

DATE OF MEETING December 16, 2024
AUTHORED BY TIM DOYLE, FIRE CHIEF
SUBJECT MUTUAL AID AGREEMENT

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to obtain Council's approval for the City of Nanaimo to enter into a new Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA) with the Cranberry Improvement District, Mountain Improvement District, District of Lantzville, North Cedar Improvement District, and, Extension and District Volunteer Fire Department Society.

Recommendation

That Council authorize the execution of a new Mutual Aid Agreement with the Cranberry Improvement District, Mountain Improvement District, District of Lantzville, North Cedar Improvement District, and Extension and District Volunteer Fire Department Society, for a five year term.

BACKGROUND

Resourcing emergency incidents is a complex challenge due to the unpredictability and scope of such events. To strengthen jurisdictional resources, Fire Department MAAs are often established to enhance resiliency. Fire Department MAAs are formal arrangements between neighboring jurisdictions designed to provide assistance during fire emergency incidents when resources are diminished.

These agreements offer a strategic advantage for local governments by enhancing resource availability, which is crucial for improving public safety and emergency response effectiveness. For example, high-rise fires, commercial fires, wildfires, or concurrent structural fires have the potential to overwhelm available resources. MAAs enhance emergency response capabilities by allowing Fire Departments to share resources, when available, to augment the resources of the parties to the MAA when their own are diminished. Fire-related incidents benefit significantly from MAAs due to their resource-intensive nature and the potential to impact large geographical areas.

MAAs allow the parties to the agreement to provide mutual support in kind. Requests for costs related to ancillary equipment provided by the responding parties, such as firefighting foam, are generally limited in MAAs.

In 1989, the City of Nanaimo signed Fire Protection MAAs with regional stakeholders. At that time, these agreements were signed individually between the City of Nanaimo and each stakeholder; however, these agreements have not been renewed since their adoption. |

DISCUSSION

While the terms of the 1989 MAAs may have been adequate at the time, best practices have since evolved. A review revealed that the current mutual aid agreements have outlived their effective term. For example, insurance requirements and the British Columbia Fire Commissioner's Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards have both been updated, making the current agreement outdated.

Representatives from each jurisdiction met to review the current MAA, comparing it against current expectations and requirements. Specifically, training, resources, liability, jurisdiction, agreement term, and general housekeeping were considered to ensure that best practices are followed.

It should be noted that this MAA is not intended to address non-fire emergencies, such as hazardous materials incidents, road rescues, or medical emergencies. When a response to these types of incidents requires augmentation, it is addressed through the British Columbia Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, British Columbia Emergency Health Services, or contractors, respectively.

When the existing agreement was adopted in 1989, it was signed between the City of Nanaimo and each party. During meetings between stakeholders to develop a new agreement, there was a consensus that participants preferred one agreement, signed by all parties, to facilitate a more efficient response within the region without multiple agreements. Requests for costs related to ancillary equipment provided by the responding parties cannot exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per incident, in accordance with the fees set out in Schedule "A". The term of the agreement is five years, and any Party may withdraw from this Agreement by delivering sixty (60) days' written notice of withdrawal to the other Parties.

Due to the jurisdictions' varying sizes and different means available to each stakeholder in the agreement, insurance coverage requirements differ; however, the amounts are adequate in each instance.

Regarding Comprehensive General Liability Insurance:

- City of Nanaimo - Fifteen Million Dollars (\$15,000,000) coverage.
- The District of Lantzville - Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000) coverage.
- Extension, Cranberry, Mountain, and North Cedar Improvement Districts - Five Million Dollars (\$5,000,000) in coverage.

Regarding Automobile Insurance:

- City of Nanaimo - Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000) coverage.
- The District of Lantzville - Ten Million Dollars (\$10,000,000).

- Extension, Cranberry, Mountain, and North Cedar Improvement Districts - Five Million Dollars (\$5,000,000) coverage.

Nothing in this agreement requires the Fire Chief to dispatch or make emergency resources available to a requesting party. A requesting party cannot request assistance unless or until their own resources are deployed or in use to deal with an emergency, except when specialized equipment is required that they do not have. Finally, if the safety of responding personnel is in question, the officer of the responding party has sole discretion over how directions are given.

Outlined below are examples of the value that Fire Department MAAs provide to their respective communities:

- **Access to Specialized Equipment and Personnel:** MAAs enable local fire departments to access specialized equipment and personnel not available within their own jurisdiction.
- **Supplementary Support:** During large-scale incidents, such as wildfires or major structural fires, local resources may be diminished. MAAs allow for the rapid deployment of additional firefighters and support staff, ensuring adequate coverage and reducing strain on local teams.
- **Extended Reach:** In areas with geographical challenges, MAAs extend the reach of emergency services, especially along shared jurisdictions.]

OPTIONS

1. That Council adopt a new Fire Department Mutual Aid Agreement (MAA).
 - Advantages: A new MAA will strengthen operational resiliency during emergency incidents when City resources are diminished.
 - Disadvantages: None
 - Financial Implications: Requests for costs related to ancillary equipment provided by the responding parties cannot exceed five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per incident, in accordance with the fees set out in Schedule "A".
2. That Council directs the Fire Department to conclude the existing Fire Department Mutual Aid Agreements (MAAs).
 - Advantages: None
 - Disadvantages: Operational resources may be unduly stretched during emergency incidents when City resources are diminished.
 - Financial Implications: Future fire department resource requests may need to be amplified, which could otherwise be offset by a new MAA.
3. That Council keep the status quo.
 - Advantages: None

- Disadvantages: The current MAA does not reflect the training requirements as outlined in the British Columbia Fire Commissioner's Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards. The current MAA does not reflect current insurance liability best practices.
- Financial Implications: Unnecessary liability for the City.

SUMMARY POINTS

- MAAs strengthen emergency resources during incidents when resources are diminished.
- An updated MAA strengthens firefighter and public safety by requiring partners to declare training levels as outlined in the British Columbia Fire Commissioner's Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards.
- MAAs enable local fire departments to access specialized equipment and personnel not available within their own jurisdiction.
- During large-scale incidents, such as wildfires or major structural fires, local resources may be diminished. MAAs allow for the rapid deployment of additional firefighters and support staff, ensuring adequate coverage and reducing strain on local teams.
- In areas with geographical challenges, MAAs extend the reach of emergency services, especially along shared jurisdictions.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – Mutual Aid Agreement for Fire Departments

Submitted by:

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Concurrence by:

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