

To: David Creery, Chief Administrative Officer
From: Jeff Slager, Fire Chief
Re: Fire Department Minimum Staffing Increase

AIM

The purpose of this staff report is to request Council approval to increase the daily minimum staffing level in the Woodstock Fire Department Suppression Division from eight (8) to nine (9).

BACKGROUND

The Woodstock Fire Department Suppression Division currently operates with 48 firefighters on four (4) platoons of twelve (12) firefighters. Minimum daily staffing for a platoon has been at eight (8) since 2006.

In February 2023, Council received the staff report *Fire Department Staffing Plan* which recommended increasing Suppression Division staffing to at least 52 firefighters in July 2023, and upon the new firefighters being operational on-shift increasing the Suppression Division staffing from the current level of eight (8) persons to nine (9) persons.

On March 16, 2023, as part of the City Operating Budget approval, Council approved the hiring of four (4) additional firefighter positions in the Suppression Division with a start date being July 3, 2023.

From July 3 to August 25, 2023, the recruits completed an intense training program that was able to incorporate all required testing and evaluations needed to facilitate them being placed with their platoon, and as of September 8, 2023, they are classified as being operational on-shift.

COMMENT

During previous recruit programs we were unable to complete specific training aspects during the initial training (i.e. live-fire training, auto extrication) either due to the small number of recruits (1-2) or during our season of not having an on-duty Training Officer.

For this current recruit program, (and for all recruit programs moving forward), a comprehensive training program was developed which included training that was previously completed after the recruit was placed with their platoon due to staffing

needs. The benefit of this was drastically shortening the timeframe to perform the recruit evaluations used to move forward with classifying them as being operational on-shift.

At present up to two (2) Suppression Division staff may schedule time off during a tour of duty. With the current staffing level of 12 firefighters per platoon this leaves a “buffer” of two staff above the minimum staffing level of eight (8). If the requested move to a minimum staffing level of nine (9) is approved, there will be no change at present to the number of approved staff off in the Suppression Division. This ensures the two staff “buffer” will remain.

Financial Consideration

As per the January 1st, 2023, rate of pay, each full-time probationary firefighter has an annual salary of \$65,615, plus benefits. The current collective agreement expires on December 31, 2024.

There is no financial impact directly associated with the move from a minimum staffing of eight (8) to nine (9). This move does not affect wage classification nor benefit requirements for staff. Further, there will be no additional impact to overtime costs to maintain the requested new minimum staffing level.

SUMMARY

Raising the minimum staffing in the Suppression Division from eight (8) to nine (9) brings the Woodstock Fire Department closer to achieving the Ontario Fire Marshal's (OFM) published recommendation of ten (10) firefighters on scene within ten (10) minutes, a trend many career departments are moving towards, and there is projected to be no financial impact.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve the increase of minimum staffing within the Woodstock Fire Department Suppression Division from eight (8) to nine (9) effective September 27, 2023.

Authored by: *Jeff Slager, Fire Chief*

Approved by: *David Creery, M.B.A., P. Eng., Chief Administrative Officer*