

Town of Niagara- on-the-Lake

Focused Headquarters Location Study



2024



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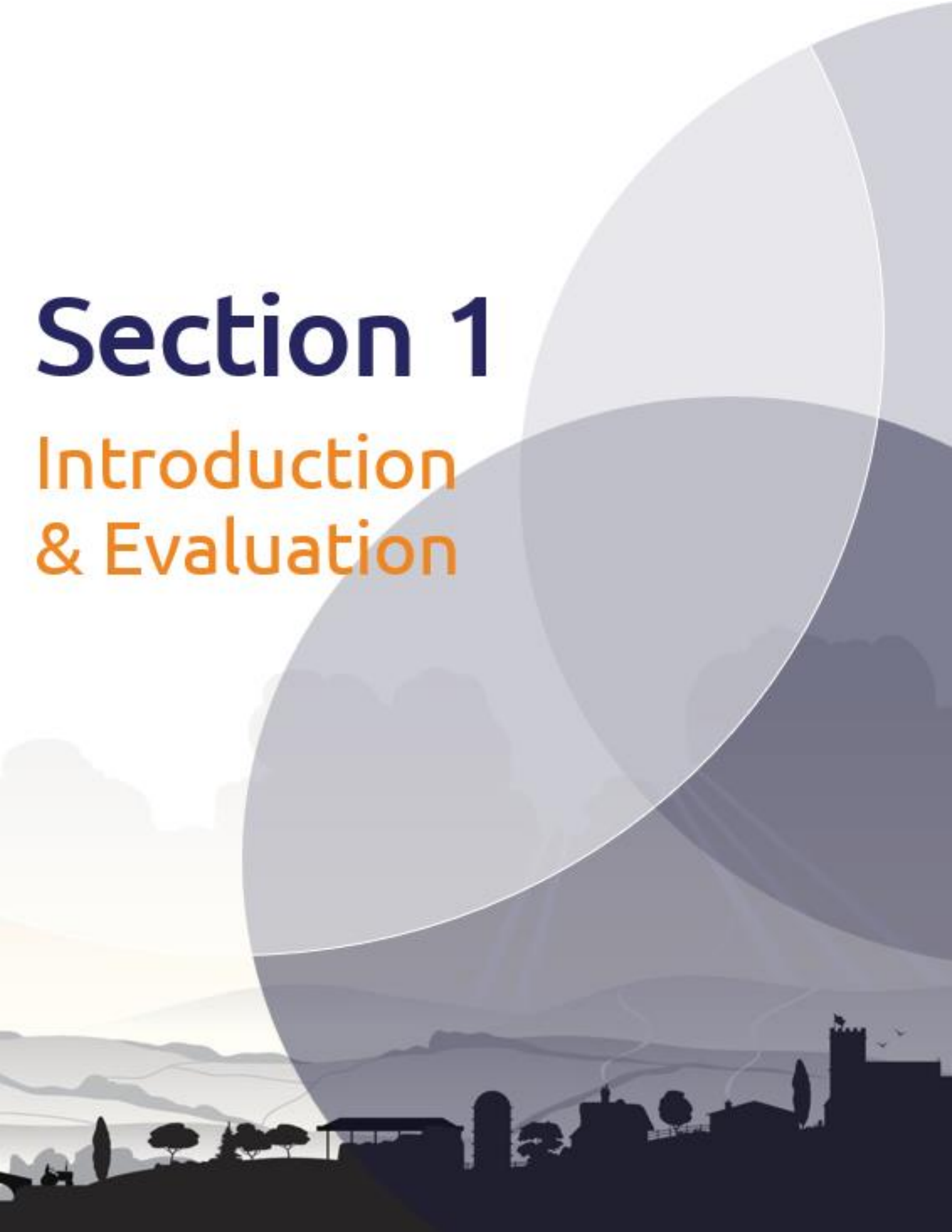
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Section 1

Introduction & Evaluation



SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION

In 2020, a Fire Master Plan (FMP) was completed for the Niagara-on-the-Lake Fire & Emergency Services Department (NOTLFES). In that report, recommendations were made regarding station locations, staffing, training, and fire prevention initiatives.

The focus of this report is based on two items. The first is a follow up to the relocation of the Fire Department Administration and Fire Prevention staff out of the Town's Public Works Facility and into a fire station. The second item is a follow-up to the amalgamation of fire stations 2 and 4.

1.1 Fire Station Locations

When reviewing fire station locations, the objective is to situate them in a position that offers the most efficient and effective response to the community served. Centering them within a determined response zone based on timed responses is not always the best option to implement, primarily because the station may not serve future growth effectively.

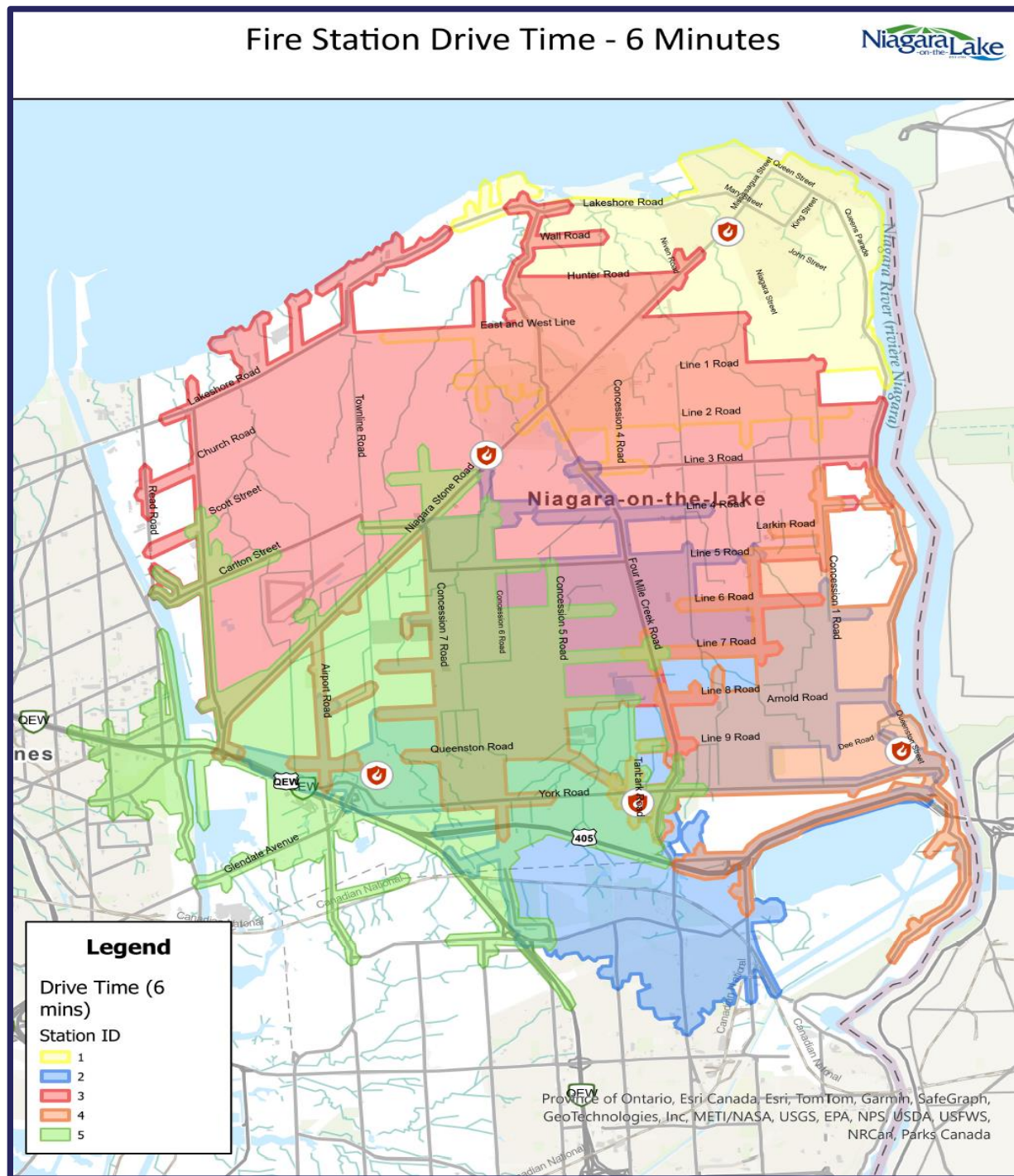
Fire station location, instead, depends on many factors such as key risks within the response zone, future growth of the community, and station suppression staffing (full-time or volunteer firefighters). Another consideration is the geographical layout of the community that can include natural barriers or divides, such as water, making it necessary to locate stations within proximity of each other.

The Office of the Fire Marshal's (OFM) Public Fire Safety Guideline – PFSG 04-87-13 (found in Appendix B) on Fire Station Location states that fire stations should be situated to achieve the most effective and safe emergency responses. Distance and travel time may be a primary consideration; however, if a basic expectation of response time is set by the community's decision makers, then a more realistic level of service and station location criteria can be identified.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is served by five stations across the municipality. Station #1 is in Old Town; Station #2 is in the rural village of St. Davids; Station #3 is in Virgil; Station #4 is in the historical village of Queenston; and Station #5 is in Glendale.

Figure #1 provides an overview of the fire station locations, along with the coverage obtained through a six-minute drive time. The drive time is part of the overall 10-minute response goal recommended by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

FIGURE #1 – FIRE STATION LOCATIONS



As can be seen in Figure #1, NOTL is well covered by the five fire stations. Notably, there is quite a bit of overlapping that does provide some future opportunity for the reallocation of resources. This is discussed later in Section 1.7.

1.2 Needs Assessment

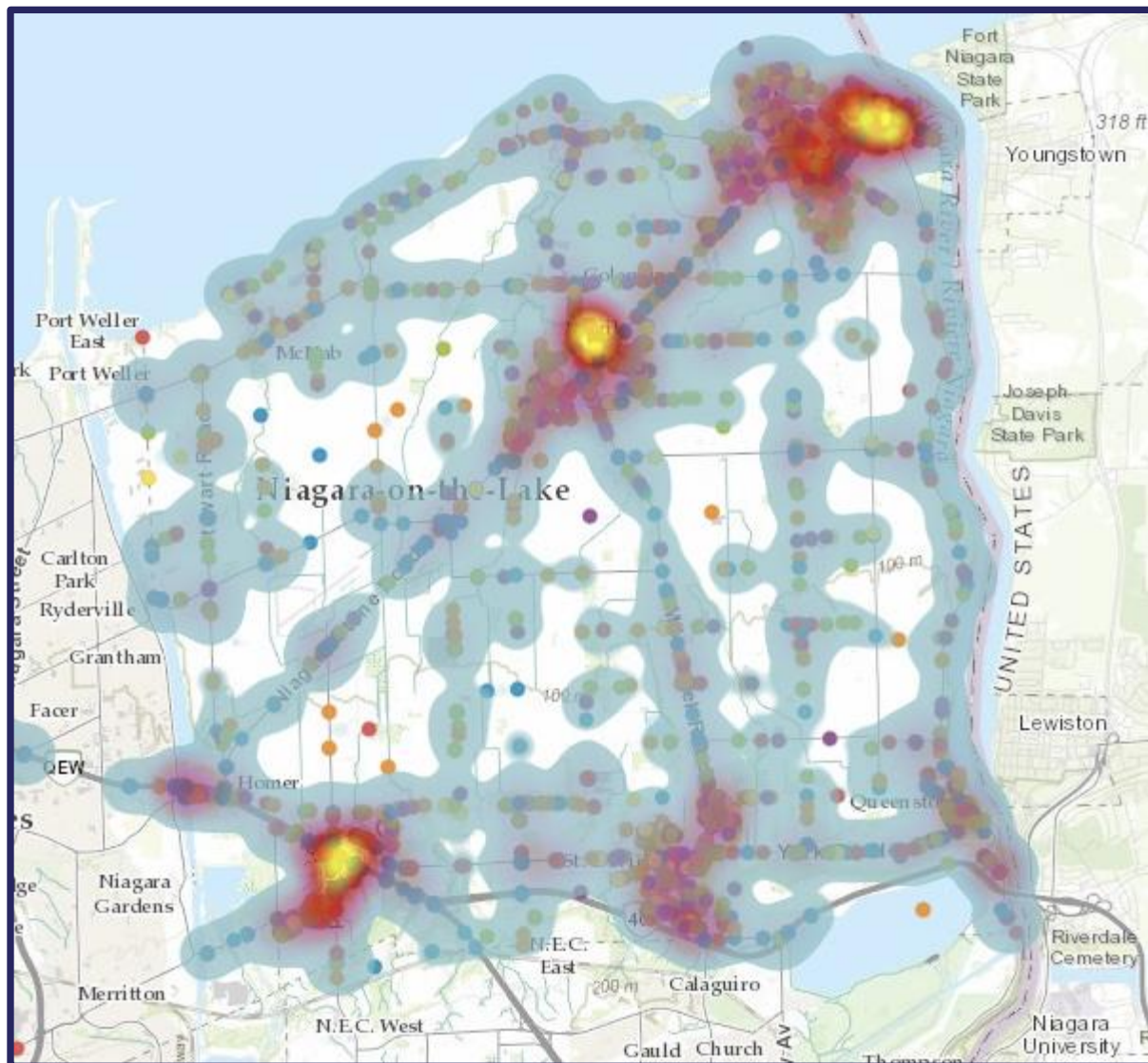
The first step to facility planning and location determination should be a needs assessment of the community and the fire department. This assessment should list specific requirements for staff in terms of the following:

- **Station** – Consider whether the station is large enough to meet the response needs of the department and community.
- **Equipment / Apparatus** – Adequate inventory as well as sufficient accommodation to house the inventory to meet the fire station and firefighters needs.
- **Offices / Workspaces** – Space for all staff to have adequate workspaces that also allow for privacy when dealing with staff, public, and confidential issues.
- **Firefighter Safety and Health** (e.g., cancer prevention and fitness) –Consider whether the fire station and office facilities meet all health and safety requirements.

The design of the fire station must meet not only current needs, but those of future requirements for the fire department and the community. It is primarily important to consider what equipment will be housed at the fire station, contemplating the fact that modern day apparatuses are growing in size.

Another key consideration is the incident locations. Figure #2 provides an overview of the locations of the responses between the years of 2018 to 2022. This illustrates the proximity and concentration of calls, which aids in identifying if the stations are adequately placed or if realignment may be required.

FIGURE #2 - CALL LOCATIONS



Note: The Yellow/Red zones are where the greatest concentration of calls is occurring.

As illustrated in the previous map, the main concentration of calls appears to be occurring in the following order: the Old Town (station #1), Virgil (station #3), Glendale (station #5) and combination of calls between stations #4 and #2 in the St Davids and Queenston areas. This is not meant to reduce the importance of responding to any one call; it is meant only to identify where the bulk of the calls are occurring and if a realignment of resources could benefit the community.

The response zones noted on the call location map identify a good level of overlapping coverage by the five fire stations in relation to where the main bulk of the calls are occurring. This overlapping of response zones also presents opportunities to identify if some realignment can occur. For example, there is quite a bit of overlapping between fire stations 2, 4 and 5, which provides an opportunity to consider consolidating some of these resources.

In the 2020 FMP report, the Emergency Management Group Inc. (EMG) (formerly known as Emergency Management & Training Inc.) presented recommendations for relocating the fire department headquarters and consolidating fire stations 2 and 4. The following sections will be discussing logistics of these options along with identifying the benefits of each.

1.3 Fire Department Headquarters

Relocation of Fire Administration and Fire Prevention Staff

The first focus of this report is the location and situation of the fire department administration and fire prevention staff. They are currently housed in the Public Works facility. As seen in the following photos, the fire staff are located at the back of the building on the second floor.

FIGURE #3 – LOCATION OF FIRE HEADQUARTERS



One of the critical issues with this arrangement is that the public has no direct access to the fire department staff, consequently reducing the effectiveness of the NOTLFES' fire prevention and public education initiatives.

Most fire departments situate their fire staff in their headquarters, which in most cases is a standalone building or part of a fire station. The goal is to make the fire department staff more accessible and visible to the public.

The OFM identifies three main lines of defences when it comes to community fire safety:

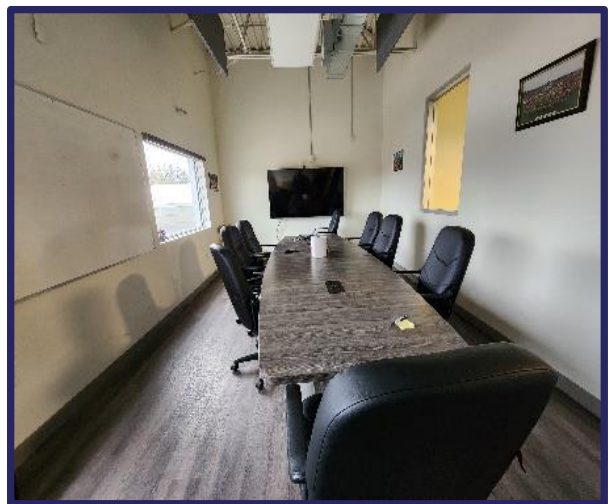
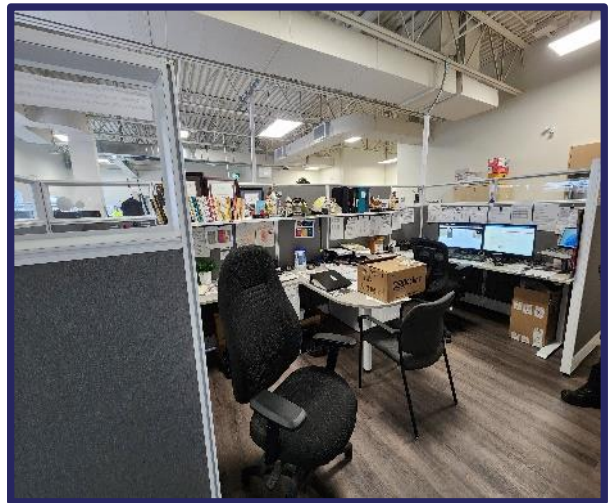
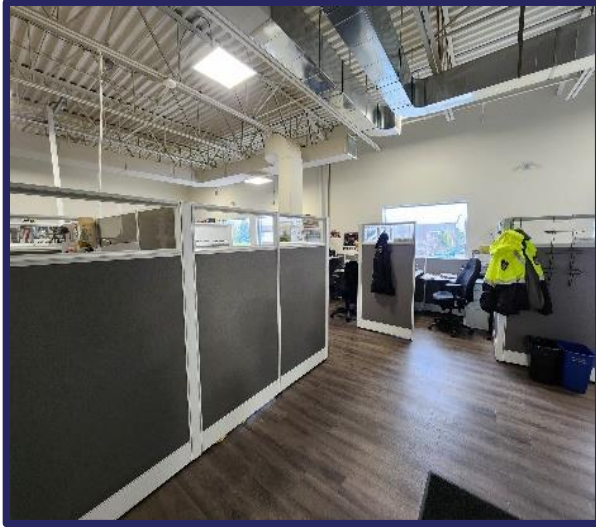
- I. **Public Education** – educating residents has proven to be the most effective way to reduce and prevent fire and property damage incidents. Reducing the number of fires before they start and identifying how the municipality will continue to meet the fire education needs while the municipality grows.
- II. **Safety Standards and Enforcement** – ensuring that the inspection and enforcement of fire codes occur so buildings meet the required safety standards.
- III. **Emergency Response** - ensuring an efficient and effective response program to mitigate and reduce harm caused by health and fire emergencies.

With the fire prevention staff located at a secondary building, public education is not as effective as if they were at a "public facing" facility such as a fire station.

Office Arrangement

Although the present space meets the fire department's basic needs, there is no room for growth. In fact, some By-law Enforcement staff that report to the Fire Chief must utilize workspaces outside the fire department's offices, creating a disjointed situation.

In the 2020 FMP 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 and increase daytime response capabilities (in support of the volunteer firefighters).



The present location could still be used by the By-law Enforcement staff, which would permit the By-Law Enforcement staff to congregate in one place. This would imply continued separation of the Fire Department and By-law Enforcement staff among two locations.

During the walkthrough of the Public Works facility, enroute to the fire department/by-law offices, it was clear that the Town is maximizing the amount of office space in most if not all parts of the Public Works facility. By moving the fire department staff to the Virgil station, this would reduce the pressure on space needs at the Works facility. This move (of the fire department staff) is not only a reasonable solution to the office space challenges at the present facility, but also one that will have the most positive impact.

1.4 Relocation Considerations

One of the benefits that 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). Their location at the back of the Public Works facility does not support this opportunity for service improvement – which is meant only to support the volunteer firefighters as needed. Also, while being located at the Public Works facility, this does not promote interaction between the firefighters and the chief officers. Moving to the Virgil fire station will promote an increase in interactions.

The 2020 FMP recommended relocating the headquarters staff to a new facility (to be built) at the rear of Station #1, located in the heart of the Old Town core of Niagara-on-the-Lake. Although this location has land available to build an Administration/Headquarters, it 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.

FIGURE #4 - ORIGINAL RECOMMENDED FOR HQ IN THE 2020 FMP



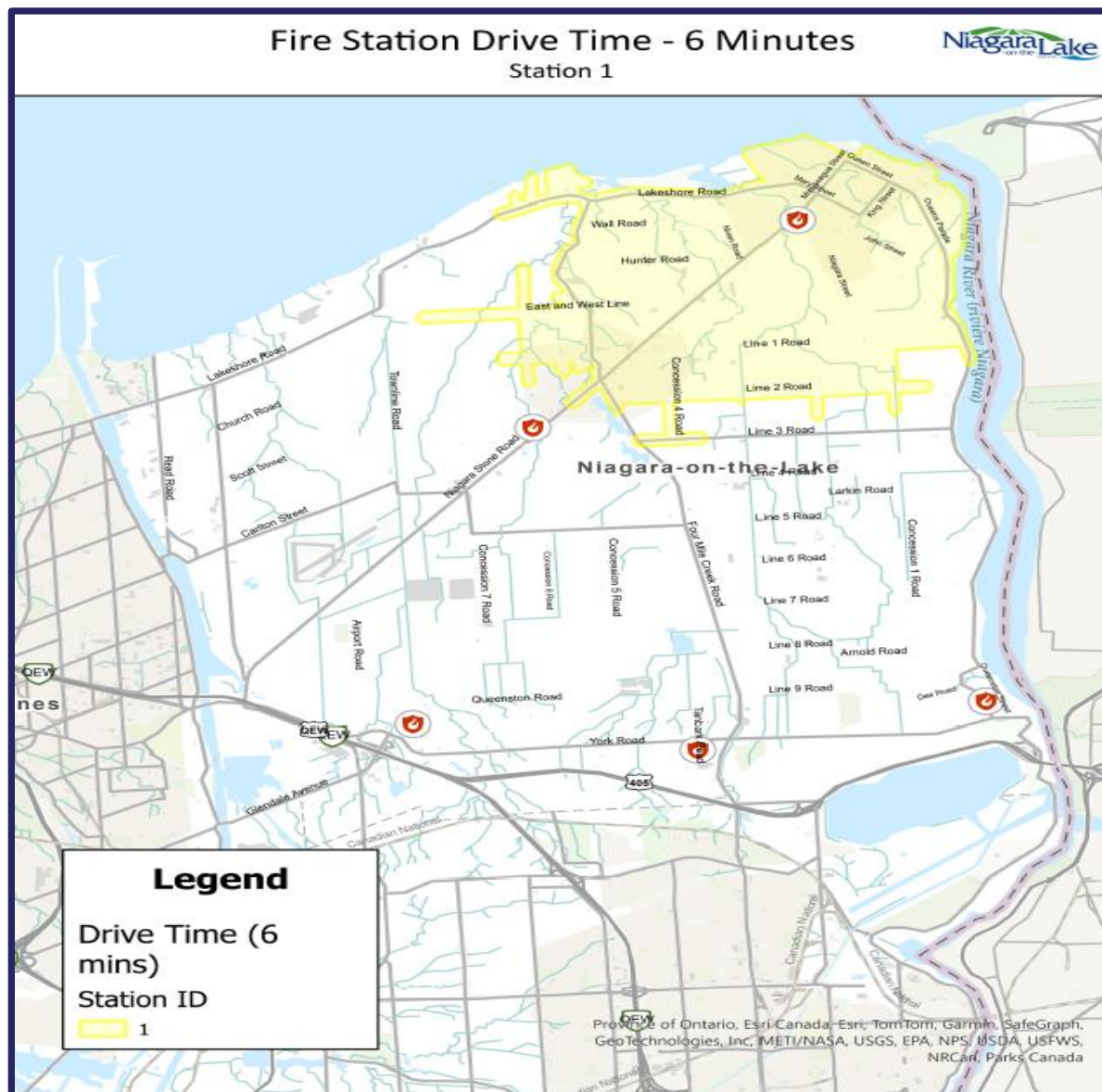
Response by Daytime Staff

***Note:** Prior to reviewing the following response maps, it MUST be noted that neither EMG or the NOTL senior fire service staff are suggesting that the day staff take over or replace the volunteer firefighters in any way. The volunteer firefighters are doing an admirable job in responding to calls at any time of the day or night. This portion of the report is only meant to point out that, in extreme circumstances, having the day staff working out of the Virgil fire station would allow for opportunities to enhance the fire department's response capabilities – not replace them (the volunteer firefighters).*

As can be seen in the following response zone maps (developed by the NOTL IT Department), the northern portion of the community would be well covered by the day staff (as needed) out

of Station #1, but the southern portion of the community is outside of the recommended response zone coverage.

FIGURE # 5 - FIRE STATION #1 RESPONSE COVERAGE

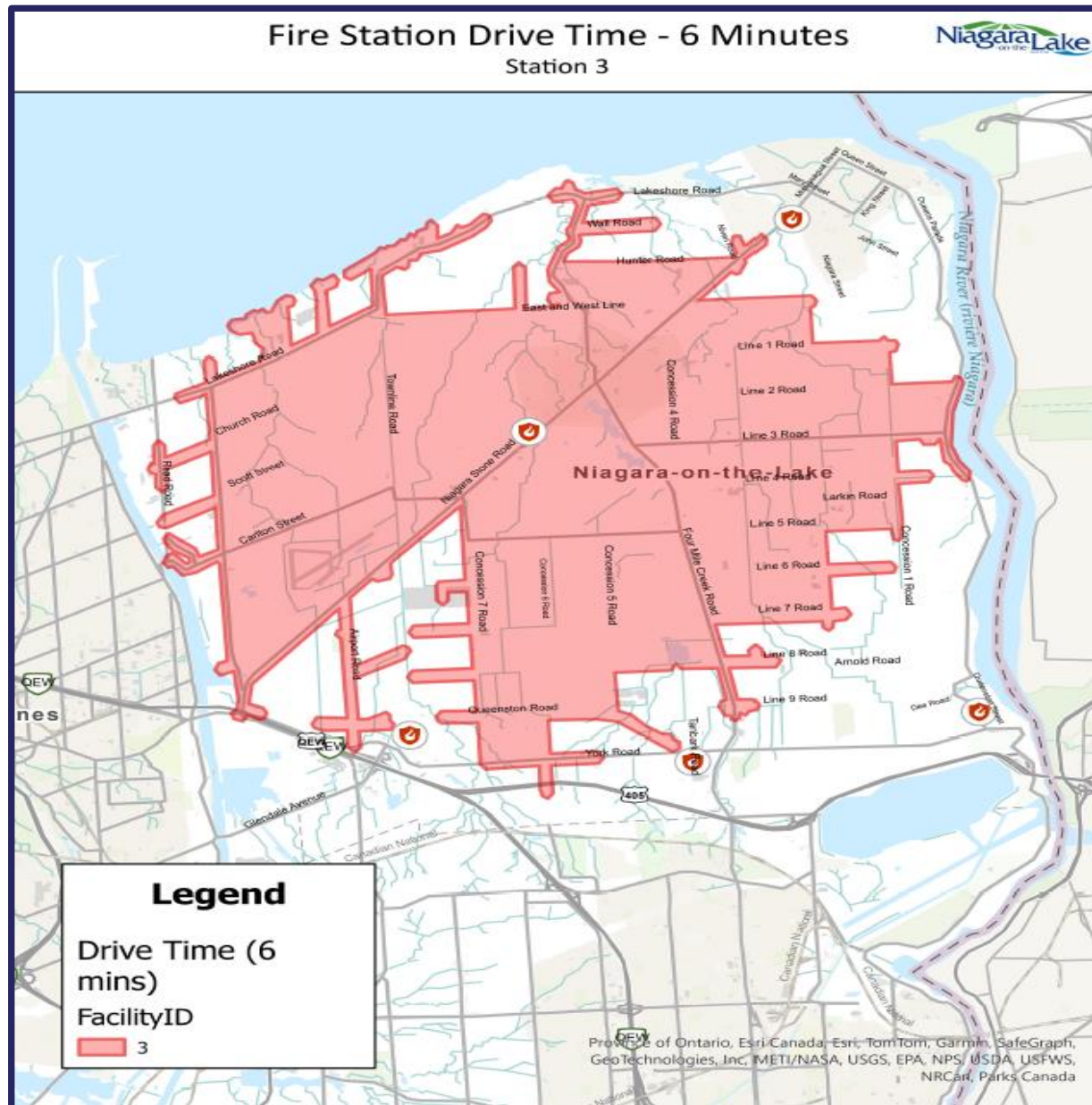


***Note:** the six-minute response zone coverage is utilized to identify that for a community the size of NOTL, the NFPA recommends a 10-minute response. However, since it takes approximately four minutes to arrive at the fire station, the actual drive time would be approximately six-minutes.*

After some comparison of response zones and available locations, Station #3 was identified as having the ability (like Station #1) to accommodate the fire administration and fire prevention staff by adding an addition to the existing building (which has already been explored by the Fire

Chief through the development of a draft set of drawings for Station #3 – See Appendix "B"). There is enough land on the site to accommodate this extension and the additional parking needs.

FIGURE #6 - FIRE STATION #3 RESPONSE COVERAGE



Having the staff from headquarters relocated to Station #3 would allow personnel to assemble as a crew on a fire apparatus and respond to calls (as needed in support of the volunteers), thus reducing the turnout time of the initial response.

As noted in the following photo, Station #3 has enough land to extend the building without infringing on other properties.

FIGURE #7 - FIRE STATION #3 LAND AVAILABILITY



The building of a standalone fire department headquarters at Station #1 may cost \$3-5 million, depending upon today's building costs and the structure's features and functionalities. The same approximate funds (or less) assigned to the expansion of Station #3 option could further garner two fundamental benefits – a more centralized use of the daytime staff and the deferred hiring of career firefighters. Also, the renovations to Station #3 are estimated to be around \$2 million, far less than building a new headquarters near Station #1.

***Note:** With the region's continued growth, the Council will eventually need to consider hiring a full-time contingent in the future. Expansion of Station #3 would improve response capacity of*

the Fire Department, while providing the Council and the Fire Chief with time to consider when full-time firefighters may be required.

Another advantage of utilizing Station #3 is that the Headquarters staff could utilize some of the present facilities in the station that are not frequently used by the volunteer firefighters during daytime office hours, such as the training room, instead of adding a conference room in the addition. The volunteer firefighters would not be affected by this additional parking in the south (of the property) because they respond to the northern portion of the building, which has its own parking lot.

Note: *Due to the amount of space available at Station #3, transferring the administration and fire prevention staff could be accomplished almost immediately while the renovations/upgrades are being accomplished. Station #3 presently has enough capacity to allow for temporary office space to accommodate the move. This immediate relocation would permit the daytime staff to be utilized much sooner, enhancing the Department's response capability.*

1.5 Present & Future Images of Station #3



Note: The above rendering was supplied to Niagara-on-the-Lake by White Line Architects Inc.

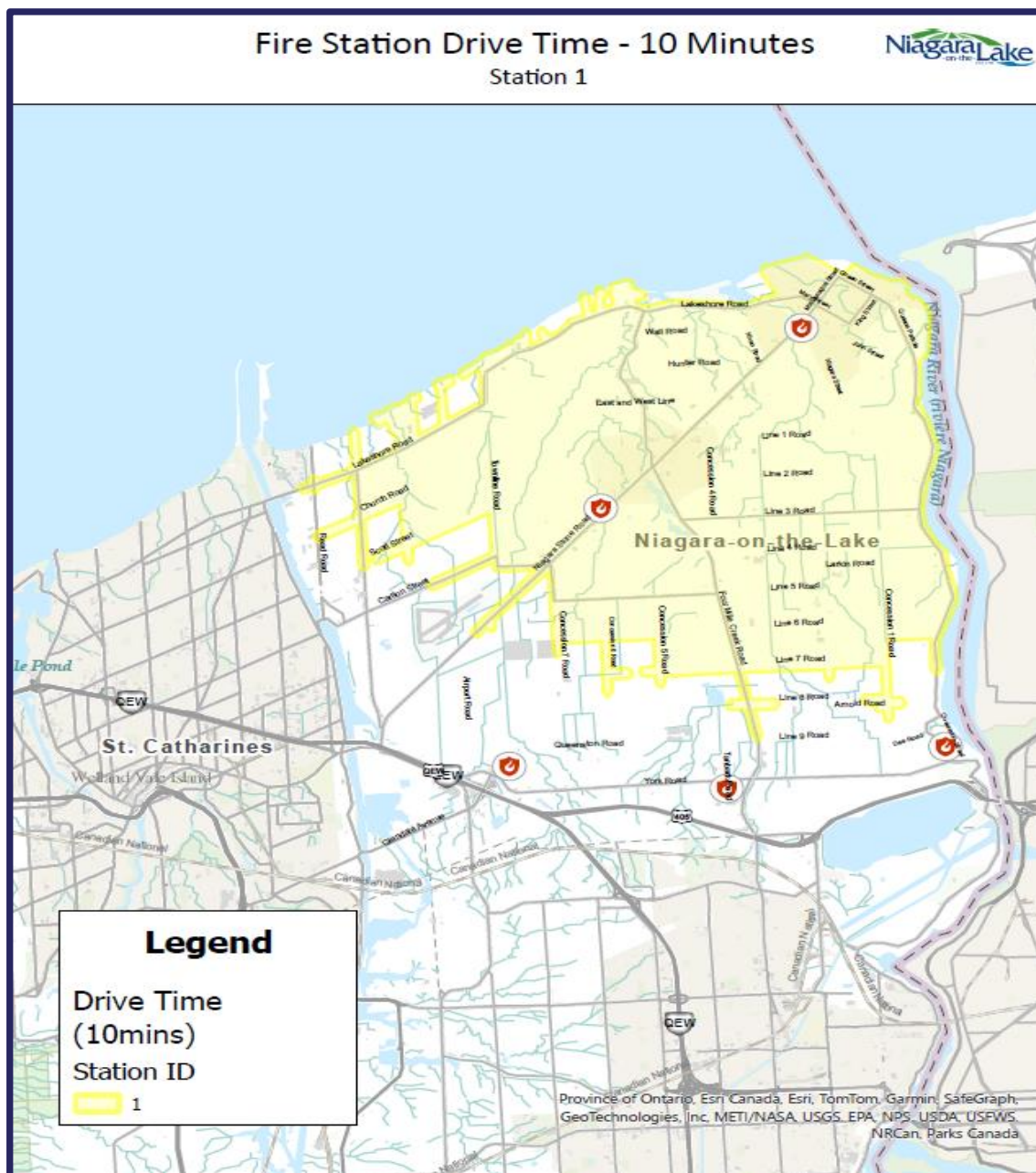
1.6 10-Minute Response Zones Concept

As noted in the 2020 FMP, based on the population and related response goals (as per the NFPA standard), the NOTLFES would need to adopt a response time of 10 minutes to meet the NFPA response time recommendation for a community the size of NOTL. During the 2024 review, it was noted that the fire department is working towards the Commission on Fire Accreditation International process that promotes continuous improvement through the development of a Standard of Cover assessment. Because of this endeavour, the fire

department is moving towards an appropriate response time standard. As such, the fire department team should be commended for this goal of continuous improvement.

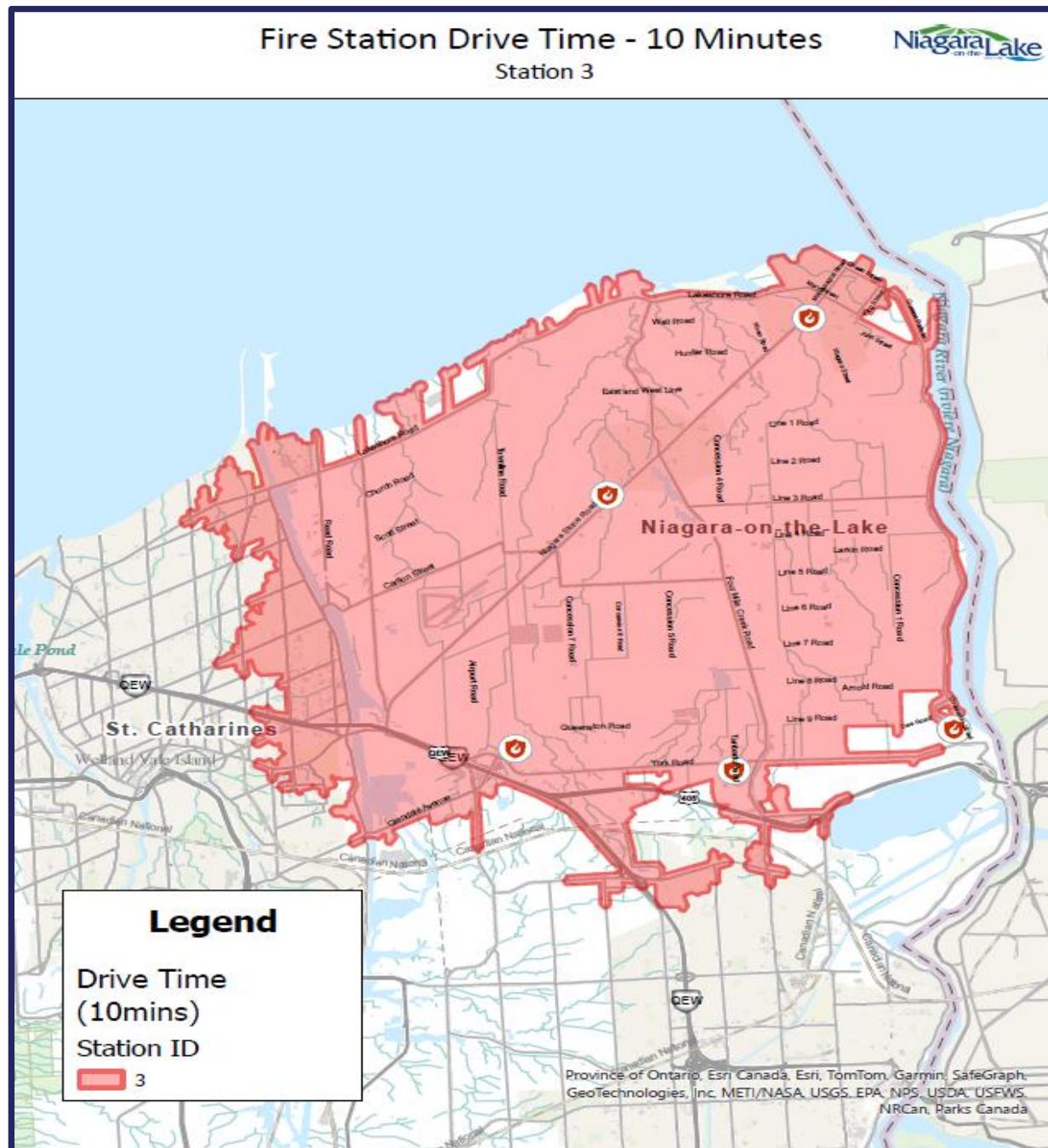
If the Headquarters staff were to be located at Station #1, as noted in the 2020 FMP, response coverage would be quite good in the northern part of the Town, but a gap to the southern portion of the municipality would still exist.

FIGURE #8 - STATION #1: 10-MINUTE RESPONSE ZONE



If Headquarters staff are located at Station #3, which is more central, the 10-minute response provides for complete coverage throughout the municipality.

FIGURE #9 - STATION #3: 10-MINUTE RESPONSE ZONE



The simple reallocation of on-duty staff to Station #3 allows the NOTLFES to cover the entire community within 10 minutes of an alarm call (during the weekday, daytime hours).

Recommendation #1

Move the fire administration and fire prevention staff from the Public Works facility to the renovated Fire Station #3. The estimated cost of this addition to Station #3 would be approximately \$2 million.

Result

This would improve the response time and capacity of the fire department while providing much-needed space for the Public Works division

1.7 Amalgamation of Stations 2 & 4

In the 2020 FMP, a recommendation was presented to amalgamate Station #2 St. Davids and Station #4 Queenston, which are at close range of approximately 4,800 metres (6-minute travel time) apart.

Documents provided to EMG show that discussions started as early as 1971 to integrate the two stations for various reasons. Further reports in 1996 and 2006 recommended the integration of the two stations. The integration would see the current firefighters from the two stations being retained to work together in a larger, more centralized fire station.

As noted in the 2020 document, there are many benefits of integrating two of the stations with less call demand, including:

- Centralizing the fire station would take advantage of the volunteer numbers. FUS provides no insurance rating credit to a fire station with less than 15 active firefighters, which could be a real possibility in the smaller stations. Integrating the firefighters into a single station creates a more extensive resource capability.
- Integration of training is more efficient with one central station than with two smaller stations.
- There can be cost containment by evaluating the apparatus needs of a combined station vs two separate stations. Currently, there are five apparatuses between the two stations; this could be reduced by one or two apparatuses.
 - For example, the Town has four Tankers to ensure adequate water supply for a rural structure fire and meet the Accredited Superior Tanker Shuttle Service requirements (which it has obtained). Therefore, a new station could be equipped with a Pumper/Rescue, (reducing the need for rescue trucks) as it already has a full fleet of tankers.

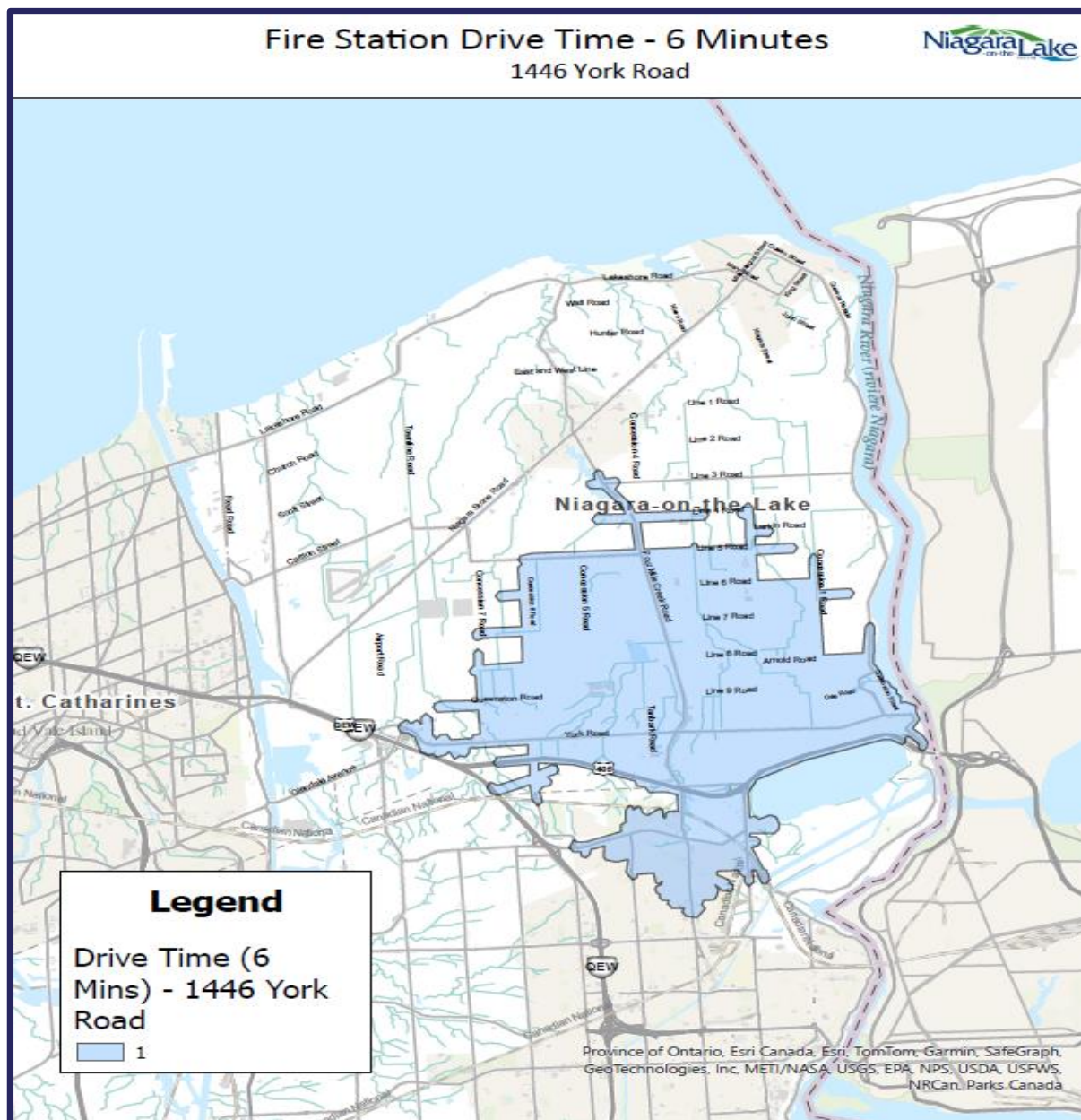
- A new building would meet current standards for fire station design, including cancer risk mitigation (proper showers, bunker gear room, washer/dryer for bunker gear, area to clean self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBAs), diesel fumes extraction, etc.
- Building a new station would allow the opportunity to design the training room to be a fully functional, purpose-designed emergency operations centre (EOC). This location could then become the primary EOC.

While the original FMP presented three potential locations for a new amalgamated station, this report offers two.

1.8 Amalgamation Options

Option 1 is at 1446 York Road between Concession 3 and Four-Mile Creek Road. Using this as a potential location, Figure #10 shows the six-minute travel time, demonstrating its ability to cover the southern portion of the Town.

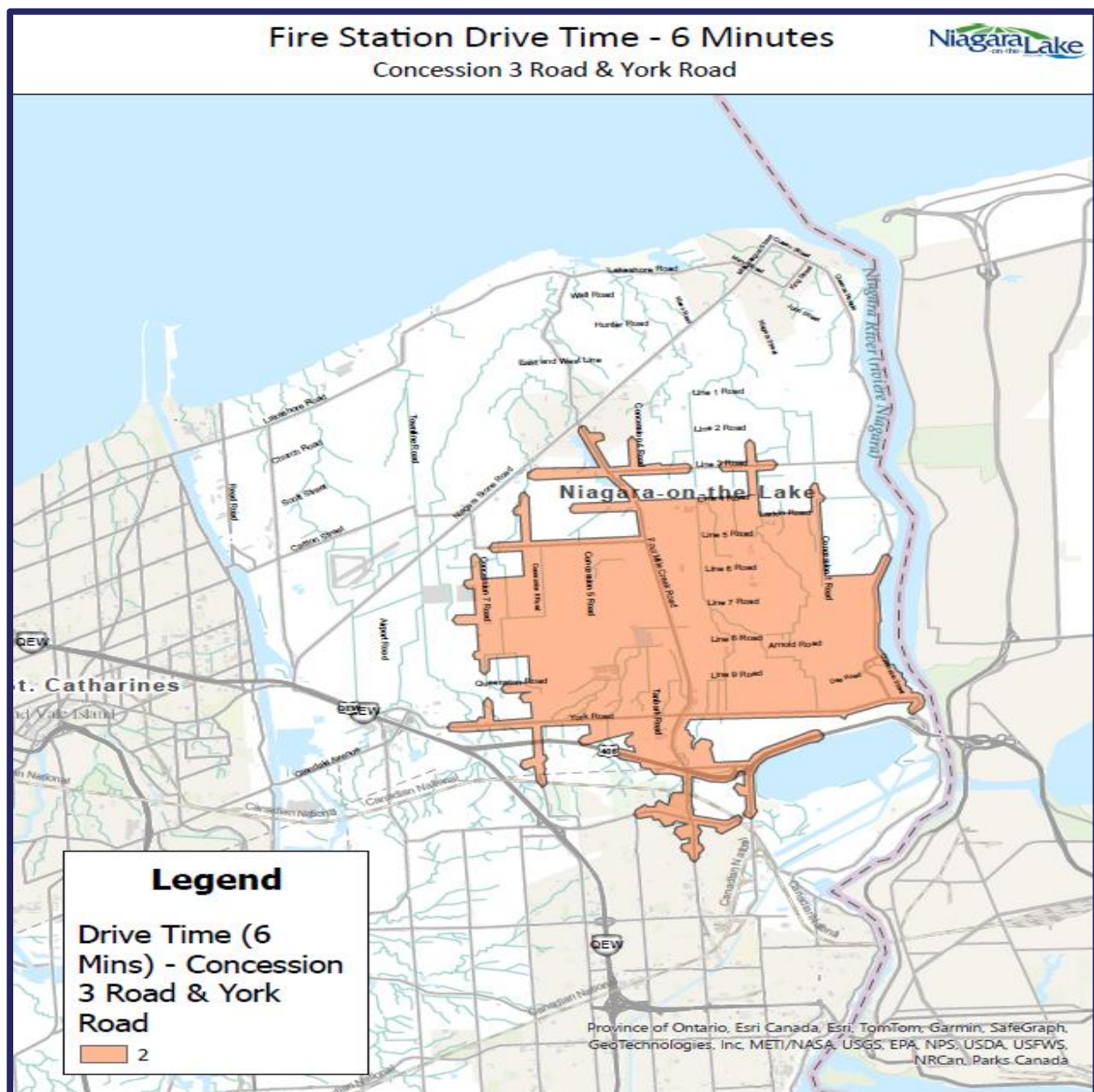
FIGURE #10 - STATION LOCATION MAP WITH AMALGAMATED STATIONS 2 AND 4 AT 1446 YORK RD LOCATION



Option 2 is at Concession 3 and York Road. Figure #11 demonstrates the six-minute travel from this location. As with option #1, this also provides very good coverage for the southern portion of the Town. There is a one-minute drive time difference between the two options and therefore, the location alone should not be the sole deciding factor.

Other factors will include availability of land, size of the land space available, cost of the land, ability to design a long-term station that meets modern standards, etc.

FIGURE #11 - STATION LOCATION MAP WITH AMALGAMATED STATIONS 2 AND 4 AT YORK ROAD/ CONCESSION 3



Option #3 of closing station #4 and consolidating everything into Station #2 (that was presented in the previous FMP) was not presented in this report for the following reasons:

- The current Station #2 has minimal floor space for additional equipment and staff.
- The renovation costs would have to be considered as this may outweigh any advantages found in renovating this structure.
- This structure was built in 1984; the lifespan of a fire station is 30 to 40 years.

With this structure already 36 years old, any funds spent on it might be better directed at a new structure in a different location with the possible repurposing of the current station for other needs of the municipality.

Renovations would require the addition of two apparatus bays. In addition, other renovations required to bring it up to modern standards, particularly those of an amalgamated station (e.g. increased firefighter complement from combining the two station), would include:

- Four apparatus bays (modern standards are for drive-through bays)
- Bunker gear room
- Clean maintenance room for cleaning/ disinfecting and repairing items such as face masks, SCBA, medical equipment, etc.
- Maintenance room for mechanical equipment such as generators, fans, small pumps, extrication equipment, etc.
- Bunker gear cleaning room (special washer)
- Training room large enough for the combined firefighter complement
- Office space
- Shower facilities for male and female firefighters
- Locker room for male and female firefighters
- Automatic backup generator
- Proper apparatus floor drainage with oil separators
- Diesel fume extraction
- Fitness room

This recommendation may be perceived as rather than an amalgamation of stations 2 and 4; it is simply a closure of Station #4, which is not the intent of this recommendation. This could impact firefighter morale, retention, and engagement of Station #4 firefighters.

Recommendation #2

Create a new fire station that will meet post-disaster requirements and future needs of the firefighters, amalgamating staff from stations 2 and 4. At the same time, it may incorporate all health and safety requirements for firefighters.

Result

The amalgamation of the two fire stations provides for an eventual reduction in building costs and equipment over the long-term.

Section 2



Evaluation of Options & Implementation



Emergency
Management
Group

SECTION 2 – EVALUATION OF OPTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 Benefits/ Risks and Estimated Costs

In this section a comparison of the two recommendations have been presented in terms of benefits versus risks.

#	Recommendation	Benefits	Risks/Concerns	Estimated Costs
1	Relocate HQ staff to Station #3	<p>Improved response to the community.</p> <p>Response coverage still addresses where the bulk of calls originate.</p> <p>A facility that can be designed and built to meet the present and future needs of the Administration and Fire Prevention Divisions.</p> <p><i>Note: this move of the administration and fire prevention staff could be made almost immediately, while the renovations/upgrades are being conducted. Station #3 presently has enough capacity to allow for temporary office space to accommodate the move.</i></p>	<p>The renovations could take two years to implement based on available funds and contractors.</p>	<p>\$2 million, depending on the timing of implementation.</p>

#	Recommendation	Benefits	Risks/Concerns	Estimated Costs
		<i>This immediate relocation would permit the daytime staff to be utilized sooner, enhancing the Department's response capability.</i>		
2	Amalgamate Station 2 and 4.	Creation of a new fire station that will meet post-disaster requirements and can incorporate all health and safety requirements for firefighters.	Both stations are at or near their end of life and may require significant upgrades to meet the future needs of the fire department.	New Fire Station approximate cost of \$5 to \$7 million.

2.2 Conclusion

The relocation of the administration and fire prevention staff provides for efficiencies by utilizing existing building space, such as Station #3, while improving response capabilities of the fire service to the community.

The option of moving fire department staff out of the Public Works facility into Station #3, would be the more cost-effective option, as opposed to building a standalone building adjacent to Station #1.

Without moving the headquarters staff, the Town is failing to utilize fire department staff in an effective and efficient manner. Further, with the planned additional staffing increases it is only a matter of time before the relocation of the administration and fire prevention staff will need to be implemented.

Appendices



APPENDIX #1 – PUBLIC FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINE ON FIRE STATION LOCATION

PFSG 04-87-13

Fire Station Location

<i>Public Fire Safety Guidelines</i>	Subject Coding <i>PFSG 04-87-13</i>
Section <i>General</i>	Date <i>September 2004</i>
Subject <i>Fire Station Location</i>	Page

Under Review

Purpose:

To assist communities in determining the best locations for their fire stations.

Introduction

Fire stations should be situated to achieve the most effective and safe emergency responses.

Fire stations represent a substantial municipal investment and should normally be located and designed to offer many years of service. As a community grows, it may become necessary to replace existing stations or add more stations to meet increasing public demands for emergency responses.

The best sites for fire stations will vary with local needs and circumstances and the fire protection services the municipality has selected to provide. Stations staffed by volunteer fire fighters may have some different considerations than those utilizing full time fire fighters.

Response Considerations

Distance and travel time are the primary influencing factors for selecting a fire station site.

Traditionally a circle was drawn around the proposed site to identify the station coverage area. Because the circle does not accommodate the normal right-angle streets or roads, times will be more accurate if a diamond is used.

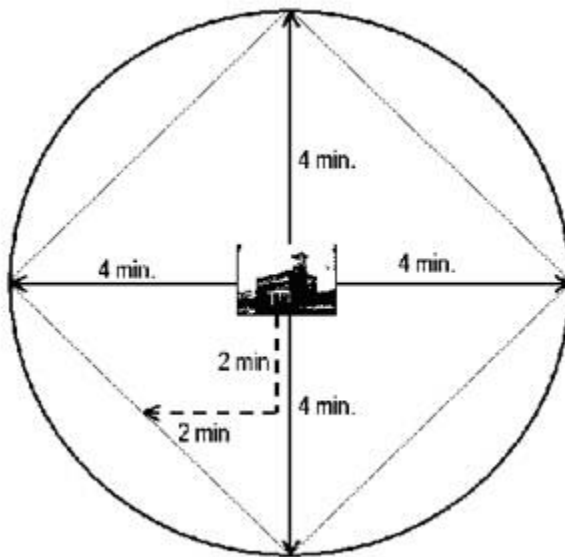
To plot the diamond, simply drive in each direction for the amount of time you have allowed for the response coverage, mark the point on a map and join the points using straight lines.

This procedure can then be repeated or modified for coverage that is beyond or less than the desired response times. This process will permit fire department managers to determine where response times are excessive, where impediments to the orderly movement of traffic exist and where specific high risks are located.

For example, the fire department reaches the downtown core in 3 minutes, the urban boundaries in 5 minutes, 75% of the rural area in 8 minutes and the remainder in 10 minutes. In the 8-to-10-minute areas specific additional fire prevention and public fire safety education programs may be warranted to help compensate for the longer response time.

The following diagram illustrates the differences between a circle and a diamond from a fire station that has used 4 minutes as the desired initial response time.

Please note that the circle will only reflect a true response of 4 minutes if the streets are straight from the fire station to the edge of the circle.



Computer Based Programs

There are several computer-based programs for identifying optimum locations for fire stations. While there are differences including data required, input and appearance, each of these programs identifies optimum fire station locations.

To determine optimum locations for fire stations using these programs, information such as the following must be entered:

- relative fire risk values for various areas, occupancies or properties
- desired response times for each identified fire risk
- information regarding the road network in the community including reasonable travel speeds, one-way streets, rail crossings, etc.
- emergency vehicles and personnel necessary to assemble fire attack teams

With the program tailored to the specific needs of a community, many fire response factors may be analyzed including:

- existing and proposed station locations based on desired response times
- best and alternate emergency response routes to specific locations
- ability of pumper, aerial, rescue and support crews to cover all parts of the community based on desired response times
- emergency response times for first, second and additional vehicles and personnel
- areas for potential automatic aid responses

A benefit of using a computer program is the ability of fire or municipal staff and council to evaluate fire station location needs (based on objective criteria).

Other Considerations

Fire stations should be located where they can serve the majority of the protection area they are assigned rather than for a specific hazard. For example, it may seem wise to place the fire station across from a nursing home. However, if the majority of responses are to the residential or commercial areas at the other side of the coverage area, the station should be situated closer to that area but still have the ability to arrive at the nursing home in the desired time.

Many volunteer stations are located in or very close to the geographic centre of the populated area of the community. This may increase response time when the volunteers have to come through the traffic to get to the station and then respond back through traffic to the emergency. Response times could be reduced by locating stations closer to the edge of the urban centre. Fire fighter response procedures could be altered to have some of the volunteers respond to the station for equipment while others go directly to the scene.

The practicability of sharing a facility should be assessed. It may be appropriate to locate the fire station with other emergency agencies or other municipal departments.

Municipalities may wish to consider the "temporary" placement of a station in a leased or rented building to address rapid growth in a specific area. An example of this could be the placement of a station in a vacant commercial or industrial unit for a period of time. At the same time, records should be kept to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of response from this location, so that Council may make an informed decision when it comes time to decide whether the location should be made "permanent".

Desirable Fire Station Site Criteria

The following is an initial check list for the selection of any fire station site:

- It may be advisable to have stations located a short distance up a side street rather than on a main street where the heaviest traffic exists. Access to and from site must have:
 - reasonable access to a major street or road
 - appropriate sight lines (no hills, physical obstacles)
 - no traffic impediments at any time of day
 - ability to have a second access to the site
 - maintained access (snow clearance, etc.)
- Assembly time for volunteers must not be negatively impacted.
- Impact on adjacent properties needs to be considered.
- Size of site must accommodate all expected activities of the fire service and allow for future expansion. (Parking, training, apparatus maintenance and equipment testing, etc.)
- Proximity to municipal services and required utilities (water, sewer hydro, telephone, gas)
- Costs.
 - acquisition of land
 - site preparation
 - building (leasing/renting may also be a consideration)

Codes, Standards, Best Practices:

Codes, Standards, and Best Practices resources available to assist in establishing local policy on this assessment are listed below. All are available at www.ontario.ca/firemarshal. Please feel free to copy and distribute this document. We ask that the document not be altered in any way, that the Office of the Fire Marshal be credited and that the documents be used for non-commercial purposes only.

See also PFSG:

04-01-12 Selecting Fire Suppression Capability

04-03-12 Service Providers

04-06-13 Codes, Standards, Acts, Regulations, Best Practices

APPENDIX #2 – ARCHITECT INITIAL DRAWINGS SUBMITTED FOR STATION #3 ADDITION



