

150 Mile Budget Meeting – Feb. 13, 2019

41 members of the public, Fire Chief Stan McCarthy, Area F Director Joan Sorley, Area D Director Steve Forseth, and 4 staff members: Scott Reid, Stephanie Masun, Emily Epp and John MacLean.

Budget Comments & Questions

- I would like a breakdown on the 2018 expenses and why they went up so much in 2018. Looking at a financial plan, that looks like a red flag, so I want more of a breakdown of why there was an increase.

Response by Scott Reid: Explained the general breakdown of the expenses. A big part of it was spending after the wildfires, which is a trend we saw after the 2010 fires as well. Our five-year financial plan is based on keeping the expenses at a much lower rate than we saw in 2018.

- I would like to thank Stan and the department. I'm in favour of increasing taxes in terms of the long-term. It's not that much actually.
- Were the donated trucks more of a detriment than a benefit? Are they useful to the department?
Response by Stan McCarthy: The one truck is a rescue truck and it is a great advantage to us. The other is only a summer truck.
Response by Paul McCarthy: The new rescue truck is also a lot safer and can accommodate more responders.
- Aren't first responders a provincial issue? Are they offloading this to us? It is getting tiring having them offload this issue on us.
Response by Joan Sorley: Yes, this is a provincial issue. We have been advocating for a long time to have them stop offloading this to us.
Response by Stan McCarthy: Yes, it is a provincial issue. And our first responder calls are going up and make up the majority of our calls.

- I have a question regarding the 2017 fires. Out of town fire departments came to help and they got reimbursed, did the 150 Mile department get paid? Did the Province not reimburse us for wear and tear on our equipment? Where did that money go?

Response by Scott Reid: Yes, we did get reimbursed after the wildfires. We received \$950,000 from EMBC after the wildfires with an all-found rate for the equipment.

- I want more clarification on where the money from EMBC went. Did it stay in the department?

Response by Scott Reid: We have fire walls between all our departments so all the money that was reimbursed will only go towards 150 Mile fire department expenses. Out of the \$950,000 reimbursed from EMBC, \$425,000 was spent paying the firefighters and \$200,000 was spent on maintenance and repairs. The remainder was spent on other fire department related expenses in 2018.

- I have a question about the new truck. It's a tender, right? What's the cost difference with 5 year and 10-year financing in terms of interest?
Response by Scott Reid: I would have to get the exact number for you, but there is about \$30,000 more interest with 10-year financing. The benefits, though, are that we can defer some of the debt repayment, meaning we don't need to have as much cash year-to-year and so it lessens the tax burden and keeps tax rates lower. It also is a better reflection of the use of the trucks over their lifespan.
- Can you tell us what the overall tax increase is for the CRD?
Response by Scott Reid: Overall the CRD is seeing about a 3.1% tax increase across all the services. When you take out the new services, that is about a 2.7% increase.

Hall 2 Proposal Comments & Questions

- There would be a referendum, right? Would the WLIB get to vote?
Response by Joan Sorley: No, only the CRD taxpayers in the service would get to vote.
- The WLIB is quite flush right now. I would be against this project without them contributing their fair share. I don't think half is their fair share.
- I don't understand why the WLIB doesn't just make their own fire department and have their own fire hall.
Response by Stan McCarthy: They don't have the interest from their members. I have done training with them over the past few years to help support developing a department, but the number of members has dwindled down.
- Wouldn't it be confusing to know which fire hall to go to when you get a callout?
Response by Stan McCarthy: No, it wouldn't be confusing. We have a very good communications system and I always know where all the guys are and where they need to go.
- If the WLIB has a 3-year-old fire truck that is up to standard, how long would it last? Would you need to buy a new truck?
Response by Stan McCarthy: The truck would last 17 years. We wouldn't need to buy a truck because we would use that one and put the two trucks we have outside here in the new hall.
- Is the full \$600,000 for the fire hall based into the cost increase you said to \$91 per \$100,000? How much would the WLIB contribute to constructing the hall?
Response by Scott Reid: That estimate is based on the WLIB contributing half of the cost of the fire hall, so \$300,000. So, the estimated CRD tax rate is based only on paying \$300,000.
- Just to confirm, they have no firefighters but all this new fire equipment. We have a contracted fire service with them now, right? Couldn't we just change the contract so that we can use their equipment?

- Where is their fire equipment currently housed? If they have a hall already, why do you need a new hall? Wouldn't you want a new truck if you get a new hall?

Response by Stan McCarthy: They currently have a very small hall. It only fits their one truck. There would need to be a bigger fire hall in order make it part of the fire department.

- Would the new Hall 2 building be able to be used for other purposes, like this 150 Fire Hall is also a community hall?

Response by Joan Sorley: That hasn't been part of any of the proposals or discussions so far.

- Does it make sense to have two halls 7km apart? Why not just make the current 150 Fire Hall bigger or find one site to house it all?

Response by Stan McCarthy: It would probably cost just as much to upgrade this hall as it would to build another one.

Response by Joan Sorley: By having the halls spread out, we can provide faster response times with 150 VFD members coming from Williams Lake where they work. And then we could include the Lexington and White Road areas in the service, and they have been asking for a while to join the 150 Mile Fire Protection area.

- There aren't a lot of homes in Lexington and White Road area, are there?

Response by Joan Sorley: There are about 50 homes or so.

Response by Scott Reid: Our proposal estimates that the WLIB and Lexington and White Road area would make up about 20% of the service and the current service area would be about 80%.

- Do residents of WLIB pay taxes into Area F?

Response by Joan Sorley: No, they don't. We have a contract service with the WLIB to provide fire protection for them and they pay through that contract.

- Would you look at other options, like a different spot for a hall or making this hall bigger, when you come back to ask us in a referendum?

Response by Joan Sorley: No, when we come back for a referendum we would have one option selected and all the details and costs fleshed out. It wouldn't be an either/or question.

- How do you come up with value on properties in Sugarcane?

Response by John MacLean: The proposed Hall 2 concept is based on the WLIB paying taxes on their insured home rates, since they don't have property values.

- Are there any risks of having this hall on band land and then having them change their minds?

Response by Joan Sorley: No, we would have a solid contract with them.

- Would you lease the space for the 100 years?

Response by John MacLean: The WLIB voted in the summer to allow us to lease the land from them, but that is the only thing discussed so far. We still have to discuss all the terms and such and we need to figure out more details before we can have those discussions.