



## Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake

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**REPORT #:** FES-25-005

**COMMITTEE DATE:** 2025-04-15

**DUE IN COUNCIL:** 2025-04-29

**REPORT TO:** COTW-General

**SUBJECT:** Fire & Emergency Services Headquarters Location

### 1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 Council support the proposed project of relocating Fire Administrative Staff to Fire Station #3 (Virgil) to improve service levels and accommodate future space needs due to growth.
- 1.2 Council direct Staff to assign \$175,000 from the capital reserve to this proposed project to create an architectural set of construction-ready drawings.
- 1.3 Council direct Staff to issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for consulting services for the creation of design and construction drawings in order to be 'shovel ready.'

### 2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In 2021, Council approved the commencement of construction drawings for a new Fire & Emergency Services Headquarters to be located at Station #1 in Old Town.
- While that project did not move forward as intended the proposed location, ongoing challenges and concerns about the Department's current location suggest the need for relocation, however, to the more central location in Virgil, at Fire Station #3.
- Relocating the Fire Department from the Town's Operations Building will provide opportunities for enhanced service levels while allowing the department to meet its growth needs. Additionally, this relocation will provide much-needed space for other departments, as the availability of space for new employees is becoming increasingly limited.
- Numerous previously completed third-party reports refer to the benefits of relocating the Fire Department Administrative Staff from their current location.
- In the spring of 2024, an updated Focused Headquarters Location Study was completed, reinforcing the benefits of relocating the Fire Department Administrative Staff to the Virgil Fire Station. This study is attached to this report as **Appendix I**.
- It is recommended that an RFP be released for consulting services to design and create a construction set of drawings for a new Headquarters.
- In early 2025, two completed capital projects were closed, with the funds allocated to be returned to the capital reserve. These two projects total nearly \$200,000. It is recommended that \$175,000 of the returned amount be allocated to fund this proposed project.

### **3. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval for an expansion of Fire Station #3, 1391 Concession 6 Road, Virgil, to accommodate the existing and future Fire & Emergency Administrative Staff. The relocation and expansion will assist the Town with numerous challenges faced by both the Fire Department and other departments.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

In the Fall of 2021, a Staff Recommendation Report (FES-21-006) was presented, advocating for the expansion of Station #1 to accommodate the Department's full-time Administrative Staff. The report articulated three critical reasons for relocating the Fire Administrative Staff from the Town's Operations Building to a Fire Station:

#### **1. Attendance Levels of Firefighters at Station #1 (Old Town)**

At the time of the report, firefighters' attendance levels at Station #1 were notably low. It was recommended that relocating the Fire Administrative Staff to Station #1 would help address this issue, enabling staff to respond in fire apparatus when volunteer firefighter attendance was insufficient. This attendance concern has since been resolved, as detailed in this report. However, the concept of Administrative Staff assisting with responding to emergency calls remains relevant.

#### **2. Current Location and Needs of Administrative Staff**

FES-21-006 highlighted the challenges faced by the department due to the limitations of operating from the Town's Operations Building. Despite discussions regarding these ongoing challenges, the Administrative Staff continues to function from the Operations Building location, underscoring the need for a more suitable environment.

#### **3. Recommendations from Third-Party Reports**

Numerous third-party assessments have suggested that the Town's Fire Department should be relocated to better meet its operational needs. The findings and recommendations presented in these reports remain pertinent, reinforcing the need to relocate the Town's Fire and Emergency Services.

### **5. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS**

The previously approved report, FES-21-006, highlighted the necessity for Administrative Staff to relocate to an addition at Fire Station #1. A primary concern at the time was the number of active firefighters at Station #1, which was 14 out of 25 available roster positions. The station has since increased its staffing to 20 firefighters, with three additional recruits from the current training program set to join, resulting in 23 out of 25 roster spots filled upon their graduation. This positive growth can be attributed to various initiatives and improvements within the Department and Station. Many of the previous challenges have diminished, and any challenges Station #1 currently faces parallel those across all stations within Town.

On occasion, Administrative Staff need to supplement low attendance across all stations. Stations #2 in St. Davids and #5 in Glendale currently require more assistance than the others due to reasons that are not uncommon through the ebbs and flows of the volunteer model.

Relocating the Administrative Staff to a more centrally located fire station, such as Station #3 in Virgil, will enhance Staff's capacity to support fire service operations throughout the community. The attached map (**Appendix II**) illustrates a six-minute response radius from Station #3, demonstrating that Staff can access nearly the entire Town within this timeframe if assistance is required. Although Stations #2 and #5 are the most recent stations requiring supplementation, attendance patterns are expected to shift over time, similar to the improvements seen at Station #1. Given that all stations may need daytime staff support at times, the recommendation to centralize Staff at the Virgil Fire Station is further supported.

The current Focused Fire Headquarters Location Study (**Appendix I**) emphasizes the benefit of Staff supplementation and relocation. On page 12, it states, *"One of the benefits that Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services (NOTLFES) has is that all its administration and fire prevention officers are also firefighters. These staff are full-time day staff that can be better utilized to enhance the daytime response capabilities of the NOTLFES whenever needed (in support of the volunteer firefighters)."* Additionally, the study references the 2020 Fire Master Plan, which recommended relocating Headquarters Staff to a new facility. While the recommendation from 2020 was to relocate to Station #1, the updated report notes that *"(Station 1) does not take full advantage of the daytime staff to provide a more centralized level of coverage to the rest of the community as compared to utilizing Station #3 in Virgil."*

Currently, the Fire Department's location is not conducive to providing the level of customer service it aspires to achieve. Positioned in the upper mezzanine level of the Operations Building, the Department lacks visibility and accessibility for public interaction. This arrangement also inhibits direct engagement with the Department's firefighters. Only a few senior firefighters can freely connect with Administrative Staff, as not every firefighter is given an access card to enter the Town Operations Building. As a result, nearly all firefighters needing to communicate with Administrative Staff must schedule meetings or submit documents at the Front Counter, undermining the open-door policy the Fire Chief aims to foster.

The Fire Prevention Staff's current location also limits public access, reducing the effectiveness of the Town's Fire Prevention and Public Education initiatives. The updated Headquarters Location Study states that having Fire Department Staff in a more accessible facility would significantly enhance these initiatives.

Numerous reports have discussed relocating Staff from the Operations Building to a Fire Station. As identified within many of these reports, this move would improve Fire Department services and allow other municipal departments to expand and enhance operational efficiency. As the town grows, the need for functional space within the Town's Administration and Operation Buildings is increasing. Relocating the Fire Department would free up valuable space for other departments.

A report from Walter Fedy in 2018 noted the potential benefits of relocating the Fire Administration Staff to another facility to facilitate operations staff growth. *"The Fire Chief, as well as other Town staff identified the possibility that the fire department administration staff currently working in the Operations facility could be re-located to another facility in order to allow the space in the Operations Facility to be re-assigned for Operations staff growth. This*

*move would also allow for growth and improved efficiency within the Fire Department's work processes. The idea of housing the Fire Department administration staff at one of the Fire Stations was presented as a desirable situation."*

The updated Headquarters Location Study further highlights that the original 2020 Fire Master Plan recommendation to relocate fire staff remains relevant, especially with increased personnel utilizing the same space. *"In the 2020 Fire Master Plan office space was noted as a concern, however, during that time the By-law Enforcement staff were not located in that original space. In 2024, it has been documented that more staff are using the same space where it was previously noted (in 2020) as a recommendation to relocate the fire staff to a more functional facility. This would not only provide more direct access for the public, but at the same time create an efficient workspace for fire staff."*

Additionally, the Fire Master Plan prepared in 2020 noted the following (it should be referenced that at the time, only six (6) Staff occupied the mezzanine level, whereas now 15 staff between By-law and Fire occupy this space). *"Presently, the space (where admin is located) is adequate but lacks capacity to grow and the location presents a number of challenges. The space is not easily accessible by the public or firefighters."* Further, it notes, *"Typically, it is encouraged that the fire department headquarters be easily accessible for both firefighters and the public."*

In early 2020, Deloitte conducted a service delivery review for the Town, identifying opportunities for modernizing services, which included the suggestion of relocating the Fire & Emergency Services Administrative Staff to improve efficiency.

The 2021-2025 Fire & Emergency Services Strategic Plan, presented to Council in 2021, emphasized optimizing the volunteer firefighter service delivery model. A key strategic action identified was the relocation of Administrative Staff to Fire Station #1 to reduce response times in Old Town. While the attendance concerns at Station #1 have diminished as previously outlined, the objective can still be realized by moving to Fire Station #3 in Virgil.

The updated Focused Headquarters Location Study identifies several other benefits to relocating to Station #3, including:

- Utilizing existing facilities such as restrooms, kitchens, and meeting spaces, thereby reducing the size of the necessary addition.
- Utilizing existing AODA-compliant public-facing sections of the building, again minimizing the renovation and addition needs.
- Strategically positioning Fire Headquarters within Niagara-on-the-Lake to maintain adequate service levels amid anticipated community growth.
- Leveraging Town-owned land south of the existing station for future expansion and ample parking.
- Completing an addition with minimal disruption to current firefighting operations.
- Maintaining proximity to the Town's Administrative Building, located approximately 1.8 kilometres or a 3-minute drive away, ensuring Staff accessibility for meetings.

Lastly, relocating the Fire Department Headquarters to Fire Station #3 in Virgil would not only enhance operational efficiency but also create a prominent municipal facility that aligns with the character of the surrounding community, particularly in proximity to existing wineries.

**Appendix III** includes preliminary sketches of a potential addition to Fire Station #3, illustrating a feasible development option for the site.

At present, By-law Staff report through the Fire Chief / Director of Municipal Enforcement. While the proposal for the addition is to construct a new Fire Department Headquarters, if approved, an internal review should be completed to determine which Department could better utilize the current mezzanine space. Upon that review, By-law could be considered to be relocated to become a more forward-facing division that has better access to the front counter of the Administration Building for public interaction.

## **6. STRATEGIC PLAN**

The content of this report supports the following Strategic Plan initiatives:

### **Pillar**

3. Enrich Community Assets, Environment, & Infrastructure

### **Priority**

3.3 Infrastructure

### **Action**

3.3 a) Infrastructure Investment (Physical & Green)

### **Pillar**

3. Enrich Community Assets, Environment, & Infrastructure

### **Priority**

3.1 Assets

### **Action**

3.1 a) Assets

### **Pillar**

4. Optimize Organizational Excellence

### **Priority**

4.2 Customer Experience

### **Action**

4.2 a) Customer Experience

## **7. OPTIONS**

- 7.1 Option 1: Approve the recommendations put forward at the beginning of this report, including supporting the Fire Department Staff moving from the Operations Building to Fire Station #3 in Virgil; Prepare and award an RFP for the design and administration of construction drawings; And transfer \$175,000 from the Capital

Reserve, an amount less than that recently returned from closed projects, to fund this project. (**Recommended**)

- 7.2 Option 2: Not approve or support a Fire Department Headquarters move; Preparation of an RFP; And the transfer of funds from the capital reserve  
(*Not Recommended*)

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

A request is made to transfer \$175,000 from the Capital Reserve to this proposed project. Existing capital projects C02075 and C02076 have recently been closed with the remaining funds, totalling nearly \$200,000, being returned to the general capital reserve.

There are two primary costs to consider for this project. The first is for completing a set of construction-ready drawings by architects and engineers. The previously approved FES-21-006 report outlined the associated costs, including consulting fees, which were set at 6% of the overall construction cost. For the Fire Station #1 request this amounted to \$90,000. However, current estimates place consulting fees at 7.5%, totalling \$135,000 (see cost estimates within **Appendix III**). As the quote is approximate, staff recommend a total allocation of \$175,000 to cover potential unexpected contingencies.

Two previous capital projects, C02075 and C02076, have concluded with final costs significantly lower than initially budgeted. Project C02075, related to the Diesel Exhaust Removal System at Fire Station #3, finished \$99,593.37 under budget, while Project C02076 for the Diesel Exhaust Removal System at Fire Station #1 finished \$97,661.62 under budget. The remaining balances are due to lower-than-expected tender amounts received compared to initial estimates. As these projects have been closed, the remaining balances are being returned to the general capital reserve. Staff recommend allocating a portion of the returned funds to the new Fire Department Headquarters consulting project, totalling \$175,000.

The second financial consideration involves the construction cost of the new Headquarters, projected to be approximately \$2,000,000. While this cost will not be required immediately, it should be recognized as a commitment in future budgets. Funding strategies for this stage will likely include a combination of accumulated Fire Department Development Charges, currently at approximately \$1,000,000, potential allocations from the Canada Community Building Fund, and opportunities for federal and provincial grants, the availability of which varies based on the time of year and overall project costs.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

No environmental implications are associated with this report or this stage of the potential project. Reports requesting approval to proceed with the construction phase will identify future environmental considerations during the construction stage.

## **10. COMMUNICATIONS**

No external communications are required with this report or at this stage of the potential project. Internal communications with Staff and other stakeholders will be undertaken as necessary.

## **11. CONCLUSION**

As identified in the report above, the relocation of Fire Administrative Staff to a new Headquarters located at Fire Station #3 will provide the Department and Town with numerous advantages, from overcoming current challenges to optimizing service delivery.

The optimization of the Volunteer Firefighter Service Delivery Model represents one of the most valuable and essential priorities currently ongoing by the Fire Department. Ensuring that Fire Administrative Staff can manage this model from a functional location that meets the needs of a growing department and community is critical. Staff are therefore requesting that the recommendations contained in this report be approved and acted upon.

Staff intends to provide Council with an information report on the project's status once the finalized design of the addition has been completed, prior to the full commencement of the construction drawings. Additionally, staff will be required to follow the proper Site Plan Approval requirements.

## **12. PREVIOUS REPORTS**

- **FES-21-006** - Administration Offices & Primary Emergency Operations Centre

## **13. APPENDICES**

- **Appendix I** – Focused Fire Headquarters Location Study
- **Appendix II** – 6-minute Response Map
- **Appendix III** – Fire Headquarters preliminary sketches

Respectfully submitted:

**Prepared by:**



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**Submitted by:**



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