll system and not by the person entering the time.

## **Station Administration:**

To facilitate maintaining a state of operational readiness and ensuring that the volunteer officers and firefighters are appropriately trained a set amount of pre-authorized hours shall be set out in advance by the Deputy Fire Chief of Operations.

It is expected that the Volunteer Station Captain will assign the appropriate resources to complete the necessary work within this pre-authorized allotment of hours.

Should circumstances arise that facilitate the need for additional resources to complete required work occur, the Volunteer Station Captain or designate shall receive prior authorization to exceed their allot hours in advance of any work being completed.

## **Platoon Responsibilities: PLATOON A:**

Platoon A personnel primary function is to facilitate the initial response from the station should an alarm occur within Station 5's area. It is expected that personnel if available will respond to immediately to the page to facilitate a time response from the station.

## **Platoon Responsibilities: PLATOON B:**

Platoon B personnel primary function will be to add depth to the response for resource intensive activities like structural fires, wildland/grass fires or other resource intensive operations that demand extended fireground operations requiring rehab or operation over extended period where relief staffing may be needed so that the initial responders can manage other work/family commitments.

Platoon B personnel may also be requested to provide support activities in the urban areas of Burlington if requested by the on-duty Platoon Chief or on-call Senior Fire Officer. These personnel from both platoons are expected to share in the responsibilities of maintaining the station, apparatus, and equipment.

## **Volunteer Duties and Responsibilities:**

- Volunteer Station Captain - responsible for overall operation of station 24/7/365 (payroll/ provides single point of contact for Fire Administration)
- Volunteer Training Officer – provides single point of contact for



training division, oversees and coordinates training activities within the station for all personnel.

- Volunteer Captain – on-call for response to emergencies in their communities 24/7/365 when available to respond, attend required training and assists in maintaining operational readiness with added responsibilities similar to lead hand in other departments in the municipality, helps to maintain a responsible span of control.
- Volunteer Firefighter – on-call for response to emergencies in their communities 24/7/365 when available to respond, attend required training and assists in maintaining operational readiness.

### **Requirements to Maintain Volunteer Firefighter Status:**

As noted, to complete their probationary period, volunteer firefighters are required to successfully complete NFPA 1001 Level 2 and 1075 certification within two years from their date of hire.

Additionally, they must meet all requirements set out by the Ministry of Transportation and obtain a class D driver's license with Z endorsement to allow for the operation of air braked vehicles. The department will cover the cost to upgrade a probationary volunteer firefighter's drivers license. Volunteer Fire staff shall not have any more than 3 demerit points on their driver's license.

- Must maintain an attendance record of:
- 25% of platoon callouts for respective assigned platoon.
- 75% of in-station training sessions for their assigned platoon.
- 50% of assigned station maintenance activities as directed by the Volunteer Station Captain.

### **Qualified Time Specific to Response to Alarms:**

- Upon the receipt of an alarm, the volunteer officer/firefighter shall receive payment for time worked on the alarm to the time that the last apparatus books off the air back in station.
- Should a volunteer officer/firefighter need to leave from the scene to attend to family or work matters prior to conclusion of the event shall be paid based on an end-time when they left the scene. If back at the station after the event, the time they left the station.