

DATE OF MEETING JANUARY 20, 2025

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SUBJECT FALSE ALARM REGULATION BYLAW

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To introduce a new False Alarm Bylaw for Council's consideration that would assist in reducing the number of unnecessary emergency responses for false alarms by members of the public, and to bring forward amendments to the Fees and Charges and Bylaw Notice Enforcement Bylaws to add fees and fines associated with owners and users of security alarms systems who permit an excessive number of false alarms.

Recommendations

False Alarm Bylaw

1. That "False Alarm Bylaw 2025, No. 7392" (a bylaw to reduce false alarms) pass first reading.
2. That "False Alarm Bylaw 2025, No. 7392" pass second reading.
3. That "False Alarm Bylaw 2025, No. 7392" pass third reading.

Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw

1. That "Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7336.12" (a bylaw to add false alarm fees) pass first reading.
2. That "Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7336.12" pass second reading.
3. That "Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7336.12" pass third reading.

Bylaw Notice Enforcement Amendment Bylaw

1. That "Bylaw Notice Enforcement Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7159.24" (a bylaw to add fines for false alarms) pass first reading.
2. That "Bylaw Notice Enforcement Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7159.24" pass second reading.
3. That "Bylaw Notice Enforcement Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7159.24" pass third reading.

BACKGROUND

As part of the on-going bylaw renewal project, the Director of Police Services identified that the service delivery model as outlined in the existing False Alarm Bylaw needed examining given the excessive number of calls for RCMP attendance to security system alarms, and the labour intensive and costly process associated with responding to these alarms. A very small percentage of these alarms are actually valid.

The False Alarm Bylaw outlines requirements for the owners and users of the security alarm systems to limit excessive numbers of false alarms. False alarms require emergency responses and such unnecessary emergency responses pose a threat to the safety of police officers and members of the public by creating unnecessary hazards, which could result in a delayed response to a true emergency.

The existing bylaw, which was implemented in 1994, allows a property owner to have up to three false alarms in any 12-month period, without being charged for a response. Subsequent false alarms from the same property incurs a fee of \$140.00. This fee does not cover the costs of responding to the false alarm and time spent on locating the owner before the RCMP can leave the scene. Also, because the fee is only \$140.00 for the third or any subsequent responses, property owners can have several false alarms within any 12-month period with little deterrent to address the issue.

While there is no issue with a priority one response to hold up alarms and panic alarms, there is little value in attending to alarms where there are multiple infractions, where no contact information available, or a key holder cannot be verified or contacted to attend and secure the property.

To address this problem, staff is bringing forward a new False Alarm Bylaw based on the best practises of other municipal false alarm bylaws that would:

- 1) make it mandatory for an owner or occupier of real property who uses an alarm system to keep the RCMP informed, in writing, of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the monitoring agency, if applicable, or at least two persons who will be known as Property References who may be contacted in the event of an alarm incident; and
- 2) cause a notice to be sent to the owner and occupier of the property advising that the RCMP will not respond to three or more false alarms originating from the one alarm system within any 12-month period.

An amendment to the Fees and Charges Bylaw is also being brought forward for Council's consideration that would continue to see no fee for the first false alarm to the same property, during any consecutive 12-month period but provide for a fee increase from \$140.00 to \$150.00 for a second false alarm, and a fee increase to \$500.00 for a third and subsequent false alarms to the same property within that same time period.

Should Council support giving first three readings to the new False Alarm Bylaw and Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw, staff also recommend that Council consider an amendment to the Bylaw Notice Enforcement Bylaw to assign fines for failure to ensure the prevention of false alarms, failure to inform the RCMP of monitoring service information, failure to attend the property, or obstructing a Peace Officer or Bylaw Enforcement Officer while undertaking their duties to enforce the bylaw.

DISCUSSION

Since March 0f 2023, the Detachment received 360 alarm calls by 34 property owners. Of those calls, 28 were hold up alarms where the RCMP responded as a priority one call. The other calls were from properties that have incurred a minimum of 6 false alarms within a 12-month period, with many averaging 9 to 20 false alarm calls. One property has incurred 40 false alarms since March 2023. In cases where multiple false alarms occur, often there is no

property representative listed on the alarm company file, the property representative information on the file is invalid, or a property representative is unavailable.

Attended to false alarms are reported to the City for billing, as per the current False Alarm Bylaw; however, in addition to the minimal fees for incurring a false alarm, property owners have the ability to appeal the validity of a determination that an alarm was false by submitting a notice in writing requesting a review by the Director. Each time this happens, it requires staff review time and the requirement for the responding officer to submit a written report. A hearing with the Director must also be convened. This is a labour-intensive process.

The bylaw before Council strives to limit false alarms by ensuring systems are installed and maintained correctly by the property owner and that a monitoring company attempts to verify if an alarm is false before contacting emergency services. The compliance process for false alarms also proposes that the Municipality would send a warning letter to the owner of a building after a second false alarm is received in any 12-month period advising that the Police may not respond to subsequent alarms unless the issue is addressed and that a third or subsequent false alarm will incur a fee of \$500.

The appeal and mandatory hearing process has also been removed as under the new bylaw, property owners would be required to properly install, maintain, use and operate the alarm system to prevent false alarms. Additionally, because there is no fee for the first false alarm, it would give the property owner an opportunity to address any issues that they may have been unaware of and to ensure no subsequent false alarms occur.

OPTIONS:

Option 1:

False Alarm Bylaw

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The advantages of this option are that through these bylaws, property owners would be encouraged to install and maintain their security systems so that there would be less calls to the RCMP. It would also require the property owner to provide the RCMP with up-to-date contact information for two individuals or for the monitoring agency so that they can be reached in the event of a false alarm. Otherwise, they risk not having the RCMP attend to alarm situation for continued offences.

There are no disadvantages to this option. However, should Council wish to retain the current bylaw, the RCMP would be required to continue responding to multiple false alarms each year which require emergency responses and if found to be false, create unnecessary hazards which could result in a delayed response to a true emergency.

Option 2:

Council direction is sought.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The existing False Alarm Bylaw needed examining given the excessive number of calls for RCMP attendance to security system alarms and the labour intensive and costly process associated with responding to these alarms.
- False alarms require emergency responses and such unnecessary emergency responses pose a threat to the safety of police officers and members of the public by creating unnecessary hazards which could result in a delayed response to a true emergency.
- Since March Of 2023, the Detachment received 360 alarm calls by 34 property owners.
- The new bylaw strives to limit false alarms by ensuring systems are installed and maintained correctly by the property owner and that a monitoring company attempts to verify if an alarm is false before contacting emergency services.
- Increased fees and fines are proposed for property owners who have repeated false alarms.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1 – False Alarm Bylaw 2025, No. 7392

Attachment 2 – Fees and Charges Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7336.12

Attachment 3 – Bylaw Notice Enforcement Amendment Bylaw 2025, No. 7159.24

Submitted by:

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