



REGIONAL DISTRICT OF CENTRAL KOOTENAY

MEDIA RELEASE

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Increase to firefighter remuneration considered as part of 2018 Budget

Nelson, BC: The Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) is considering increased remuneration for firefighters to better reflect higher levels of responsibility, training and commitment that volunteer firefighters are required to meet. Options for increasing remuneration will be reviewed by the Board as part of the 2018 Budget process.

“Day after day, volunteer firefighters are the first to respond to emergency situations with remarkable courage and dedication,” said Karen Hamling, Chair of the RDCK Board of Directors. “They take time away from their own families to make sure ours are protected. The RDCK Directors feel they should be fairly compensated for the time and effort they devote to this critical work.”

The RDCK currently has more than 400 volunteer firefighters who work out of 18 fire departments across the region. Each Director is responsible for setting their own remuneration budgets for their fire services, in consultation with their Fire Chief(s). This has led to a lack of consistency in remuneration across the RDCK. The costs for training, call-outs, on-call requirements and salaries and stipends vary from fire hall to fire hall.

In November 2016, the Central Kootenay Regional Fire Chiefs Association (CKRFCA), which represents the fire departments in the RDCK, brought forward a request for the review of remuneration policies for firefighters. This was prompted in part by changes made by the BC Office of the Fire Commissioner to minimum levels of training and competency for firefighters in its *Structure Firefighters Competency and Training Playbook* (the “Playbook”).

“Ten years ago, fire departments were staffed by volunteers who spent a few hours a week training in addition to their time spent attending emergency calls,” said Stuart Horn, Chief Administrative Officer for the RDCK. “The landscape is very different today. Volunteer firefighters now spend six to eight hours per week training, and are required to meet the same standards as career firefighters. The volume of calls to our fire departments has also been increasing, putting additional demand on our professional volunteers.”

The remuneration increase proposed by the CKRFCA in 2016 was addressed in part by some remuneration budgets being increased in 2017.

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The issue of firefighter remuneration was brought forward again as the Board initiated its 2018 Budget process. The Board has considered an analysis of options of firefighter remuneration prepared by staff. This included an analysis of what impact the different options being considered would have on taxpayers—with due consideration for the distinct needs of each fire service area, the tax impact, and the limits of service bylaws—and how those impacts would vary in different communities. The decision was to leave each Director to set a remuneration budget in 2018 and to work towards a Regional District-wide policy on remuneration for 2019.

“The goal of implementing a remuneration policy for the RDCK fire fighters is not only to compensate current firefighters for their time and effort, but also to allow fire departments to be better positioned to attract and retain firefighters into the future,” said Mr. Horn. “There are some fire department budgets that will be increasing in 2018 due to the additional remuneration costs, resulting in tax increases to our residents. I invite members of the public to attend one of the upcoming open budget sessions to provide their feedback, or to speak to their elected representatives.”

For more information about the RDCK fire service or the 2018 Budget process, please visit www.rdck.ca.

Facts about Firefighter Remuneration

- In 2014, the total remuneration budget for the Regional District Fire Service was \$300,824. In 2017, that same budget was \$447,100, and increase of 49% over three years, reflecting the level of commitment that elected officials have to their firefighters.
- The cost of fire service varies substantially in the RDCK based on the assessments of each fire service area. In 2017, the cost ranged from \$0.31/\$1,000 of assessment to \$1.45/\$1,000.
- Prior to 2018, remuneration for the majority of firefighters was based on an annual stipend amount for the more senior individuals in each department. The policy considered for 2019 will move towards an hourly wage for training and call-out time.

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