



## REQUEST FOR DECISION

**To:** Curtis Slingerland, Chief Administrative Officer

**CC:** Board of Directors, Central Coast Regional District

**From:** *Melany Helmer, Senior Local Government Consultant*

**Meeting Date:** *November 14, 2024*

**Subject:** *Bella Coola and Hagensborg Fire Services*

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**Voting Entitlement:** *Service participants - Weighted Vote – Simple Majority LGA s.209*

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to present options and recommendations to the Board and obtain direction from the Board on how to proceed with Fire Services in the CCRD.

### **Background Summary:**

The CCRD is responsible for two fire departments in the Bella Coola Valley: Bella Coola Fire Department (from 1992) and Hagensborg Fire Department (from 2021).

A small but dedicated group of volunteers manage and deliver the function and maintain the fire halls and equipment. Both departments are a tremendous benefit to residents, businesses and visitors. Firefighters are certainly heroes, as they risk their lives to save others. This isn't an occasional facet of their job, but something they do nearly every single day they respond to a call.

The fire services are the subject of a mutual aid agreement between all volunteer fire departments in the Bella Coola Valley in Electoral Areas C, D and E. It includes both the Hagensborg and Bella Coola Fire Departments, Noosatsum Waterworks Improvement District and the Nuxalk Nation Fire Department.

As of August 1, 2024, the *Fire Safety Act* (“FSA”) has replaced the *Fire Services Act*. The FSA, and the associated regulations, will be essential to protecting people and communities through regular fire safety inspections and effective enforcement that will help prevent fire-related tragedies, preserve human life, and reduce property and economic loss due to fires. The FSA addresses significant advancements in fire protection technology and a deeper understanding of fire behavior since 1979. It was developed and implemented in response to recommendations from BC Coroner’s reports and stakeholder feedback to enhance fire safety standards and enforcement. In July 2024 updates were made to the *British Columbia Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards* (“*Training Standards*”), previously known as “the Playbook”. Fire departments must comply with the legislative requirements and the Officer of the Fire Commissioner. In so doing, we keep our firefighters safe. Alternatively, the Board can choose to wind down the service(s).

### Authority Having Jurisdiction

The Officer of the Fire Commissioner calls the local government authority the Authority Having Jurisdiction (“**AHJ**”). The CCRD is the AHJ/local authority and is deemed to have decided to provide the fire services when it took over the fire departments from the Improvement Districts. Both services have service establishment bylaws and also have financial plan bylaws that provide expenditure of collected tax funds. This makes the CCRD responsible for fire services delivered to its residents. If the CCRD were to have an agreement with a Society to provide fire protection services to residents in a specific area, and contribute funds to the Society for that purpose, the CCRD would remain the AHJ.

The CCRD as AHJ has the role and responsibility to determine and deliver fire suppression and fire protection services to the residents in all or in any defined area of their community or jurisdiction – the ‘service areas’. The establishment and provision of fire services is typically based on the community’s desire and willingness (normally through property taxes) to support this important local government service.

The AHJ has compliance requirements from WorkSafe BC in ensuring that they are meeting the intent and obligations of the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations* under the *Workers Compensation Act*.

As with any established local government service that is provided to their residents, the AHJ should issue a service establishment bylaw that clearly expresses the specific authority and kind of service to be delivered for the community from their fire service group. The CCRD has two bylaws – *Central Coast Regional District Hagensborg Fire Protection Service Conversion and Continuation Bylaw No. 502, 2021* and *Bella Coola Fire Suppression Service Establishment Bylaw No. 175* – that are included as Attachments 1 and 2. With respect to fire services and suppression, this service level must be recognized and included in any guidelines or procedures provided to the fire department. It is the responsibility of the AHJ to ensure this takes place.

One of the best ways to thank firefighters is by making their job easier, so they can focus their time on saving lives and properties. In order to do this, they need support by having the appropriate tools, equipment, and training. The fire departments provide an invaluable service to the properties within the fire protection area. It is strongly recommended that they be provided with all of the requirements to enable them to continue providing fire suppression services to the CCRD fire protection areas safely rather than winding down the service(s).

### Service Level

It is the responsibility of each AHJ to determine, define and formally declare its intended service level of the fire department(s) for the community – exterior, interior, full-service - which in turn is used to determine the required minimum firefighter training competencies that must be met by the firefighters for which the AHJ is responsible for.

The Authority Having Jurisdiction’s decision to determine and define the appropriate service level for its community fire service should be based upon:

- the support of the residents through taxation to adequately financially support its fire department to meet all applicable training, safety, and operational requirements (competencies) of the OFC Training Standards;

- the realities of the community in terms of infrastructure, demographics, official community plan, building inventory, risks, travel distances, fire hall locations, equipment, and staffing models (capacity); and
- anticipated availability of personnel along with equipment resources and the competencies of those resources to respond.

At this time, the CCRD has determined and declared that both fire departments are exterior only.

### Training

The *British Columbia Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards* sets the minimum levels of training requirements for the provision of fire services in each community so that firefighters are effective and operating in a safe manner.

Each firefighter must be provided training and evaluation in all applicable competencies and skills which are required to ensure the fire service personnel are able to safely perform their assigned tasks at an emergency fire scene, and to demonstrate this to the Officer of the Fire Commissioner and/or WorkSafe BC upon request. As a competency-based training program, formal certification is not critically required by the OFC Training Standards. In-house assessments and tests of personnel competencies can be conducted internally by the AHJ as long as the testing and evaluation procedures follow the criteria of the Training Standards (and applicable National Fire Protection Association Standards), and that detailed records of firefighter training and evaluation results are maintained.

Prior learning could be deemed to meet some or all of the requirements of a level or function and allow the AHJ/Fire Department to recognize equivalency. The AHJ makes this decision and is responsible. The Fire Chiefs have been responsible for delivering and assessing training and competency. They can be directed to review the records to ensure that they are detailed and fully meet requirements, and to share such records with the CCRD as the AHJ responsible to ensure that they are compliant. An increase to the training budget to \$1,000 per member, as recommended in the *Fire Services Review* completed in 2023, is recommended to ensure that there are no gaps in training and to cover the costs associated for fire fighters to participate in the required training.

### Fire Service Area

The Fire Underwriters Survey (“FUS”) is a national organization that provides data on public fire protection for fire insurance statistical work and underwriting purposes of subscribing insurance companies. FUS require that the boundary of the protected area must be clearly established by the AHJ and registered with the Provincial Government.

In accordance with the *Local Government Act*, Regional District services must be clearly defined and propose clear methods of recovering, allocating and managing costs. Each service provided by a regional district has its own operating and capital budgets. The costs of each service are recovered only from the area that benefits from it (the participating area for the service). This ‘benefiter pays’ model of funding services is established to be fair to the people paying the taxes and benefitting from the service. If, for example, fires outside the service area/fire protection area are being responded to by the fire department, the taxpayers in the service area are ‘footing the bill’ for their neighbours, who receive the service but don’t pay for it. As a result, fire protection areas must match fire response area. If there is a desire on the part of the community to receive fire protection and on the part of the CCRD and the fire department to provide that protection outside of the existing service area, a bylaw amendment should be adopted to change the boundary.

## Nuxalk Nation Mutual Aid Agreement

Nuxalk Nation temporarily shut down their fire hall a few years ago during COVID-19 and have not yet re-opened it. The CCRD continues to provide 'mutual aid' services to them at this time. It is recommended that the CCRD reach out to determine a collaborative approach to fire services, including whether they will be reopening their hall, if they would like to look at being another hall under an existing CCRD service or vice versa, or if they would like to contract with CCRD to provide fire protection services to their residents and businesses or have CCRD contract with them to provide those services.

This report does not presume to include any Nuxalk Nation plans or involvement because a dialogue has not yet occurred.

## FUS Discount to Insurance Rates

When a community improves its Public Fire Protection Classification ("**PFPC**") and Dwelling Protection Grades ("**DPG**"), residential property insurance rates may be reduced, and insurance underwriting capacities may increase. Every insurance company has its own formula for calculating their underwriting capacities and insurance rates, however the PFPC and DPG classifications are extremely useful to insurers in determining the level of insurable risk present within a community.

For commercial insured properties:

- PFPC may affect availability, capacity and pricing for a variety of Commercial Lines insurance coverages
- Assuming all other factors are equal, the price of Commercial Lines property insurance in a community with a good PFPC is lower than in a community with a poor PFPC

## **Financial and Viability Analysis:**

All of the financial information included in this report is based on projected 2024-year end amounts. These numbers are subject to change and will not be finalized until the year end is closed.

At the 2024 Regular Board meeting, the Board passed the following resolutions:

*COW-24-10-20*

*THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District reduce the asset replacement fund allocation to address the potential shortfall in Bella Coola Fire Protection budget.*

*COW-24-10-21*

*THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District reduce the asset replacement fund allocation to address the potential shortfall in Hagensborg Fire Protection budget.*

### Benchmarking with other Fire Departments:

A review of the cost of other fire services in British Columbia was undertaken, with particular focus on the ones run by regional districts in electoral areas. A total of 52 fire departments were consulted, of which 31 are 'exterior' service level fire departments for smaller rural communities. The results are summarized below in Table No. 1. The following observations are made:

- The Hagensborg and Bella Coola Fire Departments are funded well below the average annual cost of similar Volunteer Fire Department ("VFD") services which is \$257,194. and the average taxation cost per property protected of \$480.58; Bella Coola Fire Service's average cost of taxation per property in 2024 is \$419.04 and Hagensborg Fire Service's is \$134.68.
- Some VFD's still have an honorarium similar to the CCRD and a few are fully volunteer with no honorarium provided. However, with busy lives of volunteers and challenging economic times, many fire departments are transitioning away from a purely volunteer-based model to providing some form of hourly rate or honorarium to their fire fighters, in recognition of the time that they are committing to their communities and the personal and professional time that they sacrifice to be fire fighters. Often the rate varies, with officers paid more for attendance than members, and some even differentiating the amount of honorarium between members with different levels of training, to recognize and reward their participation in training. It is recommended that the *F-21 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy*, included as Attachment No. 3, be revisited to better compensate the volunteers for their time away from work, families and other personal priorities to contribute to protecting the community.
- With the recent legislative changes, there is a higher level of assessment, record-keeping, and compliance required, both in terms of the fire fighter training and the apparatus and equipment used by the fire departments. This is putting increased financial pressure on small fire departments in order to meet the requirements. Other VFD's have higher operating expenses and higher reserve contributions to meet these requirements. By combining the two departments and pooling some training opportunities, the increases to operating expenses could be lessened.
- Reserve contributions averaged approximately \$52,000 per year. Some included debt servicing for the purchase of fire apparatus or capital costs in addition to the reserve contributions. The CCRD would need approximately \$100,000 per department (\$75,000 for apparatus replacement and \$25,000 for other assets) or \$110,000 for a combined fire service (\$75,000 for apparatus replacement and \$35,000 for other assets) to ensure apparatus, turn out gear, and equipment are kept current.

**Table 1: Volunteer Fire Department Benchmarking Results – Operating**

<b>AHJ</b>	<b>CCRD</b>	<b>CCRD</b>	<b>CCRD</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Name of Fire Department</b>	<b>Bella Coola</b>	<b>Hagensborg</b>	<b>combined</b>	<b>Others Averaged</b>
<b>Number of properties served by VFD</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>418</b>	
<b>Service level</b>	<b>Exterior</b>	<b>Exterior</b>	<b>Exterior</b>	<b>Exterior</b>
<b>Total Cost of Service per year</b>	<b>\$78,746</b>	<b>\$90,260</b>	<b>\$169,006</b>	<b>\$257,194</b>
<b>Number of paid positions &amp; titles</b>	<b>1 PT-Coordinator</b>	<b>1 PT-Coordinator</b>	<b>1 PT-Coordinator</b>	<b>Most at least 1FTE</b>
<b>Amount of honorarium for attending callouts</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>many shifting to hourly vs per call out</b>
<b>Amount of honorarium for attending training</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>\$20</b>	<b>many shifting to hourly vs per training</b>
<b>Total Assessed Value of Service Area</b>	<b>\$19,447,400</b>	<b>\$76,264,482</b>	<b>\$95,711,882</b>	<b>\$93,030,556</b>
<b>Requisition</b>	<b>\$50,704</b>	<b>\$40,000</b>	<b>\$90,704</b>	<b>\$256,536</b>
<b>Residential Mill rate for the service area /\$1000</b>	<b>\$1.88</b>	<b>\$0.51</b>	<b>TBD</b>	<b>\$1.16</b>
<b>Requisition per property protected</b>	<b>\$419.04</b>	<b>\$134.68</b>	<b>TBD</b>	<b>\$474.93</b>

Hagensborg Fire Department:

The Hagensborg Fire department was taken over by the CCRD in 2021 following support by a majority of residents when the Improvement District was dissolved. It consists of:

- the firehall located in Hagensborg,
- a Fire Chief and ten members (note that one fire chief and 15 members are required by FUS),
- Apparatus:
  - 1986 GMC Fire Truck, yellow
  - 2003 Freightliner Fire Truck, red
- \$673,267 in reserve funds,
- And various tools and equipment required for the service.

In terms of apparatus, for a 3B DPG rating, FUS requires:

- a minimum of one triple combination pumper rated at not less than 3000 LPM (625 lgpm at 150 psi), AND
- a minimum of one mobile water supply apparatus with:
  - a minimum rated water carrying capacity of 4000 L (880 l.gal), AND
 For full credit apparatus must be designed in accordance with:
- Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC) S515 Automobile Fire Fighting Apparatus, or
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1901 Standard for Automotive Fire Apparatus

In addition, the combined water carrying capacity of the 2 required apparatus must be at least 6800 Litres (1500 Imperial gallons) total and the fire department must have a transfer system

capable of supplying the pumper with water as needed. This may be accomplished by pump or dump valve to a portable tank of at least 4550 Litres (1000 Imperial gallons) capacity.

The 1986 GMC Fire Truck should be replaced and retired as soon as possible. The estimated cost of a new tanker with pump capabilities that meet the FUS requirements of at least 6,820 litres water carrying capacity to replace the 1986 truck is \$750,000. The 2003 Freightliner Fire Truck is 21 years old. While FUS typically considers the useful life of a fire truck to be 20 years, for small rural communities, they may extend this to a maximum of 25 years depending on condition, regular maintenance and passing an annual certification. In four years, the 2003 truck would need to be replaced, with funding from reserves and the balance via short-term borrowing at the then-prevailing lending rates.

The requirements, current status, and what is needed to meet requirements are summarized in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Hagensborg Fire Department**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>To meet Requirement</b>
Minimum 1 Fire Chief and 15 auxiliary fire fighters trained, equipped and scheduled to respond (plus additional personnel to conduct mobile water supply shuttle operations)	Fire Chief plus 10 members	5 additional members needed
Fire apparatus – combined water carrying capacity of 6,800 litres, less than 20 years of age, fire pump service test records, well maintained	One apparatus is 21 years old and has 10 years of remaining useful life; second apparatus is over 25 years	New tanker with pump capabilities is required. Estimated cost \$750,000. Contributions to reserves for replacement of the second apparatus in 4 years Both apparatus require new tires; fund from increased contingency in 2025
Training to exterior service level in accordance with the Office of the Fire Commissioner's requirements and maintain records	Fire Chiefs train the fire fighters	Fire Chiefs continue to provide or arrange training. All training required by the Officer of the Fire Commissioner must have records for each fire fighter that they meet all requirements in order for that firefighter to respond to a fire
Turnout Gear, tools and equipment maintained in good working order and within lifespan	To be determined	Assess hose, ladders, cylinders, refill station, AED, gas monitors, etc. at both locations; maintain/service as required; keep records; contribution to reserves for scheduled replacement

Following the Board's direction from October 10, 2024, the 2025 Budget for the Hagensborg Fire Service was updated. Note that the largest financial impact is the depletion of the surplus that has been used to balance the budget up until now. Table 3 shows the revised draft budget for the Hagensborg Fire Service, together with the estimated costs of meeting the new requirements which results in a large taxation increase of \$150,136.29, including an increase to the hours for staff support. Even with this increase, the estimated taxation of \$190,136.29 is still below the average taxation of \$257,194 from benchmarking. The increase in contribution to reserves could be phased in to smooth out the tax increase but will result

in a shortfall in reserves in four years when the next apparatus is required and likely require long-term borrowing to meet the shortfall and requiring an elector approval process rather than the shortfall being funded from short-term borrowing.

The CCRD can apply for grant opportunities whenever available to reduce the impact to taxation and address the department's requirements. Any year end budget surpluses can be contributed to reserves and reduce the annual contributions by a corresponding amount.

Should the boundaries of the service area be revised to include properties that are not currently within the service area, but for which fire response is being provided, this could spread the cost over a greater area. A bylaw amendment would be required to include the additional properties. Elector approval could be completed by a petition of the property owner(s); this method of elector approval does not require approval by the Inspector of Municipalities and is therefore faster.

**Table 3 – Hagensborg Fire Service 2025 Budget**

INCOME	2025BudgetDraft	Estimated	Comments
Budget Surplus Beginning of Year	116,793.60	0.00	
Local Taxation	40,000.00	190,136.29	Increased taxation requirement to offset depletion of budget surpluses and increased costs
Other Revenue	282.00	282.00	
Interest Income	100.00	100.00	
UBCM Grant	40,000.00		
Grants in lieu of taxes	3,618.30	3,618.30	
Fire Protection Tolls	21,942.00	21,942.00	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$222,735.90</b>	<b>\$216,078.59</b>	
EXPENSES			
Apportioned Administration Fees	3,436.98	3,766.00	
Capital Works	5,000.00		Covered by reserve transfer
Contingency	1,500.00	11,500.00	Increased by \$10k for assessment, testing and addressing issued identified
Fireman's Honorarium	7,000.00	7,000.00	May be subject to change
Operating Expenses	73,323.28	93,812.59	Increased for training at \$1k/member; min. 15 members required with associated gear & equipment; increased staff time
Grant/Special Projects	40,000.00		
Asset/Reserve	92,475.65	100,000	Annual contributions of at least \$100,000 to meet cost of regularly replacing apparatus and equipment
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$222,735.90</b>	<b>\$216,078.59</b>	
<b>Net Profit (Loss)</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	



### Bella Coola Fire Department

The Bella Coola Fire department was taken over by the CCRD in 1992 when the Improvement District was dissolved. It consists of:

- the firehall located at 613 Cliff Street in Bella Coola,
- a Fire Chief and five members (note that one fire chief and 15 members are required by FUS),
- Apparatus:
  - 1991 Spartan Fire Truck, red
  - 1992 GMC Fire Truck, red
- \$88,898 in reserve funds,
- And various tools and equipment required for the service.

Bella Coola has the same FUS requirements for apparatus as Hagensborg (see above for details). Both apparatus – the 1991 Spartan and the 1992 GMC – are over twenty-five years old. The estimated cost of each apparatus is \$750,000; for the two apparatus, totalling approximately \$1,500,000.

A bylaw amendment to increase the maximum taxation of the Service Establishment Bylaw is required to accommodate the increased costs and debt repayment. (See Table 5 for details.)

The requirements, current status, and what is needed to meet requirements are summarized in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Bella Coola Fire Department**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>To meet Requirement</b>
Minimum 1 Fire Chief and 15 auxiliary fire fighters trained, equipped, and scheduled to respond (plus additional personnel to conduct mobile water supply shuttle operations)	Fire Chief plus 5 members	10 additional members needed
Fire apparatus – combined water carrying capacity of 6,800 litres, less than 20 years of age, fire pump service test records, well maintained	Both apparatuses are over 20 years	Two new apparatus required, likely through borrowing with debt payment via increased taxation. Increase to Service Establishment Bylaw required to accommodate significant increased taxation. Contributions to reserves for replacement of apparatus after they are purchased Both apparatuses require new tires
Training to exterior service level in accordance with the Office of the Fire Commissioner's requirements and maintain records	Fire Chiefs train the fire fighters	Fire Chiefs continue to provide or arrange training. All training required by the Officer of the Fire Commissioner must have records for each fire fighter that they meet all requirements in

		order for that firefighter to respond to a fire
Turnout Gear, tools and equipment maintained in good working order and within lifespan	To be determined	Assess hose, ladders, cylinders, refill station, AED, gas monitors, etc. at both locations; maintain/service as required; keep records; contribution to reserves for scheduled replacement

Following the Board's direction from October 10, 2024, the 2025 Budget for the Bella Coola Fire Service was updated. Table 5 shows the revised draft budget for the Bella Coola Fire Service, together with the estimated costs of meeting the new requirements, including an increase to the hours for staff support. Note that one of the largest financial impacts is the depletion of the surplus that has been used to balance the budget up until now. Under the estimated costs of meeting requirements and replacing both pieces of equipment via long-term borrowing, the taxation spikes sharply, by \$198,429.27, while still remaining slightly below the average taxation from benchmarking of \$257,194.

Replacing both fire apparatus is estimated to cost of \$1,500,000, which would need to be completed via long-term borrowing with a 20 year term – the estimated life of the asset. Annual debt repayment would be approximately \$123,000 based on currently posted Municipal Finance Authority rates; actual borrowing rates would be determined at the time of borrowing. Elector approval would be required for the borrowing and for an amendment to the service establishment bylaw to increase the maximum requisition limit of the service. The replacement of fire apparatus could be completed separately in different years via separate long-term borrowing bylaws to avoid such a huge increase in taxation all at once; the estimated borrowing would then be reduced to \$61,500 each. Immediate increase to taxation could be reduced from \$198,429.27 (total taxation \$249,133.27) to an increase of \$136,929.27 (total taxation \$187,633.27). The department would not meet FUS requirements during this period.

Contributions would still need to be made to reserves to meet the requirements for gear and equipment. The CCRD can apply for grant opportunities whenever available to reduce the impact to taxation and address the department's requirements. Any year end budget surpluses can be contributed to reserves and reduce the annual contributions by a corresponding amount.

Should the boundaries of the service area be revised to include properties that are not currently within the service area, but for which fire response is being provided, this could spread the cost over a lesser area. A bylaw amendment would be required to include the additional properties. Elector approval could be completed by a petition of the property owner(s); this method of elector approval does not require approval by the Inspector of Municipalities and is therefore faster.

**Table 5 – Bella Coola 2025 Budget**

INCOME	2025 Budget Draft	Estimated	Comments
Budget Surplus Beginning of Year	14,778.16	0.00	
Local Taxation			Increased taxation requirement to offset depletion of budget

	50,704.00	249,133.27	surplus, increased costs and repay debt
Other Revenue			
Interest Income			
UBCM Grant	40,000.00		
Grants in lieu of taxes	5,862.97	5,862.97	
Fire Protection Tolls	10,728.00	10,728.00	
Total Income	<b>\$ 122,073.13</b>	<b>\$265,724.24</b>	
EXPENSES			
Apportioned Administration Fees	3,278.90	3,264.00	
Capital Works			
Contingency			Increased by \$10k for assessment, testing and addressing issued identified
	1,500.00	11,500.00	
Fireman's Honorarium			May be subject to change
	4,000.00	4,000.00	
Operating Expenses			Increased for training at \$1k/member; min. 15 members required with associated gear & equipment; increased staff time
	69,982.21	98,960.24	
Grant/Special Projects	40,000.00		
Asset/Reserve			Annual contribution of at least \$25,000 to meet cost of regularly replacing equipment
	3,312.02	25,000.00	
Debt repayment			Immediate need to update both fire apparatus via long term borrowing; estimated cost for \$1,500,000 over 20 years
		123,000.00	
Total Expenses	<b>\$122,073.13</b>	<b>\$265,724.24</b>	
Net Profit (Loss)	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	

#### One Fire Service with two Fire Halls

An option that could be considered is for the Hagensborg Fire Protection Service to be amended to include the Bella Coola Fire Suppression Service. A merged Fire Service would more easily meet the legislative and FUS requirements because their combined personnel and apparatus would be considered. Such a fire service would then consist of:

- Two firehalls located in Hagensborg and in Bella Coola,
- A total of two Fire Chiefs and fifteen members (note that one fire chief and 15 members are required by FUS; requirements met),
- Apparatus:
  - 1986 GMC Fire Truck, yellow
  - 2003 Freightliner Fire Truck, red

- 1991 Spartan Fire Truck, red
- 1992 GMC Fire Truck, red
- \$762,165 in reserve funds (sufficient to cover the estimated costs of a new fire truck),
- And various tools and equipment required for the service.

The Fire Service consisting of both firehalls would have the same FUS requirements for apparatus as Hagensborg (see above for details). The 1986 GMC should be replaced and retired as soon as possible. The estimated cost of a new tanker with pump capabilities that meet the FUS requirements of at least 6,820 litres water carrying capacity to replace the 1986 truck is \$750,000. The 2003 Freightliner Fire Truck is 21 years old. While FUS typically considers the useful life of a fire truck to be 20 years, for small rural communities, they may extend this to a maximum of 25 years depending on condition, regular maintenance and passing an annual certification. In four years, the 2003 truck would need to be replaced, with funding from reserves and the balance via short-term borrowing at the then-prevailing lending rates. Two of the four apparatus would need to meet FUS requirements and the two best remaining apparatus would continue to be operated as additional equipment beyond the required two and would therefore not need to be less than twenty-five years old.

The requirements, current status, and what is needed to meet requirements are summarized in Table 6 below.

**Table 6: Hagensborg Fire Department with Bella Coola Fire Hall (merged)**

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>To meet Requirement</b>
Minimum 1 Fire Chief and 15 auxiliary fire fighters trained, equipped and scheduled to respond (plus additional personnel to conduct mobile water supply shuttle operations)	Fire Chief plus 15 members	Requirement met
Fire apparatus – combined water carrying capacity of 6,800 litres, less than 20 years of age, fire pump service test records, well maintained	One apparatus is 10 years old and has 10 years of remaining useful life; the other three apparatus are over 20 years	New tanker with pump capabilities required. Estimated cost \$750,000. Contributions to reserves for replacement of apparatus in 10 years All require new tires
Training to exterior service level in accordance with the Office of the Fire Commissioner's requirements and maintain records	Fire Chiefs train the fire fighters	All training required by the Officer of the Fire Commissioner must have records for each fire fighter that they meet all requirements in order for that firefighter to respond to a fire
Turnout Gear, tools and equipment maintained in good working order and within lifespan	To be determined	Assess hose, ladders, cylinders, refill station, AED, gas monitors, etc. at both locations; maintain/service as required; keep records; contribution to reserves for scheduled replacement

Should both Hagensborg and Bella Coola fire departments be combined into one service while retaining both firehalls, the combined tax requisitions would result in a more modest tax increase to meet requirements due to having met membership requirements and more easily meeting requirements for fire apparatus.

Based on the Board's direction from October 10, 2024 for both services, the first column in Table 7 shows the combined budget using 2025 values as an example of the services, together with the estimated costs of meeting the new requirements, and including an increase to the hours for staff support. Combined taxation would be estimated at \$284,426.81, above the average taxation of \$257,194 from benchmarking. The additional \$30,000 over average benchmarking is a combination of needing to assess gear and equipment and insufficient reserve contributions in past years. While this still shows a large tax increase of \$193,722.81, the amount is half of what it would be for either department individually where the combined total was \$348,565.56. Note that the largest financial impact is the depletion of the surplus that has been used to balance the budget up until now (approximately \$132,000) and only \$62,000 approximately of the increase is for meeting legislative requirements, contributions to reserves, etc.

The total assessed value combined would be \$95,711,882 which is in line with the average of \$93,030,556 from benchmarking.

The increase in contribution to reserves could be phased in to smooth out the tax increase but will result in a shortfall in reserve funds in four years when the next fire apparatus is required and potentially require long-term borrowing to meet the shortfall, and requiring an elector approval process rather than the shortfall being funded from short-term borrowing. The CCRD can apply for grant opportunities whenever available to reduce the impact to taxation and address the department's requirements. Any year end budget surpluses can be contributed to reserves and reduce the annual contributions sourced from taxation by a corresponding amount.

Should the boundaries of the service area be revised to include properties that are not currently within the service area, but for which fire response is being provided, this could spread the cost over a lesser area. A bylaw amendment would be required to include the additional properties. Elector approval could be completed by a petition of the property owner(s); this method of elector approval does not require approval by the Inspector of Municipalities and is therefore faster.

**Table 7 – Hagensborg/Bella Coola service 'example' 2025 Budget (Merged)**

INCOME	2025 Budgets totaled	Estimated	Comments
Budget Surplus Beginning of Year	131,571.76	0.00	
Local Taxation	90,704.00	284,426.81	In part increased taxation requirement to offset depletion of budget surplus and cover increased costs
Other Revenue	282.00	282.00	
Interest Income	100.00	100.00	
UBCM Grant	80,000.00		
Grants in lieu of taxes	9,481.27	9,481.27	
Fire Protection Tolls	32,670.00	32,670.00	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 344,809.03</b>	<b>\$326,960.08</b>	

EXPENSES			
Apportioned Administration Fees	6,715.88	7,030.00	
Capital Works	5,000.00		In future plan is to fund from reserves
Contingency	3,000.00	15,000.00	Increased by \$15k for assessment, testing and addressing issued identified for both halls
Fireman's Honorarium	11,000.00	11,000.00	May be subject to change
Operating Expenses	143,305.49	183,930.08	Increased for training at \$1k/member; min. 15 members required with associated gear & equipment; increased staff time
Grant/Special Projects	80,000.00		
Asset/Reserve	95,787.67	110,000.00	Annual contributions of at least \$100,000 to meet cost of regularly replacing apparatus and equipment
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$344, 809.03</b>	<b>\$326,960.08</b>	
<b>Net Profit (Loss)</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	

#### Legislative Process to Combine Both Services

The legislative process to combine the services would be to amend *Central Coast Regional District Hagensborg Fire Protection Service Conversion and Continuation Bylaw No. 502, 2021* ("Hagensborg Bylaw") to add the area served under the *Bella Coola Fire Suppression Service Establishment Bylaw No. 175* (Bella Coola Bylaw) into the Hagensborg Bylaw. The proposed change should be communicated to the electors to inform them of what the Board is considering and what impact the change is expected to have on the electors. This amendment can also include changes to the boundaries of the service area via petition so that the fire protection area and service area match, as described earlier in this report. Approval may be granted by 2/3 of the participants consenting, being the electoral area directors for Areas C, D and E. A petition, Assent Voting, or Alternative Approval Process is not required unless the Minister orders that one of these is required; provided that the electors are informed of the change proposed, this is unlikely. Summary of process:

- Hagensborg Bylaw Amendment drafted and submitted to Board for first reading; (Note: this amendment can also include changes to the boundaries of the service area so that the fire protection area and service area match);
- Board directs that the electors in Areas C, D and E be informed of the change that the Board is considering;
- Board provides second and third reading to Hagensborg Bylaw Amendment;
- Approval may be granted by at least 2/3 of the participants consenting, being the electoral area directors for Areas C, D and E;
- Inspector approval is requested from Municipal Affairs;

- After Inspector approval is granted, the Hagensborg Bylaw Amendment is presented to the Board for final reading and adoption.

After the Hagensborg Bylaw Amendment is adopted, fire services will continue to be provided by both firehalls for all of the existing properties that are in both fire protection areas (and potentially an expanded service area, should the Board so direct). As a result of the change, the costs required to meet legislative and FUS requirements will not need to increase as much as they would by keeping the two Services separately, avoiding further increases in taxation for residents and businesses. If FUS requirements were met, their insurance rates may remain at current levels or decrease, instead of increasing. All existing assets and liabilities (reserve funds, debts and obligations, firehall, equipment) held under the Bella Coola Bylaw must be transferred to the new Hagensborg Bylaw that will now include all of the Area C, D & E fire protection areas.

After this is completed, the Bella Coola Bylaw will be repealed through the following process:

- Bella Coola Bylaw Repeal drafted and submitted to Board for first three readings;
- Approval may be granted by 2/3 of the participants consenting, being the electoral area directors for Areas D and E;
- Inspector approval is requested from Municipal Affairs;
- After Inspector approval is granted, the Bella Coola Bylaw Repeal is presented to the Board for final reading and adoption.

### **Options:**

Option 1: Should it be determined that it is too costly to provide fire protection services, the Board can direct that the process be started to wind down either or both fire services.

Option 2: The Board can direct that both fire services be maintained as independent services with an increase to taxation to meet the new requirements. New apparatus should be acquired for both departments with associated borrowing. Bylaw amendment(s) to ensure fire protection area matches fire response boundary and to permit increased taxation.

Option 3: The Board can direct that the process be started to amend the service establishment bylaw for the Hagensborg Fire Service to bring the Bella Coola Fire Department into a combined service with two fire halls. Acquire a new tanker apparatus. Include change in Bylaw amendment via petition to ensure fire protection area matches fire response boundary. This process will add the maximum taxation from both current bylaws by adding additional taxable properties but will not require a further increase to the maximum tax requisition limit.

Option 4: The Board can direct that Nuxalk First Nation be contacted to determine an interest in exploring options for fire protection in a manner that is collaborative and mutually beneficial.

Option 5: The Board can direct staff to review *F-21 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy* and bring back a report with recommendations to a future meeting.

### **Implications:**

Option 1: The fire service(s) will be phased out, assets disposed of, and taxation for the service will cease. A bylaw is required to repeal the service. Staff time will be required to

support this process. Residents and businesses will no longer have fire protection services placing them at risk in the event of fires. Residents and businesses may experience an increase to their property insurance as a consequence.

Option 2: Both fire services will continue to operate as currently. Fire apparatus will need to be purchased. Additional funds through increased taxation will need to be invested to ensure that apparatus, turn out gear, tools and equipment are maintained and replaced as needed. An amendment to the maximum requisition will be required for both Bella Coola Fire Department and Hagensborg Fire Department. Staff time will be required to amend the bylaw(s). Staff time and mailing costs to communicate with the electors. Bylaw amendment(s) via petition to ensure fire protection area matches fire response boundary. Long term debt requirement for Bella Coola Fire Service to replace outdated apparatus.

Option 3: The Board can direct that the process be started to amend the service establishment bylaw for the Hagensborg Fire Service to bring the Bella Coola Fire Department into the service as a second fire hall. Bylaw amendments are required to bring the Bella Coola Fire Hall into the Hagensborg Fire Service. Staff time will be required to support this process. Staff time and mailing costs to communicate with the electors. Combined taxation limits and combined reserves are sufficient to acquire the new tanker apparatus without fully depleting the reserves or borrowing and commence saving for turnout gear, tools, equipment, and future apparatus. Residents and businesses will have improved fire protection services, better protecting them in the event of fires and better protecting the valiant fire fighters by ensuring the required training is provided and recorded and their apparatus, gear and equipment are all regularly assessed, maintained and replaced when needed. Residents and businesses may experience a decrease to their property insurance or avoid an increase as a consequence.

Option 4: Whichever option is chosen, it is recommended that Nuxalk First Nation be contacted to share the Board's direction with respect to fire services and to determine if they have an interest in exploring options for fire protection in a manner that is collaborative and mutually beneficial.

Option 5: Whichever option is chosen, it is recommended that the Board direct staff to review *F-21 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy* and bring back a report with recommendations to a future meeting. Other fire departments that revised their compensation model for fire fighters have improved attraction and retention results. The cost for compensating fire fighters would be expected to go up.

#### **Policy, Bylaw or Legislation Considerations:**

- *Fire Safety Act, August 2024*
- *BC Minimum Training Standards, Fourth Edition, July 2024*
- *Fire Underwriters Survey*
- *Motor Vehicle Act*
- *Workers Compensation Act*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*
- *Amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada*
- *Local Government Act*
- *Central Coast Regional District Hagensborg Fire Protection Service Conversion and Continuation Bylaw No. 502, 2021*
- *Bella Coola Fire Suppression Service Establishment Bylaw No. 175*
- *CCRD F-21 Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy*



- Section 349 of the *Local Government Act* authorizes bylaw amendments to service establishment bylaws. Section 3 of the *Local Government Act Regional District Establishing Bylaw Approval Exemption Regulation* authorizes a regional district to increase the maximum requisition by a maximum of 25% after at least five years from the adoption or the last increase.

### **Strategic Plan Alignment:**

- ☒ Advances Strategic Plan in Category:
  1. First Nations Relations - To enhance our dialogue and relationships with Nuxalk, Wuikinuxv, and Heiltsuk First Nations to enable us to work more closely together and support each other on issues of mutual interest.
  2. Responsive Services - To provide services that are responsive to the unique and evolving needs of our citizens and our communities.
  3. Asset and Infrastructure Management - To manage our assets and infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.
- ☐ Regular Business - does not advance Strategic Plan.
- ☐ Consider adding to the Strategic Plan and allocating resources (staff time, funding) to the project.

### **Recommendation:**

*(Hagensborg Fire Protection Service Conversion and Continuation Bylaw No. 502, 2021)*  
*Service participants - Weighted Vote – Simple Majority LGA s.209 – (Area C and D)*

1. **THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District direct that the process be started to amend the service establishment bylaw for the Hagensborg Fire Service to bring the Bella Coola Fire Department into the service resulting in one fire service with two fire halls;**  
**AND THAT staff commence communication with the public about the proposed change including the opportunity for properties in the Bella Coola Valley and outside the service area/fire protection area to receive fire protection services through a petition and a bylaw amendment.**

*(Fire Suppression Service Area Establishment - Area E Bylaw No. 175, 1992)*  
*Service participants - Weighted Vote – Simple Majority LGA s.209 – (Area E and D)*

2. **THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District direct that the process be started to amend the service establishment bylaw for the Hagensborg Fire Service to bring the Bella Coola Fire Department into the service resulting in one fire service with two fire halls;**  
**AND THAT staff commence communication with the public about the proposed change including the opportunity for properties in the Bella Coola Valley and outside the service area/fire protection area to receive fire protection services through a petition and a bylaw amendment.**

*Weighted vote – all Directors – LGA s. 210*

3. **THAT the CCRD acquire a new tanker apparatus for the Hagensborg firehall.**

*Unweighted vote – all Directors – LGA s. 208*

4. **THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District direct that Nuxalk First Nation be contacted to determine an interest in exploring options for fire protection in a manner that is collaborative and mutually beneficial.**

*Weighted vote – all Directors – LGA s. 210*

5. **THAT the Board of Directors of the Central Coast Regional District direct that *F-21 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy* be reviewed, with a report including recommendations to be submitted for the Board’s consideration to a future Board meeting.**

**Attached:**

1. *Central Coast Regional District Hagensborg Fire Protection Service Conversion and Continuation Bylaw No. 502, 2021;*
2. *Bella Coola Fire Suppression Service Establishment Bylaw No. 175;*
3. *F-21 – Volunteer Fire Fighter Honorarium Policy*

Submitted by: *Melany A. Helmer*  
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Reviewed by:   
Curtis Slingerland, Chief Administrative Officer