



# REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: CS-BRD-034

From: David Sturgeon, Protective Services Manager

Date: January 28, 2021

**Subject: Moberly Lake Volunteer Fire Department Transition to PRRD**

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## **RECOMMENDATION #1: [Corporate Unweighted]**

That the Regional Board commit to working with the Moberly Lake Volunteer Fire Department Society to begin the transition from a society operated fire service to a Peace River Regional District administered and managed fire service.

## **RECOMMENDATION #2: [Corporate Unweighted]**

That the Regional Board approve that a letter to be sent to Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations asking if their respective nations will continue to be partners in the Moberly Lake fire service function, and if so would they appoint two representatives to work with the Peace River Regional District.

## **BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:**

In 1996, the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) established two local service areas in Moberly Lake, (one on the north side and one on the south side) to provide funding to the Moberly Lake Volunteer Fire Department Society for fire protection service. The Society, a registered non-profit society, also provides fire protection services to Saulteau First Nations and West Moberly First Nations under contract.

While the Department (a registered non-profit society) has operated effectively since before 1996, they are facing a number of challenges, including managing a growing regulatory and administrative burden (WorkSafe BC and Provincial training requirements), ensuring appropriate staffing, and most recently, addressing the resignation of its Fire Chief. As such, the Society requested in 2019 that the Electoral Area Director and the PRRD investigate the transition of the Moberly Lake Volunteer Fire Department to a PRRD directly operated service.

At the September 19, 2019 Regional Board meeting the following resolution was passed:

*MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED*

That the Regional Board be provided with a report regarding options for Peace River Regional District operation of the Moberly Lake Volunteer Fire Department.

In doing so, the PRRD contracted Dave Mitchell & Associates to conduct a needs assessment and identify options. The study confirmed that the best way forward for the longevity of the fire department is to become a local government administered service – like many other societies in BC have done in recent years. The most recent example of this in the PRRD is when the Regional District took over

management and operation of the Charlie Lake Fire Department in 2012. By doing so, Moberly Lake volunteer firefighters will be able to focus on training, recruitment and response instead of administration and records management which will be the responsibility of the PRRD.

On January 11, 2021 Dave Mitchell presented his teams' findings to the Society. The Society has continued to maintain that they would like to transition to a PRRD operated and managed service (like Charlie Lake Fire) and that continuing on as a society is not something that they are supporting. Please see the attached letter.

Dave Mitchell also presented the final report to Sauteau First Nations on January 12, 2021. They will be discussing the findings at an upcoming Council meeting, but have stated that they support the services provided by the Fire Department. Staff are working to schedule a meeting with West Moberly First Nations for Dave Mitchell to provide a presentation on the final report.

**Bylaws & Referendum:**

In order to transition the fire department to be a PRRD operated and managed service, the current bylaws will need to be amended as follows:

- 1) Merge the two service areas and combine north and south;
- 2) Remove the First Nations reserves from the service area as they are provided service under a fee for service contract;
- 3) Increase the requisition limit to meet the needs of the Department going forward (note currently the tax limitation for the two service areas is not the same);
- 4) Provide for the PRRD to operate the fire department rather than provide financial assistance to the Society; and
- 5) Amend the service to include both fire and rescue services so that rescue services are an option in the future. (Note: In the short-term the department's services will be limited through Board policy to that of fire protection only).

Staff have discussed the amendments required with the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and as this is considered an extensive amendment, an elector approval process will be required. In order for changes to be made to the 2022 tax roll (e.g., PRRD authorization to operate the service, service area boundaries, tax limitations, etc.), an elector assent process will need to be completed in July 2021. Alternatively, the Electoral Area Director and Regional Board may choose to utilize a petition process or alternative approval process, but in all cases the bylaw must be adopted and approved by the Ministry before mid-October 2021.

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:**

1. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

**STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:**

- ☒ Partnerships
  - ☒ Collaboration with Local and First Nations governments
- ☒ Responsive Service Delivery
  - ☒ Enhance Emergency Planning and Response Capacity

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):**

The Area E Director has budgeted \$15,000 in 2021 for public consultation and a referendum.

**COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):**

None.

**OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):****Assent (Referendum) Voting Process Timeline**

Time to Complete	Item	Timeline
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Board provides first three readings of the bylaw	March 11, 2021
8 weeks	Bylaw is forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for approval	Returns by May 11, 2021
9 weeks	PRRD preps for referendum, secures facility, develops COVID plan, completes statutory and non-statutory advertising, holds virtual town hall, advanced voting and regular voting	May 11 to July 16, 2021
	Referendum Day	July 17, 2021
3 weeks	Bylaw goes back to the Regional Board for adoption	August 12, 2021
4 weeks	Wait one month quashing period before bylaw can go to the Ministry for final certificate of approval and expenses can be incurred	September 13, 2021

**Petition Process Timeline**

Time to Complete	Item	Timeline
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Obtain permission from Regional Board to utilize a resident petition process	March 12, 2021
4 weeks	Develop public information required for mail out/distribution to benefitting area	April 12, 2021
6 weeks	Hold Public information session, allow one month deadline for receipt of petition responses	May 25, 2021
3-4 weeks	Verification of results and development of report to Board on the results	June 24, 2021
4 weeks	Bylaw goes to the Regional Board for three readings	July 22, 2021
4 weeks	Bylaw goes back to the Regional Board for adoption	August 12, 2021
4 weeks	Wait one month quashing period before bylaw can go to the Ministry for final certificate of approval and expenses can be incurred	September 13, 2021

**Alternative Approval Process (counter petition) Timeline**

<b>Time to Complete</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Cumulative Timeline</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> week	Obtain permission from Regional Board to utilize an AAP process	March 12, 2021
8 weeks	Bylaw is forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for approval	May 11, 2021
7 weeks	Complete required advertising and provide 30 days for elector responses from date of 2 <sup>nd</sup> advertisement	June 29, 2021
3-4 weeks	Bylaw goes back to the Regional Board for third reading and adoption	July 22, 2021
4 weeks	Wait one month quashing period before bylaw can go to the Ministry for final certificate of approval and expenses can be incurred	August 22, 2021

**Attachments:**

1. Final Report – Moberly Lake Fire Needs Assessment Nov. 16, 2020
2. Moberly Lake Fire Department letter to the Board January 18, 2021
3. Bylaws No. 1074, 1996 and 1076, 1996 and 2012 amendments