

Review and Feedback From Okanagan Landing Volunteer Fire Department March 03, 2009

Re:

VFRS Business Plan Version 1 as distributed by Chief Jeffrey G Carlisle Feb 13, 2009

Pages 1, 9, 10, 12

The report and business plan continues to focus on response times as the crucial factor in an effective fire service and particularly in the Okanagan Landing where services have been rendered quite efficiently, effectively and acceptably for 33 years. Much emphasis is placed on the progression of fire in the initial stages but fails to portray the results of a poorly manned or equipped first response relying on size-up and possible actions of the first round of arrival. The graph with no numbers and analogy used on Page 12 in no possible way shows a true cost to results ratio. The cost related to fire control from A to C is in no way a straight line and is deceptive at best. Try putting some real numbers to these lines and see what it looks like.

While we certainly question if the desired manning of halls and response guideline (pg 38) could result in a more effective fire suppression model, we also must question how much should be spent to satisfy the very low call volume currently in Okanagan Landing.

A review of Calls in the last 2 years in Okanagan landing reveals that:

Okanagan Landing Call Response	2007	2008
general fire calls, garbage bins, BBQ, camp fires, lightning strikes and chimney concerns	14	17
Actual Structure or Vehicle/ Boat Fires	2	4
Tota of all calls including alarm, false, fire and non fire	64	103
Percentage of structure fire to total calls	3.1%	3.8%

Page 3, 5, 15 - Tax folio increases and footprint size from 1992 and 2008 are directly related to annexation of the landing in 1993. The higher value properties are also in the landing. The main growth areas and added footprint is already well covered for fire protection. For 18 years before the annexation the two fire departments worked very efficiently at protecting the area and still do. The growth projections that are talked about were based on information before current economic conditions and it would be careless to plan growth based on these.

Page 6, 20 -

The description of services rendered by the relative halls fails to address the many services OKLVFD provides outside of fire suppression that have previously been listed in the OKLVFD Fire Services Review, such as fire alarms and MVI's, on-water fires, ice rescue and nuisance call responses. The hall has an active Search and Rescue component and have undertaken public education for interface safety as well as school and public education initiatives. While the report re-addresses the services later in the page, the reader is left to think the Downtown station is required for numerous situations per year. A look at the provided descriptions of 2007/2008 incident summary should provide a more accurate picture.

The list of services referenced that the tax structure did not account for is inaccurate as and misleading in that:

FMR was a no-cost service to the City of Vernon Re Chief Lysholm Administrative services have always been charged for. Tax collected from the landing is greater than the budget for the landing fire hall.

There has only been one HAZMAT incident in the OK landing area and the Landing hall looked after that. (boat spill)

A more realistic allocation of costs for FMR based on some real numbers would be $103 \text{ Landing calls} / 1847 \text{ Total} \times (\text{Your Numbers}) \$ 20,000 = \$ 1115.32$ and even if the "Value" is used $103/1847 \times \$1,574,093. = \$ 87781.$ a more reasonable taxation formula could be calculated for the specified area. The provision of FMR services by the COV requires a financial review open to council and the public.

We do expect that there will be a backlash to the thoughtless decision to integrate taxation once the public realizes the impact and cost downloading to the assessment values in the Okanagan Landing area.

Page 20 - Taxation of fire services into the General Levy. This will punish owners of large empty lots and is a completely inaccurate study. There is no reason that a fire tax for specified areas cannot be done and as stated earlier there has been over and above tax collected in the landing to cover support services. The presentation given to council to make the decision was a value look at allocation not an increased marginal cost study. The costs for the services downtown would not get any lower if the extra services were taken away – the cost shown is the cost to man a hall 24/7 no matter what type of call it is responding to. Perhaps a study should be done to reduce operating cost of the downtown hall.

Page 6 – “ the arrangement results in two separate fire service organizations “ Both of these organizations are under the responsibility of the Downtown Vernon Chief they are not independent. This fire service is duplicated in Kelowna.

Page 6-7 “ the Volunteer fire service is in crisis”. The recruitment and retention are like any other business; it works better when the people are treated better. If you want to retain membership then give them some pride, responsibility and ownership. In the Okanagan Landing Hall we manage a successful business and the membership feels ownership and pride in that. The way the hall operates contributes to its lower turnover rate than other volunteer halls.

Page 7 - The OKLVFD has been talking about joint training for years and has very little success in getting the downtown hall to join except for one or two times for airport training and a joint aerial ladder practice. We continue to see the benefit of a training officer organizing the training model but also recognise the need for OKLVFD members continuing training and practice on equipment and pumps.

Page 15 – There is an incident command system in place provincial wide that follows an efficient chain of command and also utilizes volunteers. The fires of 2003 used the incident command system very well.

Page 19 – Public Expectations: it is very premature to discuss, as if known, what the public would like. This has to be presented to the public with a full disclosure of benefits as well as costs before anyone should presume to know the appetite of the public.

Page 4, 24 – Principle stakeholders Input – It should be noted that while the facilitated workshop was deemed a positive step for all involved, it quickly devalued in the wake of the pre-determined direction finally disclosed in the Strategic Plan by the “Independent Study” and substantially reflected in the intentions here in this business plan.

The Landing hall does not feel that they have an autonomous roll. The hall is managed by its members but does report and is integrated with the City of Vernon Chief’s responsibility.

The Landing hall has never stated that two fire chiefs in the COV was confusing. Ideas expressed at round table discussions came from all stakeholders and agreements to disagree were part of that. A rank structure within the Stations is part of the leadership and organisation of the fire service and important on the fire ground in decision making structure.

Page 25 – Unified ICS. It should be state that the first arriving body with it's commander is in charge - THAT IS HOW THE ICS SYSTEM WORKS IN THE REST OF THE PROVINCE. In many cases the volunteer that is in charge would have more experience than the responding full time person. Do not forget that volunteers also hold many other very responsible authoritative positions in other full time jobs making them better suited to handle an emergency situation. If any IC is uncomfortable or needing help they should be able to turn to the next senior officer on scene for help.

Page 25 - Organizational Structure:

We have and look forward to a continuation of the development of operational changes such as unified accountability, coordinated training, response guidelines to the betterment of operations and services etc. for the public.

Any wholesale changes to policies that render the Landing Station not accessible for the continued use and benefit of the Volunteer Association and members will be deemed a negative and substantially decay what makes this hall so successful. A Volunteer Station must feel pride of ownership, benefit of use and results of efforts and responsibility in order to maintain moral and dedicated service. The results of the decay of these benefits would most likely be the resignation of over 300 years of dedicated, trained and effective manpower and skills.

Page 27 - Manpower issues

A quick look at the issues currently causing financial hardship.

The Volunteer-on call model currently used in the OK Landing has no such issues.

Page 28 – All stakeholders involved has recognized that training is and issue for both volunteer and full time fire fighting groups. Integrated training would alleviate this issue and the poor moral issue that runs within the different ranks.

A modified Option 1 is the only affordable and responsible model for the foreseeable future.

Advantages

Lowest cost in bad economic times

Will keep a positive environment for volunteers helping with retention. Volunteers can continue to run the business giving them pride of ownership and involvement in the community.

With back up or dual response with the downtown hall as an option, the timing of response will be above the standards set and at less cost than other models. That should be weighed against the need to have several crews dispatched to the same location for the sake of timing as opposed to a quality manpower response with appropriate equipment.

This will decrease risk to the COV as both halls are working in a coordinated fashion.

Maintains quicker size up in outlying areas by members carrying radios to their homes.

Volunteers in the downtown hall could be utilized to the same capacity as the landing hall, and all future halls, resulting in improved equitable service city wide.

First responding members will be in their own neighbourhoods giving them a better knowledge of how and what equipment to respond with.