

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF FIRE SERVICES IN THE BELLA COOLA VALLEY LOOK LIKE?

HISTORY

Founded in 1944, the Bella Coola Fire Department was converted into a service of the CCRD in 1992. The Hagensborg Fire Department, founded in 1964, was converted into a CCRD service in 2021 following the decision to dissolve the Improvement District.

Through the years, both departments have relied on dedicated volunteer firefighters to provide fire protection to both Bella Coola and Hagensborg. Both departments have long histories of helping community residents when they need it most.

NEW FIRE STANDARDS

Over the years, the Province of BC and the Federal Government have brought in new operating standards for fire departments. This includes the *Fire Safety Act* and updated *BC Minimum Training Standards* that require increased firefighter training, detailed record-keeping, and compliance with modernized safety and operational requirements to protect communities and fire service personnel.

These updated requirements are expensive. They call for modern fire vehicles with greater water carrying capacity, regular maintenance programs, and compliance with national standards to ensure effective fire suppression and firefighter safety.

The CCRD needs to use tax dollars efficiently. In efforts to adhere to these new requirements, the Board of Directors is thinking about some ways to deliver the same level of service with a more efficient delivery model. The Board wants to hear what you think about this potential change!

Feedback or Questions?

If you'd like to leave feedback or have any questions for the CCRD regarding the future of fire services in the Bella Coola Valley **please email us at boardofdirectors@ccrd.ca**



Read the full Fire Services Review below using the QR code



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FUTURE OF THE FIRE SERVICES IN THE BELLA COOLA VALLEY

The CCRD Board is considering the Future of Fire Services in the Bella Coola Valley. Recent and upcoming changes require more investment in our Fire Services.

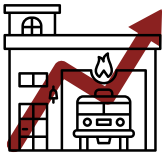
Is merging the services into one service with two fire halls the way to move forward?



HOW DO WE TACKLE THESE PROBLEMS?

OPTION 1: MAINTAINING SEPARATE FIRE SERVICES WITH INCREASED TAXATION

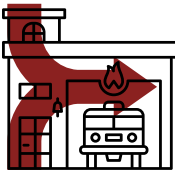
Maintaining both services and increasing taxation is an option to keep good fire services that would have Bella Coola and Hagensborg keep their distinct fire halls. This would be a more expensive option for residents, as it would require



duplicated resources and pose challenges for meeting total needed volunteer numbers for each department. This option would prioritize keeping the status quo while seeing both departments purchasing needed equipment to meet new fire standards.

OPTION 2: MERGING TO ONE SERVICE WITH TWO FIRE HALLS FOR EFFICIENCY

A merged fire service would operate with two firehalls, two teams of firefighters that train together, share support, equipment and compliance efforts under a single structure.



Merging the two fire services into one with two firehalls reduces duplication of service; thereby lowering combined projected tax requisition to \$284,426.81 (compared to \$348,565.56 if separate), meets insurance requirements more efficiently, and allows shared resources streamlined operations without compromising on resident safety.

OPTION 3: WINDING DOWN SERVICES IF DEEMED TOO COSTLY

New training, equipment and compliance costs are estimated at nearly \$200,000 a year. If residents see those increased costs as unattainable, then winding down fire services and phasing out



operations may be up for consideration. This would cease taxation for fire protection, leaving residents and businesses without local fire coverage. This would increase risks to life and property, and potentially lead to higher insurance premiums.

WHAT WOULD MERGING TO ONE SERVICE WITH TWO FIRE HALLS LOOK LIKE?

To maintain a good fire department insurance rating, fire departments need to use two fire engines that are less than 20 years old (with an option for two five year extensions).

A merged Fire Service would meet these requirements more effectively because expensive equipment like breathing gear or fire engines could be shared. A merged fire service would include:

- Two firehalls: one in Hagensborg and one in Bella Coola;
- A total of two Fire Chiefs, 15 members at one hall and 10 members at another hall;
- Apparatus:
 - 1986 GMC Fire Truck;
 - 2003 Freightliner Fire Truck;
 - 1991 Spartan Fire Truck;
 - 1992 GMC Fire Truck.
- \$762,165 in reserve funds (sufficient to cover the estimated costs of a new fire truck);
- And various tools and required service equipment.

HOW AND WHEN COULD THIS HAPPEN?

Legally merging the services would involve:

- The Board passes first three readings to a bylaw amendment to one of the fire services, including the new service boundaries and 2/3rds of the Directors from areas C, D and E give their consent;
- Public engagement to inform residents of the proposed changes gets underway.
- The bylaw gets sent to the Province of BC for approval (this could happen as early as 2025).
- The CCRD would begin merging the services.
- After that, the Bylaw of the old service would be repealed. This would also need Provincial approval.

Merging the services would make taxation for the service consistent across the new service area, with all participating households contributing based on assessed property values to fund the merged service.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MERGING?

Better Support for Firefighters

A combined service can offer better opportunities to train and equip firefighters, ensuring compliance with updated standards and giving local firefighters better support for their important work.

Broader Coverage Area

Combining services might potentially expand the area that the services can cover. This offers an opportunity to potentially grow the service and distribute the tax load among a larger group.

Improved Resource Allocation

Merging services may lead to better use of firefighters, equipment, and funding, enhancing overall operational efficiency.

What would the numbers look like?

Merging services will allow the firehalls to share vehicles like fire trucks and equipment like breathing equipment and turnout gear. This will cause overall expenses for a merged fire service to be much cheaper than keeping Fire Departments separate, and keep tax increases as small as possible to meet new standards.

Fire Service - Expected Future Taxes and Expenses

