



Volunteer Fire Fighters  
Recruitment and Retention Round Table  
February 9, 2019  
Perth, Ontario

## Executive Summary

This was a meeting facilitated by MPP Randy Hillier at the request of a local fire department to discuss the challenges they face with a specific eye towards volunteer firefighter retention and recruitment. The meeting was held at the Dufferin Board Room on Saturday, February 9, 2019.

### Participants included:

Darcy Knott, Fire Chief, South Frontenac  
Casey Cuddy, Fire Chief, Addington Highlands  
Eric Korhonen, Fire Chief, North Frontenac  
Ron Closs, Councillor, Lanark Highlands  
Greg Saunders, Fire Chief, Drummond/North Elmsley Tay Valley  
Brian Campbell, Reeve, Tay Valley Township  
Scott Granahan, Fire Chief, Mississippi Mills  
Pascal Meunier, Fire Chief, Carleton Place  
Christa Lowry, Mayor, Mississippi Mills  
Doug Black, Mayor, Carleton Place  
Pat Publow, Deputy Chief, Perth  
Greg Robinson, Fire Chief, Central Frontenac  
Ron Higgins, Mayor, North Frontenac  
Randy Hillier, MPP, Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston  
David Shostal, Chief of Staff, Randy Hillier, MPP

This summary begins with the recommendation drawn from the discussions, followed by the concerns that were discussed.



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## **Recommendation/Proposals**

- 1) Provincial funding should include the Public Safety Network as part of EORN's proposed expansions
- 2) The provincial government should examine a policy to create a firefighter apprenticeship program and/or apprenticeship incentives, and consider a policy to create post secondary/internship programs (Examine the "work involvement programs" being implemented in BC and AB)
- 3) The provincial government should evaluate the benefits of creating income tax credits similar to what the feds provide (Feds provide a \$1000 tax credit to volunteers, to a max of \$3000 with proof of more than 200 hours of service/annum)
- 4) The provincial government should examine tax credits for businesses who employ volunteer firefighters
- 5) The provincial government ought to consider the benefits of participating in shared advertising costs for fire fighter recruitment
- 6) The provincial government should examine a policy of education training subsidies
- 7) There ought to be greater flexibility in training options that relate more directly to the service being provided by individual volunteers

## **Communications**

- 1) The OPP Fleetnet system is 40 years old, and tenders have been issued to replace the system, however costs are prohibitive for municipal participation
- 2) Dispatch concerns
  - a) There are multiple dispatch services between police, fire and EMS that are inefficient, create complexities, and do not cover regions completely
  - b) Fire fighters receiving too many medical calls for a variety of differing reasons from jurisdiction to jurisdiction

## **Recruitment and Retention**

The average service period for a volunteer is down to 5 years. The days of having a firefighter with twenty or thirty years' experience has become less common for many volunteer fire companies.

- 1) Location matters; recruitment and retention challenges increase the more rural you are. Areas with higher rates of economic development and residential growth have fewer difficulties with recruitment and retention.
  - a) Lack of young families in rural communities
  - b) Employment is in major centres, and have shifted from agricultural jobs to service-oriented jobs; often the volunteers are working too far away from their community to provide an adequate response
  - c) Many employers feel a disincentive to have volunteer fire fighters on their staff



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- d) Many volunteer fire departments lack adequate personnel to respond to calls during daytime hours
- 2) Training
- a) Approx. 80 hours NFPA1000 + approx. 80 hours online; around the table agreement was that training averages about 150 hours for a new firefighter
  - b) Training is not flexible either to the types of fires encountered in smaller rural communities or requiring medical training for volunteers who will not respond to medical calls
  - c) Departments generally provide some small compensation for basic training costs
  - d) There seemed to be agreement around the table that the County training model is the most effective model
  - e) Basic training is on weekends, meaning a recruit will be away from family for up to 3 months of weekends, lessening desirability

**Other Observations and Challenges**

- 1) WSIB is very slow on presumptive claims
- 2) Agreement that training standards are good and necessary, but very expensive and time consuming
- 3) The high volume of medical calls put significant pressure on retention and recruitment
- 4) There is a need for a more effective and efficient dispatch system; improved, more timely and effective ambulance/EMS services would reduce medical calls, which are a disincentive to recruitment
- 5) Provincial downloading by previous governments have been an impediment, imposing additional costs that take away from other municipal obligations and constraining municipal authorities.



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