



**GENERAL/FINANCE COMMITTEE
AGENDA REPORT**

TO: Chair Zavitz and Members of General/Finance Committee
MEETING DATE: March 10, 2021
SUBJECT: Closure of Ontario Fire College, Gravenhurst Campus

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT Council express concern that the closure of the Ontario Fire College may result in training that are not financially sustainable for the Township;

AND THAT Council express their support for the Town of Gravenhurst Committee of the Whole Resolution respecting the closure of the Ontario Fire College insofar as it will result in job losses and would be a detriment to the broader community;

AND FURTHER THAT modernization efforts to improve fire service training must result in a program that is affordable, accessible and meet the needs of all department sizes and types in the Province of Ontario.

APPROVALS:

Date

Signature

**Submitted By: Ryan Murrell,
Fire Chief / CEMC**

March 5 2021 signed by R. Murrell

Acknowledged: Derrick Hammond, CAO

March 5 2021 signed by D. Hammond

SUMMARY:

Following the Council Agenda of February 10, 2021 where two items of correspondence under Other Business were received from [OPSEU Local 317](#) and [Township of Baldwin](#); this report provides an overview of the announcement by the province to modernize firefighter training and the plan to permanently shut down the Ontario Fire College (OFC) campus, located in Gravenhurst.

ORIGIN:

On January 13, 2021, the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM) announced that the Gravenhurst campus of the Ontario Fire College (OFC) is closing effective March 31, 2021, and further that the Province will be modernizing firefighter training. There was no consultation with any municipalities prior to this announcement.

BACKGROUND:

Most fire departments in Ontario are operated and funded by municipalities. Since 1949, the provincial government, through the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management (OFMEM) has provided and subsidized firefighter training at the Ontario Fire College (OFC) campus in Gravenhurst. The OFC's primary responsibility is to develop and deliver academically sound educational/training programs to meet the needs of the fire service.

Over the years, due to continued reductions of provincial resources at the OFMEM, the Ontario Association of Fire Chief's (O AFC) assisted the OFMEM with time, resources, and expertise to review and update firefighter training courses to ensure they met prescribed standards in Ontario. Through the O AFC leadership, courses were based on the Ontario Fire Service Standards in 1993 and then the NFPA standards in 2012.

DISCUSSION:

Closure

The decision to close the OFC campus appears to be irreversible at this time and the date aligned with the end of the provincial fiscal year. While the closing of the fire college campus in Gravenhurst is a loss of accessible, available, consistent, and standardized training for Ontario's fire service, it is also an economic loss to the Muskoka community.

Modernization

While the announcement also speaks to modernization of training, a fulsome and detailed framework and plan must be developed with input from all stakeholders. Modernization of training for the fire service should be based on an equitable and sustainable model, with principles that include affordability, accessibility and autonomy. It should result in a program that has a standardized curriculum with testing and oversight that meets the needs of all department sizes and types in the Province of Ontario. The plan that the province is relying upon has twenty Regional Training Centres becoming the sites that offer training for the fire service in lieu of one college.

Funding

It is noted that the Province currently provides grants to police services to address both local and provincial community safety priorities through the Community Safety Grants program. At this time, there is no similar program for fire services. The Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs has requested that any financial resources being re-directed from the OFC closure stay within the Ontario fire service. This funding should be used to create a grant or subsidy, similar to other emergency services, to ensure a standardized training system for all fire services.

Summary

In conclusion, there is not a “one-size, fits all” approach to training for the fire service, based on individual department size, resources, needs, and circumstances. In developing a long-term plan, it must provide fire services with the autonomy and authority to train and test their fire service personnel to the levels of service that they provide.

FINANCIAL

The closure of the OFC could result in significantly increased training costs for our fire service than in the past. These increased costs have not been factored in to our 2021 Fire Services budget.

The training provided at the OFC was at a set rate of \$65.00 per course per student, inclusive of all accommodations and meals.

Below is a chart that provides an indication of the difference in price for just the course for typical firefighter courses. For the purposes of this comparison, Leeds and Thousand Islands Regional Training Centre and Southwest Fire Academy pricing has been used as comparators in the table below.

Course	OFC fee	RTC fee	Private College fee
Firefighter 1 Recruit	\$65	\$1,200	\$2,995
Pump Operator	\$65	\$350	\$595
Rescue	\$65	Not Offered	\$595
Fire Officer Level 1	\$65	\$300	Not Offered
Firefighter 2	\$65	\$700	\$2,995
Investigator	\$65	\$500	Not Offered
Vehicle Rescue Technician	\$65	\$300	\$595
Fire Code Courses	\$65	\$300	Not Offered
Fire Instructor	\$65	\$300	Not Offered
Fire & Safety Educator	\$65	\$300	Not Offered

Currently, the budget includes \$3,900 for course fees for our recruit program to train 20 new recruits up to the level of Firefighter 1 & 2 using the OFC fee structure (\$170 per recruit). Using the RTC fees above, this fee could increase to \$38,000 (\$1,900 per recruit), an increase over 870%. In addition to the increase in training fee, additional costs would be incurred due to traveling to a RTC (none are located as close as the OFC), lodging and meals.

CONTACT:

Ryan Murrell, Fire Chief

705 765 3156 Ext. 261

ATTACHMENTS:

[Communique from the Ontario Fire Marshal](#)
[Leeds and Thousand Islands Calendar w fees](#)
[Southwest Fire Academy](#)