



Subject: *Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) - Governance Study*
To: Corporate and Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: December 22, 2025
Related Motions: C25(337)
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Summary

In 2025 the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) completed a Fire Services Governance Study. This study was funded by the province. The final report was presented to government on September 29, 2025. The report includes 40 recommendations.

Through January 2026 a series of engagement sessions has been established with Fire Chiefs across the province to review the recommendations in order to modernize the fire service. CAOs and emergency management officials will be engaged at the end of January.

This report provides a high-level overview of the FSANS Fire Services Governance Study recommendations for informational purposes. Appendix A includes a detailed table with municipal comment for each recommendation.

It is important to note that the recommendations in many cases are subjective to what potential impacts may or may not be as it relates to East Hants.

Financial Impact Statement

It is important to note that through the entire FSANS report there is not a financial number attached to any of the recommendations. How these recommendations are funded should be carefully thought through with Municipal engagement prior to provincial legislative changes.

Recommendation

Council has previously discussed and defeated a motion to include funding in the draft budget for a fire service needs assessment. Council determined it would wait until the province introduces legislative changes and then determine if a review is warranted.

Recommended Motion

None.

Background

There are 13 Fire Departments in East Hants. All departments are independently owned and operated through their not-for-profit associations and bylaws that govern them. Brooklyn Fire from West Hants provides first response fire protection services for East Hants residents. All departments are registered annually with the Municipality in accordance with legislation.

East Hants Municipal Council establishes fire area rates for each fire district. These are based on recommendations from the department providing the service. The area rates range from \$0.134 - \$0.22 per \$100 of assessment. The projected budget for fire services in the 2025/2026 budget is projected at \$4.6 million. This would not include the fundraising efforts of our departments and the funding that is put back into their local departments.

- In 2023/2024 Enfield increased their area rates by 2 cents per \$100 of assessment, to 14¢.
- In 2024/2025 - The fire levy rates for Maitland, Noel, Walton, Gore, Kennetcook, Rawdon, and Brooklyn were reduced by 1 cent. These fire departments will receive additional funding from the Municipality in the form of a Growth Management Grant.
- In 2025/2026 Elmsdale and Lantz increased their area rates by 2 cents per \$100 of assessment, to 16¢.

The Municipality provides bookkeeping financial services to 11 of the 13 departments.

Discussion

There are 6 main sections to the FSANS report. Each section has a preamble with a list of recommendations for a total of 40 recommendations. The sections are:

1. Governance and Legislation
2. Fire Dispatch and Communications Systems
3. Professional Standards and Training
4. Firefighter Health, Safety and Wellness
5. Sustainable Fire Service Funding
6. Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention

The following is a summary of each of the six sections. Attached to the report is a supplemental analysis that includes a list of all 40 recommendations with potential municipal impacts.

Governance and Legislation

The recommendations in this section of the report may have the most impact on the Municipality.

It identifies there are various models of fire service delivery across the province along with numerous pieces of provincial legislation that govern or impact local fire departments.

Report recommends to streamline and consolidate legislation. Also to align oversight into one Provincial department. Multiple recommendations are provincial jurisdiction rather than municipal.

Currently Municipalities are not required to provide fire services. It recommends shifting the authority and responsibility to Municipal government for providing fire service. States the need to clarify the roles and responsibilities for the role of the Fire Chief. This will likely create additional administrative burden for the Chiefs and the need for a higher level of municipal oversight for public safety will need to be resourced.

Council will need to consider (or maybe required) to establish levels of service for fire protection. This can be done through policy development. Regardless of if this report is advanced by provincial government, the development of levels of service may be something Council should consider in the future.

East Hants Fire department registers with the municipality annually to provide service. As part of their registration process each department states there is no guaranteed response of service. More specifically, it is often identified on the registration that during the day time there is no guaranteed response, as volunteer availability varies between departments. The EHFSA does have auto dispatch protocols for mutual aid to support each other. In some areas of the municipality departments have hired daytime firefighters to support responses during the day time.

Fire Dispatch and Communications Systems

This section reiterates what the fire service has been describing as needs towards improved communications. Some recommendations coincide with advocacy areas for Council such as improved cellular coverage.

There are currently two separate dispatch centres providing services for the thirteen East Hants Fire Departments. The recommendations in this section would improve service delivery for East Hants.

Professional Standards and Training

This section recommends implementing cohesive and standardized training standards across the province. It recommends NFPA Professional Qualifications and Standards should be adopted. There will be financial impacts to this recommendation that are unknown at this time.

It is important to maintain the existing dedicated volunteer base. In some situations, a person wanting to volunteer may not be able to meet the standards but could support their departments in various ways. As standards are created it is important that they do not isolate those who can volunteer in certain capacities.

Firefighter Health, Safety and Wellness

Putting a greater emphasis on the health/safety and wellness of firefighters is important for the fire service.

The recommendations state that all fire departments and firefighters, including volunteers, are subject to the OHS Act. This recommendation is fairly light in detail. One could interpret that they are recommending that departments are considered an employer. This would mean each department would need to implement a safety program for their department, if they do not already have one. That being said, the Chiefs do have strong safety practices in place. A good example is all 13 departments have developed and adopted Safe Operating Procedures (SOP's) to guide them. Putting the appropriate structure in place to meet OH&S legislation may be additional administrative burden should there be gaps from existing practices.

This section also includes many positive recommendations around improvements to mental health supports and cancer screening.

Standardized and equitable WCB coverage for all firefighters, volunteer or paid, is another recommendation. WCB for paid firefighters is not required under WCB legislation. The recommendation suggests that WCB coverage for volunteers should replace a full-time salary of their employer, if they have one. The Municipality pays WCB coverage for volunteer firefighters that is required by legislation. An increase to premium costs could be an outcome based on the recommendation. It would be challenging to implement this recommendation administratively. A more standardized approach would be suggested. The report suggests support should be provided to help firefighters with the processing of their claims and related activities. East Hants currently utilizes the contracted Risk Advisor to support the processing of WCB claims and reporting through the municipal HR team.

Important to note that the 13 East Hants departments have additional EAP supports through Homewood Health which would be ahead of the curve for parts of Nova Scotia.

Sustainable Fire Service Funding

This section focuses on the escalating costs and challenges around ageing equipment and ensuring a fire service has a sustainable funding model.

It includes additional fee for service revenue streams to be explored.

- Motor vehicle collisions occurring on provincial highways,
- Tiered medical responses in support of Emergency Health Services paramedics,
- Wildland firefighting operations in collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources.

The report recommends that municipalities carry out risk assessment and master plans to determine fire and emergency protection requirements.

“Risk assessments are a best practice that is used to identify and prioritize public safety risks, facilitating evidence-based analyses and decisions about fire protection service delivery, including:

- Locations of fire stations,
- apparatus deployment, and
- staffing considerations”.

East Hants Fire Departments have standardized their approach to insurance. Insurance is one of the biggest operating costs for departments.

Volunteer Firefighter Recruitment and Retention

Recruiting and retaining volunteers is challenging for the fire service. The report speaks to the aging of the volunteer sector within the fire service.

There is a recommendation to explore opportunities to standardize volunteer firefighter compensation across the province. Some examples provided within the report are:

- Consider implementing enhanced provincial tax credits for volunteer firefighters.
- Consider implementing municipal property tax credits for volunteer firefighters.
- Consider implementing a standardized paid-on-call compensation / honourarium model for volunteer firefighters across Nova Scotia.

The first two examples above would require provincial legislative changes. The 3rd example should be left to the local level to decide.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Council Strategic Plan 2025-2029

Goal: Strong Community

Objective: Support the long-term planning of the East Hants Fire Service and policing services.

Alternatives

In Collaboration with the East Hants Fire Service Council may choose to prepare a scope of work for an EH Fire Service Risk Assessment and Master Plan. This was previously discussed at Council and Council chose not proceed at that time until the Province had completed their review and implemented any legislative changes.

Attachments

Governance Model and Roadmap - Fire Services Governance Study, Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia
Appendix “A” - recommendations with municipal comment