

Atlantic Canada > News

RFP could result in study recommending amalgamation of Greenwich, Wolfville fire departments

New hall in new location another potential outcome

Kirk Starratt | Posted: June 2, 2021, 10:40 a.m. | Updated: June 2, 2021, 1:30 p.m. | 6 Min Read



GREENWICH, N.S. — A consultant’s study could recommend the consolidation of two eastern Kings County fire departments, but the proposal wouldn’t be binding.

The County of Kings and Town of Wolfville have partnered to complete a review of fire services in Greenwich and Wolfville. A request for proposals (RFP) for the study was issued recently by the Municipality of Kings.

“Of course, we are doing this in lockstep with the two departments,” Kings County Mayor Peter Muttart said. “Nothing is being imposed on anybody here, it simply is an information study to assist go-forward plans for the two departments.”

He said that, to the extent that the findings are considered something useful to the departments, hopefully the two can agree to adopt them.

Muttart said 13 fire departments are serving the municipality, some that are quite close together geographically. For example, there are departments in Kentville, New Minas, Greenwich, Port Williams and Wolfville.

He said both the Greenwich and Wolfville departments have been speaking about having a professional study conducted, and the municipality agrees.

The purpose of the study would be to see if it would be useful or more efficient for the Greenwich and Wolfville departments to “co-operate, amalgamate, consider the type of equipment each carries so there would be no duplication, but that it’s more than satisfactory to respond to emergencies within a certain radius.”

The mayor said these are volunteer departments, and the municipality recognizes that it isn’t easy to get volunteers these days. They don’t want to put further strain on volunteers. Muttart said these are all issues contained within the RFP and they hope to get a qualified firm to respond.

Fire chiefs respond

Greenwich Fire Chief Jason Ripley said they signed a memorandum of understanding with their fire commission back in January, a process that the County of Kings was involved with. As part of this, the municipality suggested that a study of the fire service in Greenwich be undertaken.

Ripley said the fact that the review is taking place doesn't surprise him, but it was his understanding that it would focus initially on the governance structure in Greenwich only.

"I'm a little bit surprised to see that it's both departments being studied or looked at through this request for proposals," he said.

Ripley said there have certainly been discussions on the topic of department amalgamations. Greenwich has been pretty clear over the past few years that if amalgamation is something coming down the pipe, they would certainly take a look at it and determine if it would be the best move for ratepayers and the department.

He said one caveat to any consolidation would be that Greenwich wants to be considered an equal partner to any other department it would be merged with. Ripley would also want to ensure that there would be no reduction in fire protection services to the ratepayers and the community of Greenwich.

"If there's something that comes out of this that is positive and that's going to be better for the residents and better for the membership and good for everybody, then obviously we're going to support that," Ripley said.

Wolfville Fire Chief Todd Crowell said his is a town department and would support council's decisions regarding the study's recommendations. He said he's never been part of a process like this before, so it's difficult to comment on it at this point.

"I wouldn't want to speculate anything," Crowell said. "For me, it's too early in the game to answer those questions."

Wolfville weighs in

Wolfville Mayor Wendy Donovan said that until the study is completed, it is purely speculative. But, it is possible consolidation and a new fire hall location could be recommended.

She said that since before her time on council, there have been discussions about locating the Wolfville fire hall closer to Highway 101. The department regularly responds to calls in communities such as Gaspereau and Grand Pre and emergencies on the highway.

Although it will be up to the consultant to explore the possibilities, and she doesn't want to preclude their findings, Donovan said her "gut feeling" is that there could be some efficiencies to gain by amalgamating the two departments.

"If we can be more effective by gaining some efficiencies, then absolutely that is what should happen," Donovan said.

She said both Kings County council and Wolfville town council would review the recommendations once prepared, so it's premature to say whether or not they have any concerns. Donovan said she isn't concerned over the potential of the fire hall moving outside town boundaries, so long as response times and the level of fire protection aren't compromised.

Similar to when there was a discussion about the RCMP moving out of town, Donovan said there would likely be concerns expressed by the community if such a scenario arises.

It will be important for council to pay attention to those concerns and to have the data from the review to support any potential recommendations regarding a new fire hall location.

Recognizing that area fire departments support each other's efforts and work well together, she said they are already a somewhat informally integrated group.

About the RFP

The County of Kings provides funding to the Greenwich Volunteer Fire Department for the provision of fire services to the Greenwich area, through the Fire Protection Commissioners for the District of Greenwich.

The municipality also has an agreement with the Town of Wolfville for the provision of fire services to the area of the Wolfville Fire Protection District that is outside of town boundaries.

The proposed review has been agreed to by the Fire Protection Commissioners for the District of Greenwich and the Greenwich Volunteer Fire Department.

The successful consulting firm will be asked to focus on several areas, including general information gathering and stakeholder engagement; reviews

of finances and operations; fire call information; membership; and apparatus, equipment and buildings.

The consultant will be required to provide recommendations on potential efficiencies of the participating fire departments; proposed capital investment plans for fire halls and apparatus; and proposed funding models for collaboration or consolidation.

Should there be a recommendation that consolidation would be beneficial, the consultant must provide recommendations on site selection criteria, with specific locations included; the estimated cost of a potential fire hall (based on similar recent construction information); and a comparison to potential future capital costs if no changes to fire services are recommended.