



Media Release

THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VFRS pilots new deployment model to maximize firefighting capacity

A new firefighter deployment pilot project is underway with a goal of improving effectiveness and reducing overtime at Vernon Fire Rescue Services (VFRS).

Vernon Fire Rescue Services is undertaking a deployment model pilot project to test and validate several approaches for improving service throughout the City. The pilot is applying strategies outlined in the *Vernon Fire Rescue Services Eight Year Strategic Plan 2018-2025*, with an overall goal of improving effectiveness.

Contracting out dispatch services in 2018 provided the ability to re-allocate four previous positions to firefighter positions. Prior to contracting out the service VFRS firefighters provided relief when dispatchers were away, committing approximately 2,000 hours of firefighter time in dispatch each year. Today, with the equivalent of five fulltime firefighters hours re-allocated to response it's time to start addressing gaps in the current deployment model.

The pilot maintains a minimum four firefighter response from Fire Station 1, located at 3401 – 30 Street. When staffing is six or above the additional firefighters work from Station 2 located at 7210 Okanagan Landing Road. Station 2 staffing levels vary from two to four firefighters and current resourcing is expected to enable this level of service throughout much of the year. Normal travel time between the stations is 11 minutes and having resources respond from the second location will help provide a more consistent level of service across Vernon's long and complex footprint.

Career and paid-per-call firefighters are working together to staff Station 2 at every opportunity. The pilot involves new assignments, the adaptation of work practices, and an increased time commitment from the paid-per-call members. In 2018, VFRS received a budget increase to accommodate more paid-per-call hours and the strategic plan calls for additional full time staffing in 2021. At that point, Station 2 will have a minimum of two firefighter staffing most of the time.

Station 3 is located at Predator Ridge and will receive a fire apparatus recognized by the Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) in 2019. Station #3 is currently staffed during high hazard periods and for special events.

"I am proud of how our team has pulled together with the implementation of this deployment pilot," said Chief David Lind. "We share a common vision and our folks have approached this with a focus on improving service for the public."

The pilot began on February 4, 2019 and is scheduled to run until November 1, 2019. In the first weeks of the pilot there have been instances in which service has been improved for customers and also instances where overtime has been avoided.

VFRS has come to rely heavily on overtime to maintain service levels and to increase staffing for larger, longer lasting events. With more resources immediately available and better positioned throughout the community it is reasonable to expect that much of the need for this can be avoided.

“A heavy reliance on overtime is unhealthy for organizations and their employees,” said Chief Lind. “In the long term it is not cost effective and our people need breaks from work to rest and recover. When the opportunities for time away are reduced we are really doing our staff a disservice. Overtime should be a leader’s tool of last resort and not a daily go to.”

The implementation of the VFRS Strategic Plan through 2018 - 2025 provides the City of Vernon with a more consistent level of fire rescue service while capitalizing on the agile utilization of resources.

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February 4, 2019 – First Day of VFRS Deployment Pilot. Left to right – Captain D. Cecchini, Deputy Chief S. Hemstad, Firefighter S. Calder, Lieutenant M. Stoll, Firefighter B. Crawford, Firefighter S. Pshyk, Firefighter J. Bradley, Chief D. Lind.