

Memo



TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 23, 2021

SUBJECT: The CVRD Emergency Program Service: Gaps and Recommendations for Emergency Management in Cowichan

PURPOSE / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CVRD Emergency Program Service is a regional service funded by requisition, grants and user fees to provide emergency management support, tools, and resources to the nine electoral areas, four member-municipalities (Town of Lake Cowichan, Town of Ladysmith, Municipality of North Cowichan, and City of Duncan) and four First Nations partners (Malahat, Cowichan Tribes, Halalt and Stz'uminus). This service is not currently intended to meet all local authority requirements under the *Emergency Program Act*, nor does it provide all essential elements for an effective emergency program.

An assessment report (gap analysis) completed in December 2020 by the CVRD indicates that local governments in the Cowichan area have not formalized their emergency program to the extent required to address the gaps between local authority responsibilities and the Emergency Program Service supplemental support.

This report proposes 21 recommendations for municipalities and 10 for the CVRD emergency program service. At the foundation of these recommendations, local authorities in the Cowichan region will need to determine the best implementation and governance model for the future of the emergency program.

BACKGROUND

The Cowichan area is at risk from a range of natural and human hazards. Incidents have become increasingly prevalent due to climate change, increased urbanization, and increasing vulnerable populations.

The *Emergency Program Act* (EPA) establishes the local authority as responsible for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. A new EPA will be coming into force establishing more stringent requirements and increased local authority responsibilities soon. New response and recovery financial guidelines (redefining provincial support provided to local authorities) are also anticipated to include more restrictions and limitations on what can be reimbursed.

The CVRD Emergency Program Service was established to provide support for training, a regional plan, an emergency notification system and to supplement some emergency preparedness/response functions for local authority and First Nation partners. However, it does not address all local authority and First Nation responsibilities.

An assessment report was completed by emergency management staff at the CVRD on the state of emergency management in the region. This report provides critical recommendations to local authorities in the Cowichan area and presents three main

The CVRD Emergency Program Service

governance models moving forward. Proposed viable options are to continue under the existing blended model (where some elements continue to be provided under a

regional service while other elements must be provided by each local authority independently) or move to a fully regionalized model (where all emergency program elements are provided through one established emergency management organization for all partners).

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS / PROPOSAL

Currently Cowichan local authorities are operating under a blended model where some elements continue to be provided under the CVRD's regional service, but other elements must be provided by each local authority independently. Local authorities are still responsible for the following:

- Establishing an emergency management organization and strategic plan for the organization
- Establishing a committee (if not covered by policy group) to provide advice and decisions on program
- Establishing policy group (authority to declare a State of Local Emergency)
- A Local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) (stocked, supplied, maintained) and team
- Community-specific hazard assessments and plans to ensure an effective response
- Community-specific mitigation
- Additional training beyond that offered by CVRD Emergency Program Service

With changes to the *Emergency Program Act* and the financial guidelines for response and recovery, it is critical for local authorities to have an adaptable and resilient emergency management organization. The current blended model has been operating for several decades but there has been confusion about the roles and responsibilities. Meanwhile the expectations of emergency management have increased without an increase in resources at the local level, leading to degradation of emergency management in Cowichan. Several critical recommendations for local authorities and the CVRD emergency program service are included in the final report. Local authority staff have discussed the implementation of a fully regionalized model. This model would enable all emergency program elements to be managed and coordinated for all local authorities through one established emergency management organization (EMO). A single governance structure could be established representative of all partners to set a single strategic plan for the EMO. The EMO would operate under this strategic plan to achieve mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery objectives for all partners. A centralized budget and consolidated resources would help ensure a consistent and cost-effective program, establishing greater depth of positions (multiple EOC Directors across the region can step into the role for any partner) and improved agility to coordinate new legislative requirements.

OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES

Option 1 – Status Quo, no change to governance and no implementation of recommendations

Local authorities may choose to maintain status quo.

Option 2 – Implement recommendations, no change in governance model

Under the current blended model, local authorities will be required to invest in resources (employees, funding for supplies) to address critical gaps. The CVRD Emergency Program Service would also require additional resources (increasing the requisition for this service for all municipal partners).

Option 3 – All local authorities agree to move to a regional model to implement recommendations

The establishment and operation of a regionalized EMO would require the addition of resources but would be more cost effective (pooled resource benefit). Local authorities would still be required to provide some staff time towards review of key emergency plans and training and may play a support role to the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC) during a widespread emergency event but would not be required to invest in additional part or full-time employees.

Future options/changes for the First Nation partnerships have not been explored at length at this time. The services offered to First Nations will remain in place and any changes to service levels will only occur as part of a collaborative planning effort with these partners.

IMPLICATIONS

The risks with not proceeding with any recommendation are highlighted in Appendix A of the assessment report. Of note, incomplete emergency management programs at the local level pose a risk to life and safety and may be non-compliant with provincial regulations.

The financial implications of option 2 and option 3 are:

Model	Financial Impact	2021 Example
Option 2 Current Blended Model + Recommendations	1. Add 0.75 – 1.0 FTE to each local authority (will vary depending on existing capacity and desired classification/responsibilities). 2. \$80,936 increase to 205 requisition for CVRD Emergency Program Service.	1. Varies depending on local authority 2. Cost per \$100,000 household is \$3.74 (up from \$3.41). This does not include the increase in municipal costs.
Option 3 Regionalized Model *	1. No local authority requirement to add positions – plan for 86 hours per year to support consultation, review and approval of program pieces. 2. To support an increase of 2 FTEs for the region - \$323,743 increase to 205 requisition for CVRD Emergency Program Service.	1. n/a 2. Cost per \$100,000 household is \$4.70 (up from \$3.41)

* Assumes all local authorities have selected this model

	Estimate only (uses 2021 assessment numbers)						
	Requisition (CVRD Function 205)	Cost per \$100,000 Household	City of Duncan	District of North Cowichan	Town of Ladysmith	Town of Lake Cowichan	Nine CVRD Electoral Areas
Current 2021 Budget	\$867,890	\$3.41	\$43,271	\$289,638	\$73,915	\$24,008	\$437,058
Option 2 - 2022 Blended Model Est.*	\$948,826	\$3.74	\$47,306	\$316,649.00	\$80,808	\$26,247	\$477,816
Option 3 - 2022 Regional Model Est.	\$1,191,633	\$4.70	\$59,412	\$397,680	\$101,487	\$32,963	\$600,090

* Does NOT include financial impact to local authority's budget to implement their portion of the program

RECOMMENDATIONS

That council approve:

1. The establishment of a single regional Emergency Management Organization (EMO) for all Cowichan area local authorities.

The CVRD Emergency Program Service

2. That through the newly established Cowichan EMO, implementation of the report's recommendations be carried out in a phased approach.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph A. Fernandez', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized with a large initial 'J' and a long horizontal stroke.

Joseph A. Fernandez

DESCRIPTION			Responsible		
Program Element	Recommendation / Deliverable	Risks of not proceeding	EAs	Munis	EPS
4. B) Preparedness – Training & Exercises	4.3. The Emergency Program Service should continue to provide training to EOC and ESS teams under a shared Training and Exercise Plan. This five-year plan should include the training requirements and recommendations for designated roles in a response, and provide a schedule of exercises for each community that increase in complexity over time, culminating in a full scale multi-jurisdictional exercise every three to five years.	Training and exercises may not be appropriately planned (scheduled, benefiting multiple teams) and may have low attendance.			✓
4. C) Preparedness – After Action Reviews	4.4. Each local authority or, in the event a single Emergency Management Organization is established, the EMO should establish a formal After-Action Review process and procedures to clarify when debriefs will be held and how actions will be tracked to completion.	Improvements / change may not occur.	✓	✓	
	4.5. Each local authority or, in the event a single Emergency Management Organization is established, the EMO should report annually on continuous improvement measures (and completion of corrective actions) to its council/board and to the public.	Improvements / change may not occur or may not be appropriate.	✓	✓	
5. A) Response Planning – Emergency Plans	5.1. Each community (local authority) should develop, implement and maintain a community-specific emergency plan. This plan should be based on the hazards, risks and vulnerabilities identified in the HRVA. It should include specific procedures/people, evacuation routes, muster locations, critical services, and vulnerable groups for that community.	Response/decisions based on generalized information only, less effective responses. Potential for increased threat to life safety.	✓	✓	
	5.2. The CVRD or, if a single emergency management organization is established, the designated EMO should implement a community plan template so that plans in the Cowichan area follow a similar format and structure. This will enable interoperability, and reduce training and knowledge barriers when local authorities and First Nations support each other in response to an incident.	Less effective responses.			✓
5. B) Response Planning – Communications & Warning	5.3. All local authorities should identify the same notification system as the emergency alert system to ensure maximum participation and increased saturation.	Public confusion, risk to life safety, poor coverage/saturation, increased costs.	✓	✓	
	5.4. All local authorities should actively advertise and promote the emergency alert system for the Cowichan area.	Risk to life safety if there is poor coverage/saturation. Less effective preparedness/response. More burden on emergency responders during an incident.	✓	✓	
	5.5. Each local authority or, if a single emergency management organization is established, the designated EMO should establish trained authorized users for the Emergency Notification System to ensure rapid deployment of public warnings and/or EOC team activations during an incident.	No warnings / delayed warnings, increased threat to life safety.		✓	
	5.6. All EOC teams and alternates should be uploaded and maintained in the Emergency Notification System to enable rapid deployment.	Time delay to establish EOC response (impacting support to emergency responders on site).	✓	✓	
	5.7. The Disaster Radio program should be refreshed to include training.	Unable to use system in an emergency.			✓
	5.8. Emergency Communications exercises should be integrated into the Cowichan Exercise and Training Program.	Less effective communications in an emergency.			✓
5. C) Response Planning –	5.9. Each local authority should maintain a current roster for their local EOC. This roster should be updated regularly and should identify at minimum section chiefs (planning, operations,	Time delay to establish EOC response (impacting support to emergency responders on site).		✓	

DESCRIPTION			Responsible		
Program Element	Recommendation / Deliverable	Risks of not proceeding	EAs	Munis	EPS
Response Operations	logistics, finance) and management staff (director, liaison, information, risk management). If a regionalized EMO is established, each partner should provide an alternate available for each essential role.	Individuals may have to fill roles without adequate/knowledge/training.			
	5.10. The Regional Emergency Operations Centre should implement incident management tools and systems that support ongoing remote activities.	Remote REOC operations will be less effective, (decreased communications, common picture, less effective decisions, record management challenges).			✓
	5.11. Situational awareness and analysis procedures and roles for a response should be formalized for all EOCs/REOC.	Inability to gain adequate situational awareness. Poor decisions during a response, risk to life safety.	✓	✓	
	5.12. Damage assessment processes should be formalized and personnel in all jurisdictions trained to implement during an incident.	Inability to assess impact of incident. Poor decisions during a response, risk to life safety.	✓	✓	
	5.13. The Cowichan area should continue to build on response team capacity by increasing volunteer engagement. Volunteer teams can provide additional support to staff (which continue to provide a reliable backbone for response in the region).	Increased cost of response and emergency support services as financial reimbursement from province is reduced.			✓
5. D) Response Planning – Operational Readiness	5.14. Each local authority should identify a secondary location for an EOC.	Time delay to establish EOC response (impacting support to emergency responders on site).		✓	
	5.15. The CVRD (Emergency Program Service), or EMO if a single emergency management organization is established, should implement an operational readiness maintenance and testing plan to ensure regular and established testing and maintenance of equipment, tools and systems.	Equipment and systems may malfunction or be unavailable during a response.			✓
	5.16. Each local authority should identify prepositioned disaster supply locations based on community layout and vulnerabilities. These locations should be stocked, maintained, and part of a public awareness campaign.	Equipment and supplies may not be accessible in some areas, impact to life safety and increased reliance on emergency responders in those areas.	✓	✓	
	5.17. Secondary reception centres should be identified/confirmed in each community. Baseline requirements for these secondary centres should be established and maintained.	Primary Reception Centres may not be accessible in some areas, impact to life safety and increased reliance on emergency responders in those areas.			✓
	5.18. The CVRD, or EMO if a single emergency management organization is established, should assess mobile assets and establish an appropriate fleet procurement and management plan. Vehicles should be appropriate for daily operations as well as response activities.	Vehicles may malfunction or be unavailable during a response. Some assets may not be deployed.			✓
6. Recovery Planning	6.1. Each local authority or, if a single emergency management organization is established, the EMO should develop templated recovery plans for top hazards as identified in the HRVA. Recovery plans should include the priorities to restore essential services, processes to re-establish community functions, and recovery roles. The plans must be relevant and achievable by local authorities with or without a Disaster Financial Assistance program.	Delayed recovery (increased cost and impact to essential services, some infrastructure and vulnerable groups may not recover if they are not prioritized early).	✓	✓	
7. Program Evaluation	7.1. Each local authority or, if a single emergency management organization is established, the EMO should develop and implement a program evaluation process and schedule. Progress should be reported at senior levels and summarized for the public.	No continuous improvement, no commitment to the program, lack of public buy-in, reputational damage.	✓	✓	