

Fire Services Modernization Q&As

WHY MODERNIZATION IS NEEDED

Q: Why are you making all these changes?

- Over the past year, we've taken a hard, honest look at the state of fire services across the province.
- These changes reflect the recommendations coming out of the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia's (FSANS) governance review last year.
- Firefighters told us loud and clear what's working, what's not, and what needs to change. They want:
 - Better governance
 - Safe training
 - Standardized services.
- For far too long, the sector has been struggling under a patchwork of funding, governance arrangements with municipalities, and service levels around the province have been inconsistent.
- So, we're tackling it head on, by working *with* the fire service sector and municipalities.
- Over the last few months, our staff have met with over 300 fire chiefs and deputy chiefs, municipalities, fire service coordinators, and fire commission leaders to figure out how to implement the 40 recommendations from the recent FSANS report.
- Together with the sector, we'll build a sustainable, effective and safe sector for our firefighters.

Q: Did you consult with firefighters on these changes?

- Yes, in 2025, firefighters told the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia exactly what they needed in the governance review.
- There was also a value-for-money audit of the Nova Scotia Firefighters Training School, which also revealed governance and safety issues.
- In September 2025, the Department of Municipal Affairs introduced legislation that put the framework in place to have the Fire Modernization Act in place by September 2026.
- In January of this year, we began extensive engagement sessions with fire chiefs, deputy fire chiefs, fire commissioners, fire service coordinators and municipal CAOs across the province to figure out how to implement the recommendations coming out of that FSANS report.
- As of now, we have held over 13 sessions with participation from more than 300 participants across the Province.

Q: How much will this cost?

- Work is underway to estimate what the transition to a new model of governance for fire services and a new approach to training will cost over three years.

Q: Will municipalities have to pay for this transition?

- At least 50% of municipalities (25) already provide fire services.
- For those that don't there will be a period of support to help fire departments and municipalities with the governance, legal and financial transition.
- Changes will happen in a phased approach over the next three fiscal years, giving municipalities time to prepare for the full implementation by January 1, 2029.

Q: When will these changes be implemented?

- We know this change will take time.
- Changes will happen in a phased approach over the next three fiscal years, with full implementation by January 1, 2029.

Q: What were the results of the value-for-money audit of the Nova Scotia Firefighters School?

- The findings of the report were troubling.
- They show a consistent failure to uphold a culture of safety, and serious, unaddressed safety-related deficiencies.
- The report also identified a dysfunctional governance structure, outdated bylaws, non-existent committees, lack of strategic planning and a decline in infrastructure.
- As a result, the Province cut ties with the training school, and established the Fire Training Advisory Committee, which is tasked with building out standardized training for firefighters across the province.

Q: What were the results of the broader fire services review by FSANS?

- There were common themes noted across the province.
- They were:
 - Sustainable funding models
 - Standardized and accessible training
 - Improved recruitment and retention supports
 - Clearer governance structures
 - Consistent and coordinated dispatch systems
 - Enhanced health and safety measures
 - Equitable access to equipment and infrastructure
 - Defined levels of service based on risk assessments
 - Stronger interoperability and mutual aid arrangements
 - Sustainable approaches to medical first response.

Q: Who contributed to the fire services review?

- FSANS can speak to the details of who helped inform the review, but we know that hundreds of firefighters and fire service leaders participated in the process.
- In their final report, FSANS reported that the recommendations were based on conversations with hundreds of firefighters at 30 in-person meetings and 400 responses to a consultation survey.
- NSFM and AMANS also provided feedback on behalf of their members.

Q: What is the goal of these changes?

- The commitment of all partners is to ensure that:
 - Nova Scotians are adequately protected from fire risks through access to high-quality municipally led fire protection services no matter where they live
 - Firefighters are shown the respect they deserve by ensuring they have equipment and training they need to stay safe
- The Legislation being introduced in the House creates the Office of the Fire Commissioner, rolls out regional firefighter training, and supports fire departments and municipalities to transition to a new fire services structure.

GOVERNANCE

Q: What would an Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) be responsible for?

- An OFC was one of the recommendations coming out of the FSANS report.
- The feedback received by FSANS in its report imagines the OFC to be responsible for investigations and compliance along with the Fire Marshal, training and certification, and municipal relations, policy and legislation.
- The OFC could also oversee all aspects of fire safety and services and provide clear, consistent direction to municipalities and all fire service stakeholders through standards and regulations.
- It could also lead the development of a new training model that provides accountability, oversight, and equitable access to training resources and professional certification.

Q: What would a new governance model look like?

- A new model could see a single model of governance for fire services that is municipally led, with new levels of support and oversight from the Province.
- In a model like this, all municipal units including regional and rural municipalities, towns and villages would be required to provide fire services.
- They would have the ability to provide these services either directly, through mutual aid, or through services agreements and regional collaboration.
- A provincial Office of the Fire Commissioner would provide province-wide oversight.
- The Office would engage subject matter experts and key organizations as needed, rather than through standing committees.

Q: What will happen to fire service entities, like commissions, brigades and associations?

- FSANS told us that there is a lot of fragmentation in the governance of fire services.
- In the recommendations, existing fire service entities (such as Commissions) and statutory fire safety committees will be dissolved over a three-year period and integrate into municipal operations.
- Fire service entities, like commissions, brigades and associations play an important role in supporting local fire service delivery through local knowledge and good relationships.

- We have committed to bring Fire Commissions, Fire Safety Committees and municipalities together during the transition period to work out what role the Commissions and Committees can play in the new municipal model.

Q: Will village fire departments be required to integrate into a larger municipal unit?

- No, because villages are considered to be a municipal unit under the Municipal Government Act.
- If a village commission decides to provide fire services to residents, they can do so, or they can partner with other municipal units.

Q: Will the new model impact everyone in the same way?

- No, for at least 25 municipalities that currently provide fire services directly to their residents, this modernization process will have moderate impacts.
- There will be many positive benefits including greater clarity and collaboration, better access to safe, high-quality training for firefighters, and more consistent services to Nova Scotians regardless of where they live.

Q: Do these amendments affect DNR’s wildland firefighters?

- No. These amendments only affect volunteer and career firefighters.

Q: Who will be the most affected by these amendments?

- This will mostly affect those fire departments or commissions who are not currently tied to their municipality. This includes societies, associations, brigades and commissions.
- Of the **275** fire service entities in the province, at least 17 municipalities do not directly provide fire services to residents which means that commissions and associations are currently providing those services on a volunteer basis for Nova Scotians.
- These municipalities are:

Name
Annapolis Royal
Clark's Harbour
Kentville
Lockeport
Annapolis
Antigonish
Chester
Clare
Digby
East Hants
Inverness
Pictou

Richmond
Shelburne
St. Mary's
Victoria
Yarmouth

Q: How would new fire protection service standards be enforced? What would happen if a municipality doesn't meet standards?

- The focus would always be on collaboration, support and continuous improvement.
- The province would work with municipalities to help them set levels of service, and help them understand what standards they need to meet and the levels of training required for firefighters.
- Municipalities would be given time, guidance and tools to meet new standards through a phased implementation.

Q: What do you say to Commissions or fire departments who do not want to undergo such drastic changes?

- We know that change is difficult, and we know that it will not happen overnight.
- We are working to address long-standing challenges that are impacting residents, especially those living in rural areas.
- This will be a phased approach, with a transition period of about three years.
- That timeline is intentional.
- Meaningful change – especially change of this scale – requires planning and collaboration.
- We understand that this is a significant shift. But it's a necessary one to ensure that Nova Scotians, no matter where in the province they live, know that they will receive the same minimum levels of service from their fire department.

IMPACT ON MUNICIPALITIES

Q: How will the legislation affect municipalities?

- A legislated responsibility to provide a service can be considered a public law duty to the residents.
- To provide protections to the municipalities ahead of the January 1, 2029 transition, the FMA will propose provisions to limit municipal liability for an act, omission, or failure to provide a fire protection service if it meets provincially set fire service standards.
- Further protections can be provided to prohibit actions against a municipality mandated to provide fire protection service for a grossly negligent action of employee or volunteer firefighters.

Q: What role will municipal councils play in the new model? Will Fire Chiefs report directly to municipal council?

- Municipal council would play an important role in the new model.
- Council will be the decision-makers on fire service levels.
- Councils do not have to be experts in fire protection services. As with other areas of municipal jurisdiction, council will receive evidence-based advice from municipal staff and fire chiefs to help inform their decisions.
- CAOs may appoint a municipal fire chief or a fire services coordinator to work with a fire department in their area.

Q: How will these changes impact municipal taxpayers and fire rate payers (for rural areas where services are not provided by a municipality)?

- No decisions on taxation or rate payers have been made.
- Municipal taxation is the responsibility of municipalities, and the province will not be making any decisions on this.
- Municipalities will have three years to assess the financial implications of the change and to come up with solutions that work well for their residents.

IMPACT ON FIRE DEPARTMENTS AND FIRE FIGHTERS

Q: Will training standards be set so high that we lose volunteers?

- There is a role for everyone in Nova Scotia's fire services
- The FSANS Standards Committee is actively working on developing policies for minimum standards for the Nova Scotia Fire Service. See their work here: <https://www.fsans.ns.ca/documents-forms/standards>
- FSANS advocates for Firefighter service levels in structural firefighting:
 - Exterior (Defensive) Firefighter
 - Interior (Offensive) Firefighter
 - Support/Other Roles
 - These levels determine the risk, training requirements, and equipment allowed for firefighters at a scene.
- The new regional training model will ensure that firefighters can access training to achieve the level they desire, close to home and delivered in a hybrid environment through on-line classes for appropriate sections of the curriculum.
- Firefighters will be engaged in standardizing the colour code for the service level tags.

Q: Will these changes result in job losses, given disparate fire departments will cease to exist?

- The three year transition period will help us work together to implement a plan where there is a role for everyone in the new model.

Q: Will municipalities take the equipment that we fund-raised for and re-distribute it?

- No. There is no intention of putting all equipment on the table and re-distributing it.
- Equipment that belongs to the fire department will be grandfathered. New equipment moving forward will belong to the municipality.

- Having said that, many firefighters have identified that there is an unevenness in access to equipment across the fire service, with many departments driving end-of-life trucks and apparatus while others have new trucks and equipment. They have suggested many ways to work together to address these disparities including re-homing equipment. These opportunities will be worked out through the transition period.

Q: Will we lose our financial assets?

- There is no intention of asking fire departments to turn over financial assets.
- Fire departments have fund-raised and saved for equipment and structures. These assets will remain with the fire departments with the understanding that they support fire services in their area.
- Transitioning to a new municipally led fire service, will build on these assets as a foundation for the future.

Q: Will we still have to fund-raise for equipment and buildings?

- We have heard from many fire fighters that they are tired of having to fund raise for breathing apparatus and bunker gear.
- Bingos, Chase the Ace and other fund raisers take time and there is a dwindling number of volunteers to do the work.
- Provincial standards for equipment and training will ensure that in municipally led fire services, fund-raising for a set standard of equipment will no longer be required.
- Having said that, firefighters are unanimous in wanting the 50/50 and other forms of fundraising to stay in place.

Q: Will departments still be able to fundraise for other things?

- Yes.
- Municipally-led fire departments will be able to fundraise for 'extras', and for community-based needs and requirements.
- However, fundraising for standard equipment for safety and training will no longer be needed.

Q: Volunteer firefighters and GSAR members often have difficulty being released from their regular duties to act in their volunteer roles. How will this new fire services model help?

- We value our volunteer firefighters and GSAR members and have heard about this issue from them.
- We are currently looking at how this is being addressed in other jurisdictions and will work with other departments such as Labour, Skills, and Immigration to explore options.

CERTIFICATION / TRAINING

Q. Will legislation require all firefighters in Nova Scotia to be Level 1 certified?

- We continue to work with the fire service across Nova Scotia to ensure the legislation and standards are achievable across the province.
- Our objective is to ensure standard baseline.

- Achieving Level 1 certification will be a choice for individual firefighters to make, but it will not be a requirement.
- We want to be clear that there is place for every volunteer firefighter in the province.
- Firefighters in exterior or support positions may opt to only complete the required components of Level 1 training, as defined by their role.
- In developing new Training and Certification Standards, the Province will ensure that a variety of training options are provided in alignment with the roles that volunteers want to play.

Q. Will there be one central fire training school in the province?

- Through the FSANS report, it was recommended that training centres be established regionally so firefighters can train locally and avoid excessive travel.
- We will work toward a hub-and-spoke model for a central training facility for higher-level firefighter training and Incident Command training, with more basic training being offered locally, as recommended by the FSANS report.