



Subject: *Fire Service Review*
To: Corporate and Residential Services Committee
Date Prepared: June 19, 2026
Related Motions: C26(90)
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Summary

At its Regular Meeting in March 2026, Council directed staff to return with a report outlining options for undertaking a fire service review.

Since that direction was provided, there have been developments at the provincial level regarding the governance and delivery of fire protection services.

More recently, in April 2026, Bill 186, the *Support for Fire Protection Services Act*, received Royal Assent. The legislation introduces requirements for fire service providers to complete Community Risk Assessments and for municipalities, in collaboration with their fire service providers, to undertake Fire Protection Service Reviews.

Council received a letter from the East Hants Fire Service Association (EHFSA) in June 2026 indicating they are supportive of a Fire Service Review in order to implement a 5-year Strategic Plan for the fire service.

This report outlines a proposed framework for Fire Services Master Planning, incorporating a Community Risk Assessment and Fire Protection Service Review as foundational components. It presents options for Council's consideration should it wish to be responsive to the EHFSA and begin this work in advance of the timelines established by the Province, providing a proactive approach to understanding current service delivery, future needs, and long term planning.

Financial Impact Statement

The costs to get to a final Fire Service Master plan is estimated to cost up to \$150,000. The provincial budget this fiscal does not include a funding program to support this.

Recommendation

1. Staff recommend that Council undertake this work through a phased approach in under one procurement. The first phase would focus on completing the Community Risk Assessment, possibly using the Province's standardized tool once it becomes available. The second phase would build upon those findings by completing a Fire Protection Service Review, establishing the Municipality's desired level of fire protection service, and then developing a comprehensive Fire Services Master Plan to guide future decision-making. Council engagement would take place at each stage.
2. The need to begin strategic planning for fire services is becoming increasingly important. Council is aware of the significant capital and operational pressures facing the fire departments in East Hants. Four departments (Maitland, Mount Uniacke, Enfield, and Lantz) have identified the need for new fire stations, while increasing operational demands are driving changes to staffing models and service delivery. These pressures are occurring in advance of the Province's implementation of mandatory fire service planning requirements.
3. Thank the East Hants Fire Service Association for their June 2026 letter and respond with the following:
 - Council is supportive of funding a Fire Service Master Planning process in collaboration with the East Hants Fire Service Association.

- The EHFSA will be invited to participate in the full process - in a format to be determined by the Chiefs.
- The Municipality will utilize the results of the Community Risk Assessment to complete a Fire Protection Service Review as part of a Fire Service Master Plan in collaboration with the EHFSA.
- Due to the significant investment being made by Council and the anticipated participation of the EHFSA, results of the Fire Service Master Plan will be binding.

Recommended Motion

Move that the Corporate & Residential Services Committee recommends to Council that Council authorize the Chief Administrative Officer to undertake a Fire Protection Service Review and a Fire Services Master Plan, with a project budget of \$150,000 to be funded from GTR Contingency Reserve; and further, that engagement with Council be done after each stage of the process.

Background

In January 2026, staff presented Council with a summary of the Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) Fire Services Governance Study, which had previously been submitted to the Province.

March 2026 motion C26(90), Council directed staff to bring back a report on the level of study we could do at this time for risk and needs assessment (of the fire service) to move this thing along.

In April 2026, Bill 186, the Support for Fire Protection Services Act, received Royal Assent. The following definitions and legislative provisions are relevant to the Municipality's consideration of Community Risk Assessments and Fire Protection Service Reviews.

Fire Protection Service Level - means a level for operational capabilities, resources, training requirements or service expectations for a municipality's fire protection services that is based on an assessment of community risk and local hazards;

Fire Protection Service Plan - means a plan or program prepared by a municipality applying risk assessment considerations to reflect and implement the regulated fire protection service requirements, including training, for its fire protection service level;

Fire Protection Service Provider - means an organization, such as a fire department, fire commission, fire brigade or fire association, that is authorized and available to provide regulated fire protection services within a municipality;

Fire Protection Service Review - means an operational exercise by a fire protection service provider to collect information on community needs, existing capacity, training requirements and resource identification.

Section 11 - A municipality and a fire protection service provider shall, at the times and in the manner required by the regulations, conduct a fire protection service review to determine its fire protection service level.

In May 2026, the Municipality received a 12-month notice letter from Minister Masland, Department of Emergency Management. The letter provides notice for municipalities that may have financial impacts.

“With the introduction of the Act to Provide Support for Fire Protection Services, the Department is providing one-year notice that all municipalities - whether they oversee fire services or not - will be required to:

- conduct a fire protection service review to ensure municipalities and fire service providers make evidence-based decisions about the services they provide to their community,
- ensure that local firefighter competencies, training, and personal protective equipment meet the service standard required by the fire protection service review, and participate in a common records management system

These requirements will not take effect this fiscal year (2026-2027) and over the next three years, my team will be working closely with our municipal and fire service partners to support the design and completion of fire service reviews beginning in 2027-2028 and to develop regulations and standards”.

In June 2026, Council received letter from the East Hants Fire Service Association requesting the Municipality fund a fire service review.

Discussion

The Province has enacted legislation that will require municipalities and fire service providers to complete a Fire Protection Service Review informed by a Community Risk Assessment. While regulations are still under development, the Province has confirmed that municipalities are not required to wait for the regulations before undertaking this work.

To support municipalities, the Province is developing a standardized Community Risk Assessment Tool, anticipated to be available in Fall 2026. The tool is intended to assist municipalities in identifying local hazards, community characteristics, service demands, response capabilities, and emerging risks. The results are a foundational piece to completing a Fire Protection Service Review.

Undertaking a Fire Protection Service Review would provide Council with a comprehensive understanding of the Municipality's current fire protection services, identify service gaps and opportunities for improvement, and establish a strong foundation for future strategic planning. While a Fire Protection Service Review focuses on evaluating existing service delivery, a Fire Services Master Plan builds upon those findings to establish a long-term vision and implementation strategy for the fire service.

Fire Protection Service Review	Fire Service Master Plan
Evaluates current fire protection service delivery	Establishes the long-term strategic direction for the fire service
Assesses current state, community risks and service gaps	Identifies future service requirements and implementation priorities
Focusses on current operations	Focuses on long term planning over a 5 to 10 year timeline
Smaller in scope and lower in cost	More comprehensive and broader in strategic focus
Is foundational and contributes to a Master Planning process	Intended to guide future service delivery, capital investment and organizational planning

A Community Risk Assessment informs the Fire Protection Service Review which informs the Fire Service Master Plan.

A Community Risk Assessment and Fire Protection Service Review can be completed ahead of a Fire Service Master Plan or incorporated into the full planning process as described in the next section of the report.

FIRE SERVICE MASTER PLAN

What is a Fire Service Master Plan?

A Fire Service Master Plan is a strategic planning document that evaluates community risks, assesses current fire service capabilities, forecasts future demands, and provides recommendations to ensure fire protection services remain effective, sustainable, and aligned with community needs. A master plan needs to ensure recommendations are informed by local expertise, operational experience and community needs.

Why Develop a Fire Service Master Plan?

A Fire Service Master Plan:

- Aligns fire protection services with community risks and needs.

- Provides strategic direction through short-, medium-, and long-term priorities.
- Supports sustainable community growth and development.
- Promotes operational efficiency, accountability, and responsible resource allocation.
- Ensures compliance with applicable legislation, standards, and industry best practices.
- Builds public and Council confidence through transparent, evidence-based decision making.

How is it developed?

1. Community Risk Assessment

Identify and evaluate the factors that influence the demand for fire protection services, including:

- Geographic characteristics
- Population and demographics
- Land use, industries, and building stock
- Critical infrastructure
- Transportation networks
- Natural and human-caused hazards

2. Current State Review

Assess the municipality's existing fire service delivery model, including:

- Emergency call volumes and response times
- Staffing and volunteer capacity
- Fire stations, apparatus and equipment
- Training, policies and operational procedures
- Mutual aid agreements
- Administration, governance and financial sustainability

3. Future Demand Analysis

Evaluate how anticipated growth and changing community conditions may affect future fire service requirements by examining:

- Population growth projections
- Development patterns
- Future land use
- GIS mapping
- Forecasted emergency call volumes
- Future infrastructure, staffing and resource requirements

4. Gap Analysis

Compare the current level of service with projected future needs to identify:

- Service gaps
- Operational deficiencies
- Capacity issues
- Compliance with legislation and standards
- Opportunities for improvement

5. Level of Service

Develop a recommended level of service that reflects:

- The municipalities identified risks
- Industry best practices and standards
- Council priorities
- Financial sustainability

6. Recommendations and Implementation Plan

Develop prioritized recommendations based on risk, operational need, and financial sustainability.

Recommendations may include:

- Station locations and coverage
- Volunteer and Staffing models
- Apparatus replacement strategies
- Training and professional development
- Technology and communication investments
- Capital infrastructure planning
- Implementation priorities and phased timelines

Note: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards are an important benchmark for evaluating fire protection and would be considered where appropriate throughout the planning process. However, they are intended to inform planning rather than establish mandatory service levels. With East Hants having diverse urban and rural areas, recommendations would be based on community risk, operational needs, and local capacity. This approach is consistent with the province's Bill 186 which establishes Community Risk Assessments and Fire Protection Service Reviews as the starting point for fire protection planning.

Collaborative Approach

- A Fire Service Master Plan needs to be developed in collaboration with the 13 East Hants Fire Departments (Fire Protection Service Providers).
- Each department's knowledge, experience, and operational realities will inform the planning process.
- The objective is to identify opportunities to strengthen fire protection services across the municipality while recognizing local needs and capabilities.
- Recommendations would be evidence-based, informed by community risk, service demands, and collective input.

Conclusion

A Community Risk Assessment provides the foundation for a Fire Protection Service Review, which in turn informs the development of a Fire Services Master Plan. These components provide Council with an evidence-based framework to understand community risks, evaluate current service delivery, establish an appropriate level of service, and identify long-term priorities for investment.

Staff recommend that Council undertake this work through a phased approach. The first phase would focus on completing the Community Risk Assessment, possibly using the Province's standardized tool once it becomes available. The second phase would build upon those findings by completing a Fire Protection Service Review, establishing the Municipality's desired level of fire protection service, and developing a comprehensive Fire Services Master Plan to guide future decision-making.

The need to begin strategic planning for fire services is becoming increasingly important. Council is aware of the significant capital and operational pressures facing the fire departments in East Hants. Four departments (Maitland, Mount Uniacke, Enfield, and Lantz) have identified the need for new fire stations, while increasing operational demands are driving changes to staffing models and service delivery. These pressures are occurring in advance of the Province's implementation of mandatory fire service planning requirements.

A Fire Services Master Plan would provide Council with a strategic, municipal wide plan to guide to support decision making across the 13 fire departments. It would assist both the departments and Council in prioritizing capital investment, evaluating future funding requests, and planning for future infrastructure and operational needs. As East Hants continues to experience growth and increasing demands on the fire service, establishing this plan will help ensure decisions are guided by community risk, operational need, and long-term financial sustainability while positioning the Municipality to respond proactively to future legislative requirements.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Council has the authority to complete the fire service master planning process.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Procuring all three phases of the project makes economical sense and ensures continuity in project execution. East Hants can build check-ins with Council along the way.

Alternatives

1. Council may choose to hire one consultant to do the Community Risk Assessment, then go out to RFP for the Fire Service Review and again for the Fire Service Master Plan. This would add a lot of risk to the project and removes any benefit of continuity as you get if one consultant does all of the phases.
2. With four fire departments currently planning new fire stations (Mount Uniacke, Enfield, Lantz, and Maitland) without confirmed long term financial viability, Council may wish to consider requesting that further station planning be deferred until completion of the Fire Services Master Planning process. The Master Plan will assess long term infrastructure needs, prioritize future capital investments, and help ensure decisions are made within a municipal wide context.

Attachments

N/A