

Committee of the Whole For the Meeting of December 9, 2024

Date: December 2, 2024

File No: 1700-20-2025-2029 & 7380-20

To: Committee of the Whole

From: M. Fox, CAO

Subject: Fire Department | 2025 Staffing Financial Plan Implications

Prepared by:	Supervisor:	CAO Concurrence:
M. OWENS	M. FOX	
FIRE CHIEF	CAO	M. Fox, CAO

RECOMMENDATION[S]

THAT the Committee of the Whole recommend Council direct Administration to include the following in the 2025-2029 Financial Plan:

- \$58,094 for a Fire Department Administrative Support position commencing in Q3 2025
- ii. \$59,380 for the addition of two Firefighters commencing in Q4 2025.

PURPOSE

On November 18, 2024, Behr presented the preliminary findings of the Fire Master Plan which made a number of recommendations potentially impacting the 2025 Financial Plan. This report aims to implement some of those findings in a fiscally responsible manner.

BACKGROUND

Earlier this year, Council approved the development of a number of master plans, including the Fire Master Plan. At the November 18, 2024 Committee of the Whole (COW), Behr presented the preliminary findings of the Fire Master Plan which included a number of recommendations which impact the 2025 Financial Plan.

Administration is recommending the addition of one Administrative Support position commencing in Q3 2025 and two additional Firefighters commencing in Q4 2025.

Presently, over 50% of the Deputy Fire Chief's time is being spent on tasks which could be completed by an Administrative Support position. These tasks include payroll, issuing purchase orders, paying invoices, managing schedules, and similar duties on a weekly basis.

When looking at the preliminary findings of the Fire Master Plan, Port Alberni is the only community without at least one full-time Administrative Support position. An Administrative Support position would greatly assist in the generation and quality of reports, researching statistics, file management, managing properties where bylaw infractions may result in fines, developing and maintaining spreadsheets, and other administrative tasks.

Much of the discussion regarding Suppression Firefighter staffing has been in regard to call volume. The total call volume for the Port Alberni Fire Department has increased 80% over a five-year time period. A Fire Underwriter's report for the City of Port Alberni which was delivered in 2017 states, "Where a Pumper company receives in excess of 2,500 calls per year, additional companies are needed." At that time, the report was analyzing statistics from 2014 & 2015 where the total call volume was 1,272 and 1,186 respectively. In 2023 PAFD responded to 2,823 incidents.

The pandemic in 2020 also transformed employee attitudes towards illness, with many now prioritizing the prevention of illness transmission by staying home instead of working through their sickness. This shift has resulted in increased demands on off-duty personnel to cover shifts. Additionally, a cultural shift towards worklife balance has led some senior personnel to take on a disproportionate amount of overtime work, contributing to burnout.

PAFD's most critical role is that of structural firefighting. PAFD has an on-duty compliment of a minimum of 4 personnel on shift. At a structure fire, WorkSafeBC's regulations stipulate that:

"(4) A suitably equipped rescue team of at least 2 firefighters must be established on the scene before sending in a second entry team and not more than 10 minutes after the initial attack."; and "(5) The rescue team required by subsection (4) must not engage in any duties that limit their ability to make a prompt response to rescue an endangered firefighter while interior structural firefighting is

The current staffing levels enable PAFD personnel to respond and enter the premises within the first ten minutes, but after that, we rely on off-duty personnel. Due to various factors, including increased burnout, active parenting, illness-related absences, and a general emphasis on work-life balance, our off-duty personnel have not consistently arrived on scene within the ten-minute window.

being conducted."

In November 2023, PAFD requested that our automatic aid partners—Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek, and Sproat Lake—begin responding to all structure fires, rather than just larger structures or mutual aid calls. While this adjustment has proven effective, it has placed additional strain on these volunteer fire departments, especially during weekdays when many volunteers are at work and unable to respond promptly.

The addition of two additional Firefighters into the suppression division will aid to reduce burnout, reduce reliance on off-duty personnel and volunteer fire departments, decrease the likelihood of having to abandon a salvageable building due to resource shortages on scene, and ultimately improve the safety of residents and employees.

ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

- 1. THAT the Committee of the Whole recommend Council direct Administration to include the following in the 2025-2029 Financial Plan:
 - i. \$58,094 for a Fire Department Administrative Support position commencing in Q3 2025
 - ii. \$59,380 for the addition of two Firefighters commencing in Q4 2025.
- 2. THAT Council direct Administration to include a Fire Department Administrative Support position and two additional Firefighters in the 2026 Financial Plan and gives early approval to populate those positions in Q1 2026.
- 3. THAT Council give Administration other direction.
- 4. THAT Council direct staff to not amend the Financial Plan as it pertains to these positions.

ANALYSIS

- 1. Presently, the staff employed to plan long-term strategy for the department are spending a substantial amount of time at the task level. An Administrative Support position would allow for better utilization of time. Two additional Firefighter positions, as mentioned above, will enhance safety, prevent losses to property and life, and mitigate burnout.
- 2. This option has the same benefits as option one but deferred by 3 months.
- 3. Dependant on direction.
- 4. This option is not sustainable long-term. Further action would be required to reduce levels of service. If PAFD is unable to consistently have a sufficient number of adequately trained personnel on scene within 10 minutes, Council should consider reducing the declared structural firefighting level of service.

IMPLICATIONS

The following are the implications to the Financial Plan:

EIRE GERVI	CES - MASTERPLAN COSTING					
	nancial Plan - Operational Budget					
	ed Operational Service Level increase					
Ongoing						
ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	2025 BUDGET	2026 BUDGET	2027 BUDGET	2028 BUDGET	2029 BUDGET
	Rei	venues				
	Total Revenues	-	-	-	-	-
ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	2025 BUDGET	2026 BUDGET	2027 BUDGET	2028 BUDGET	2029 BUDGET
	EXPE	NDITURES				
22411	Administrative Support	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60
22421	Increase Supression by two	0.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
22421	Increase Supression by additional two	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
22241	Fire Prevention Officer	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
22241	Training Officer	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Total FTE	1.10	3.60	6.60	6.60	6.60
22411	Administrative Support	58,094	61,720	63,401	65,132	66,911
22421	2 FF with annual increase in classification	59,380	297,262	330,189	363,116	377,641
22421	Additional 2 FF w/ annual increase in class	-	-	306,180	340,095	374,009
22421	Firefighter mechanic to work week dayshifts	-	-	-	-	-
22421	Establish Fire Prevention Officer position	-	-	177,043	182,354	187,925
22421	Establish Training Officer position	-	212,814	218,835	225,036	231,424
	Other costs - training, equipment gear, etc.	15,000	5,000	15,000	-	-
	Total Expenditures	132,474	576,796	1,110,648	1,175,733	1,237,910
Combined	Tou Funding Demoised	422.674	F7C 70C	4 440 540	4 475 722	4 227 040
	Tax Funding Required	132,474	576,796	1,110,648	1,175,733	1,237,910
Combined	Annual increase - Percentage	0.42%	1.60%	2.81%	2.82%	2.83%

COMMUNICATIONS

None at this time.

BYLAWS/PLANS/POLICIES

Fire Control Bylaw.

SUMMARY

This report takes into consideration the Preliminary Findings Report for the Fire Master Plan. The focus of this report is the budget implications for the 2025 Financial Plan and the impact on subsequent years' operating budget.

ATTACHMENTS/REFERENCE MATERIALS

Appendix A: Behr Fire Master Plan Preliminary Findings Report.

c: A. McGifford, Director of Finance



The following information as requested, is provided to assist the City of Port Alberni and PAFD in their 2025 budget and financial plan deliberations. It must be noted that these recommendations are preliminary findings that require fully developed evidence-based observations and rationale. The fire service master plan is in the early stages of completion, and it is anticipated that an initial draft will be available by December 20, 2025.

Also included is the comparative community analysis completed by Behr. This is provided to provide additional context in terms of costs, budgets, organization, and service demands. As indicated, all communities have different attributes such as risk factors, historical decisions, and community profiles. For this reason, the comparative community analysis should be used as a base reference only, not a suggestion or intention of something to be replicated.

1.1 Preliminary Findings and Recommendations

Staffing

Recommendation: Establish a .5 FTE administrative support position

Suggested completion: 1 − 12 months

Cost: Estimated cost, \$35K per year

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Reduces general administrative requirements for the Chief Officers. I.e., budget

prep, staff admin, public requests, council reports, corporate responsibilities, etc.

Recommendation: Increase fire suppression staff by 2 FTEs (swing firefighters) to a total of 22

suppression staff.

Suggested completion: 1 – 12 months

Cost: Estimated cost (2024): 1^{st} year = \$88,057 + 20% for benefits = \$105,668.00 per year per firefighter (2 X= \$211,336.00), escalating to 5th year = %117,409+20% for benefits = \$140,891 X 2 = \$281,722.

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Increase response capacity to manage stacked calls, possible OT reduction offset to more efficient manage minimum duty strength of 4 staff 24/7. Reduces the requirement to have Chief Officers respond to routine operational calls for service, Provides additional workload capacity for the Chief Officers to lead and manage.





Recommendation: Move firefighter mechanic to work week dayshifts.

Suggested completion: 1 − 12 months

Cost: Estimated cost, No cost shift configuration change

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Less reliance on automatic aid for routine calls during peak periods (7:00-19:00 hrs daily). Can safely perform interior operations within initial alarm assignment. Enhanced routine repair and maintenance for emergency vehicle fleet.

Recommendation: Increase fire suppression staff by another 2 FTEs. Total suppression staff 24

Suggested completion: TBD

Cost: Estimated cost (2024): 1st year = \$88,057 + 20% for benefits = \$105,668.00 per year per firefighter (2 X= \$211,336.00), escalating to 5th year = \$117,409+20% for benefits = \$140,891 X 2 = \$281,722.

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Increase based upon complete assessment of emergency response performance including call volume, impact of volunteer services and automatic aid, effective response force and total response time and the achievement of Council approved service delivery policy.

Recommendation: Establish a permanent Training Officer position

Suggested completion: 12 – 24 months

Cost: \$180K per year (includes corporate costs)

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Meet occupational safety and training legislation requirements (B.C. Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards). Increases firefighter safety. Provides additional duty chief on call capacity. Currently Chief and Deputy alternate on a bi-weekly basis. Provides less reliance on Automatic Aid for routine calls during peak periods (7:00-19:00 hrs daily). Can safely perform interior operations within initial alarm assignment.





Recommendation: Establish a permanent Fire Prevention Officer position.

Suggested completion: 24 – 36 months

Cost: Estimated @ \$177,043 (based on being between the 1st class rate and Chief FPO

rate) =

Resource: Operational Budget

Rationale: Meet new fire safety act requirements for compliance monitoring, risk assessments, fire investigations etc. Enhances public education and safety awareness throughout the city. Less reliance on automatic aid for routine calls during peak periods (07:00-19:00 hrs daily).

Fire Station

Recommendation: Based on our cursory review of the building, we recommend a complete functional study of the building to address daily operations, growth, health and safety, gender requirements, and equipment (apparatus, PPE, consumables, etc.) storage.

Suggested completion: 12 – 24 month

Cost: Estimated cost, \$35K - \$ 50k (depending on scope and depth of project)

Resource: Operational Budget. Third-party consultant

Rationale: The current fire station was built in 1967. Since then, it has undergone number of renovations and updates. On October 3, 2024, a Building Condition Assessment was done that focused only on exterior cladding, roofing, emergency power, and HVAC. It did not, however go over the functionality of the building and workspace. Over the years, the entire space has been re-purposed, resulting in poor overall flow. There is also no room for expansion to accommodate additional apparatus or operational space.

A recent renovation was done to prevent the transmission of airborne illness and provide for a degree of privacy for all personnel. Previous to that a major upgrade was done over 10 years ago which included seismic upgrades and breathing apparatus maintenance area.

Training

Recommendation: Undertake a feasibility study to establish regional training centre to support Port Alberni Fire Department and the surrounding volunteer services.

Suggested completion: 12 - 36 months

Cost: Approximately \$20K - \$25K (depending on scope and depth of project)

Resource: Operational Budget. Third-party consultant

Rationale: Currently, Port Alberni Fire Department does not have a dedicated or readily available facility to conduct the necessary hands-on training to maintain the necessary skills for operational readiness.





1.2 Municipal Comparative Analysis

Comparing the port Alberni Fire Department to that of similar municipalities is a good way to identify relative service levels, costs, and trends. It must be noted that all communities have different attributes such as risk factors, historical decisions, and community profiles. For this reason, the comparative community analysis should be used as a base reference only, not a suggestion or intention of something to be replicated.

For the purposes of this analysis, we used 2019-2023 information to obtain common information from each community. Although fire and emergency services have the same goal of protecting life and property, each community has its unique features in how to accomplish those goals. Therefore, there are no ideal or identical comparators for the Port Alberni Fire Department. Our main criteria for collecting information were:

- Population
- Budgets
- Department size
- Type (full-time, part-time or combination)
- Department staffing

Additional information for evaluation was:

- Number of fire stations
- Call volume
- Call types

Table 1: Participating Community Comparatives

Community	Population	Land Area (km²)	Area of Response (km²)
City of Port Alberni	18,500	19.76	19.76
District of Squamish	29,206	104.71	104.71
District of Oak Bay	18,000	10.52	10.52
City of Campbell River	38,000	1737	2000
City of Powell River	20,707	28.9	28.9
Township of Esquimalt	17,533	7.08	7.08





1.2.1 Budgets

Department budgets are of specific concern to most communities. In some instances, budgeting for fire and emergency services make up a considerable portion of a community's operating budget. We evaluated the budgets for each community, and it is important to note that each is unique in how each municipality allocates their budgets.

Table 2: Community Comparative Budget Ranking

Community	Municipal Budget 2022/23	Emergency Services Operating Budget	% of Municipal Budget	Population	Cost Per Capita
City of Port Alberni	\$55,984,376	\$4,389,298	7.84	18,500	\$237.52
District of Squamish	\$68,163,035	\$3,551,497	5.2	29,206	\$121.60
District of Oak Bay	\$54,775,700	\$5,124,800	9.3	18,000	\$284.86
City of Campbell River	\$81,400,000	\$6,200,000	7.65	38,000	\$163.15
City of Powell River	\$24,000,000	\$3,500,000	14.58	20,707	\$169.02
Township of Esquimalt	\$56,700,000	\$5,980,620	10.5	17,533	\$341.10

Per Capita Net Expenditure Fire:	\$237.52
Mean/Average Per Capita Net Expenditure Fire:	\$219.54

1.2.2 Industry Standards

Table 3: Community Comparative Standard of Cover

Community	Standard of Cover	Standard of Cover approved by Council	Is the standard based on a leading practice such as NFPA 1710/ 1720 and/or WorkSafe BC Minimum Training Standards for Firefighters
City of Port Alberni	No	No	Yes
District of Squamish	Yes	Yes	Yes
District of Oak Bay	Yes	Yes	Yes
City of Campbell River	Yes	Yes	Yes
City of Powell River	Yes	Yes	Yes
Township of Esquimalt	Yes	Yes	No





1.2.3 Department Profile

Department profile, staffing models and levels of service are based on community risk, risk tolerance and the ability for a community to pay for and sustain desired service levels.

Table 4: Community Comparative Departments' Profile

Community	Department Type	No. of Stations	Total Staff	Fire Chief (FT)	Deputy (DC) Assistant Chief (AC	Support Staff (FT)	Suppression Staff	Fire Prevention Staff (FT)	Training Staff (FT)	Dispatch	Mechanical (FT)	Other
City of Port Alberni	FT Career	1	23	1	1 (DC) FT	0	20 FT	ВС	0	0	1	NA
District Squamish	Composite	2	17	1	2(DC)-FT	1	13 FT 50 POC	0	0	0	0	0
District of Oak Bay	FT Career	1	30	1	2(DC)-FT	2	24 FT	1	0	0	1	0
City of Campbell River	Composite	2	80	1	2(DC) FT	1	26 FT 35 POC	1	0	13	1	1
City of Powell River	Composite	1	42	1	1(DC) FT	1	16 FT 23 PT	0	0	0	0	0
Township of Esquimalt	FT Career	1	33	1	2(DC) FT	1	29 FT	0	0	0	0	0

FT: Full-time PT: Part-time POC: Paid-On-Call





1.2.4 Response Data

For the purposes of this municipal comparator analysis, we used 2019–2023 information to get common information from each community. Breakdowns are divided into the two following categories:

Table 5: Examples of Incident Types for Statistical Analysis

	INCIDENTS BY TYPE				
EMS Related Calls					
Call Types	Pre-Hospital Care: Alpha, Bravo	Pre-Hospital Care: Alpha, Bravo Charlie Delta Echo			
	Lift Assist				
	False Alarms				
Fire-Related Calls					
Fire Emergency	Alarm	Car Fire			
	Burning Complaint	Re-check			
	Structure Fire	Wildfire – Grass, Brush, Outdoor			
	Minor Fire	Oven/Pot on Stove			
	Smoke	Explosion			
MVI (Motor Vehicle	Extrication	No Extrication			
Incident), aka MVC (Motor					
Vehicle Collision)					
Rescue	Stalled Elevator	Swift Water			
	Lake/Marine Rescue	Building Collapse			
	High Angle	Ice			
Hazmat/Dangerous Good	Highway Incident	Industrial Incident			
	Rail Incident	Resident Incident			
Non-Emergency	Carbon Monoxide	Aircraft Standby Incident			
	Gas/Oil Smell/Spill	Bomb Threat			
	Power/Telephone/Cable Line	Hazardous Materials			
	Down	Propane Leak/Smell			
	Natural Gas Leak				
Other	Inspection	Needle Pick-up			
	Burning Pile Inspection	Flood Assessment			
	Assist Other Agency	Water Problem (in structure)			
	Public Service				

Note: Description and category names may not be common terminology in all jurisdictions.





Table 6: Municipal Comparative Response Call Volume

Community		Port Alberni	Squamish	Oak Bay	Campbell River	Powell River	Esquimalt
Total Call	2019	1,572	746	1213	2576	940	1046
Volume	2020	1,281	720	899	1940	689	614
	2021	1,989	973	1120	2824	1008	803
	2022	2,459	1008	1304	3666	1243	879
	2023	2,823	1231	1382	4376	1273	969
Fire Related	2019	740	526	645	1146	385	368
Calls	2020	737	542	637	1008	365	356
	2021	848	656	751	1230	395	327
	2022	850	718	760	1323	400	383
	2023	911	717	803	1516	420	391
EMS Related	2019	832	220	568	1430	555	678
Calls	2020	544	178	262	932	324	258
	2021	1,141	317	369	1594	613	476
	2022	1,609	290	544	2343	843	496
	2023	1,912	514	579	2860	853	578

1.2 Community Comparative Analysis Summary

PAFD ranks among the mid-range (3rd or 4th) within the municipalities surveyed for operating budget, percentage of municipal budget, and cost per capita. This is considered to be appropriate and efficient for a city the size of Port Alberni

There is no standard for categorizing incidents so it must be understood that these statistics are broadly based and are only general reference when comparing fire departments. The community comparative analysis can only be interpreted from an indirect basic level due the disparity from each of the surveyed communities' organizational structure, core services and levels, emergency response categorization, and financial systems.



LATE ITEM
JAN. 20, 2025
COW AGENDA
ITEM HI

FIRE SERVICES - MASTERPLAN COSTING 2025-2029 Financial Plan - Operational Budget

2025 Proposed Operational Service Level increase

Ongoing

ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	2025 BUDGET	2026 BUDGET	2027 BUDGET	2028 BUDGET	2029 BUDGET
		Revenues				
	Total Revenues					

ACCOUNT	DESCRIPTION	2025 BUDGET	2026 BUDGET	2027 BUDGET	2028 BUDGET	2029 BUDGET
		EXPENDITURES				
22411	Administrative Support	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60	0.60
22421	Increase Suppression by two	0.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
22421	Increase Suppression by additional two	0.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
22421	Fire Prevention Officer	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
22421	Training Officer	0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	Total FTE	1.10	3.60	6.60	6.60	6.60
22411	Administrative Support	55,478	57,015	58,598	60,208	61,829
22421	2 FF with annual increase in classification	60,195	251,082	318,866	342,514	359,640
22421	Additional 2 FF with annual increase in classification	-	-	273,046	331,814	373,578
22421	Firefighter mechanic to work week dayshifts	-	-	-	-	-
22421	Establish Fire Prevention Officer position	-		182,059	189,669	197,620
22421	Establish Training Officer position		218,191	227,341	236,903	246,895
Multiple	Other costs - training, equipment gear, etc.	15,000	5,000	15,000	180	-
	Total Expenditures	130,673	531,288	1,074,910	1,161,108	1,239,562
Combined	Tax Funding Required	130,673	531,288	1,074,910	1,161,108	1,239,562
Combined	Annual increase - Percentage	0.42%	1.45%	2.65%	2.70%	2.75%