

**THE CORPORATION OF THE TOWN OF GEORGINA**

**REPORT NO. GFRS-2023-0001**

**FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF  
COUNCIL**

February 15, 2023

**SUBJECT: Town of Georgina and Town of East Gwillimbury Joint Fire Services  
Assessment - Final Report**

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**1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. That Staff Report GFRS-2023-0001 regarding the Joint Fire Services Assessment for Georgina Fire and Rescue Service and East Gwillimbury Emergency and Community Safety Services dated February 15, 2023, be received;**
- 2. That the ESCI Consultant final report entitled “Innovation and Modernization of the Fire Service for the Town of Georgina and the Town of East Gwillimbury”, dated January 27, 2023, be received;**
- 3. That Council endorse the further exploration of the fire services modernization in the Town of Georgina and the Town of East Gwillimbury, with a particular focus on Strategy 2 – Modernized Standalone Departments with Shared Services as identified in the report prepared by ESCI;**
- 4. That the Mercury consultant final report entitled “Towns of East Gwillimbury and Georgina - Study for Fire Fleet Services Alternatives”, dated January 18, 2023, be received;**
- 5. That Council approve staff to review the concept found within the consultant report from Mercury, related to transition of the East Gwillimbury fire fleet maintenance to Georgina’s fleet division, and report back on progress in Q3, 2023;**
- 6. That the fire chiefs for Georgina and East Gwillimbury, with the support of the CAOs, will further investigate shared service opportunities as identified within the ESCI report; and**
- 7. That the refreshed Georgina Fire Master Plan be received.**

**2. PURPOSE:**

This report provides an in-depth analysis regarding potential service efficiencies for the Town of Georgina Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) and the Town of East Gwillimbury

Emergency and Community Safety Services (ECSS), including exploration of three strategies for future fire and emergency service delivery:

- Strategy 1 – modernized standalone departments;
- Strategy 2 – modernized standalone departments with shared services; and
- Strategy 3 – a consolidated composite department model delivering fire and emergency services to both communities.

### **3. BACKGROUND:**

#### **Two composite departments with a long history of collaboration providing quality services to their communities**

Sharing municipal borders, the Town of Georgina and the Town of East Gwillimbury have a history of working together, in particular with respect to fire and emergency services. Long-standing agreements between the two municipalities have been very effective. Specifically, the two departments work within the York Region Mutual Aid Plan. As well, Georgina provides response to emergencies on Highway 404, via a Response Agreement.

Georgina and East Gwillimbury are at different stages of growth and population. While the operating needs and circumstances of each of the services can differ, the end goal of providing cost-effective quality fire services remains the same.

The Town of Georgina has a denser population and has been effectively served with three (3) fire stations at set service levels. Two (2) of the three (3) fire stations are staffed with both career and volunteer firefighters, and one (1) with solely volunteer firefighters.

The Town of East Gwillimbury has recently experienced major population growth in geographically spaced settlement areas requiring three (3) fire stations to provide effective emergency response at set service levels. Currently one (1) station is staffed with both career and paid-on-call firefighters (aka volunteer firefighters), and two (2) fire stations staffed with solely paid-on-call firefighters.

Notwithstanding the differences, it was agreed that examining the potential to build on department similarities and to develop a future strategy that will effectively manage continued growth in both communities, would be a worthwhile exercise.

#### **Provincial funding provided an opportunity for conducting a joint service review**

A Municipal Modernization (Intake 3) grant funding was approved in January 2022 for \$356,160 to undertake this assessment for both communities. The provincial funding criteria required that the municipalities retain a third-party expert to conduct the review.

In May of 2022, Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) was retained to undertake the technical component of the project. ESCI is an internationally recognized firm offering extensive expertise and experience in the review of related service delivery and modernization evaluations. In addition, other specialized consulting expertise was retained to provide advice on specific areas of the analysis (for example finance, HR, fleet, etc.).

The objectives of the project included determining efficiencies and modernization opportunities under the terms of the Office of the Fire Marshal's Three Lines of Defence:

- Public fire safety education
- Fire safety standards and enforcement
- Emergency response

Each Council is being provided with this report and action will only be taken after both Councils have approved the next steps.

#### **4. ANALYSIS:**

##### **A significant amount of research, analysis and engagement has been conducted over the past eight months**

An extensive engagement program was conducted to seek input from a number of stakeholders. Key participants included members of both Councils, CAOs, senior managers, Office of the Fire Marshal, paid-on-call/volunteer staff and members of each firefighter association (a listing of participants is identified within the ESCI report - Appendix 1).

ESCI representatives participated for several days in a field trip in early summer to inventory and document East Gwillimbury and Georgina fire halls, equipment and geographical challenges in order to fully assess operational aspects of both departments.

ESCI began their work in May 2022, concluding an extensive investigation by January 2023.

##### **Key deliverables include a comprehensive report and refreshed Fire Master Plans**

The anticipated outcome of the assessment was to provide recommendations that could potentially assist with achieving desired efficiencies.

Key considerations and deliverables of the study included:

- Financial impact analysis
- Human resource analysis
- Governance model options
- Level of service assessment
- Potential shared services options
- Modernization opportunities

- Implementation recommendations

The ESCI Report (Attachment 1) was completed in January of 2023 and provides a detailed overview of the potential strategies for consideration. In addition, the Georgina and East Gwillimbury Fire Master Plans were refreshed (Attachment 3).

A particular section within the ESCI report, titled “Reimagination of the Modern Fire Service Organization”, provides enlightened view on the evolving fire and emergency services.

### **Fire departments of both towns considered three possible strategies**

Consultant assessed each of the three strategies as follows:

#### Strategy 1 – modernized standalone departments

The modernized standalone departments’ assessment began with the Fire Master Plans refresh. Initially, the Georgina and East Gwillimbury Fire Master Plans were developed in 2016. An update was anticipated to take place within the typical 10-year cycle. However, it was determined that current population projections could have a bearing on data accuracy. Therefore, ESCI incorporated current growth data and provided an updated technical base.

As a result of the fire master plan updates, a number of recommendations for modernizing the individual fire and emergency services were developed:

- 20 recommendations were provided for GFRS
- 21 recommendations for ECSS

#### Strategy 2 – modernized standalone departments with shared services

In addition to the modernization elements of Strategy 1, there are a number of opportunities for Georgina and East Gwillimbury to share services with each other or other organizations. The shared service areas below were identified as having potential and worth investing time to explore further:

- Automatic aid
- Special teams
- Fleet services
- Training
- Fire prevention and education
- Group purchasing
- Fire station sharing
- Emergency management

Strategy 3 – a consolidated composite department model delivering fire and emergency services to both communities

The last strategy option that was considered is a consolidation of both the Georgina and East Gwillimbury composite fire services. ESCI incorporated best practices, assessment and findings in their final report, including but not limited to the following categories:

- Organizational overview (structure and organizational components)
- Financial analysis
- Sustainable community workforce (HR)
- Data collection, visualization and utilization (Technology)
- Implementation recommendations (governance, operations, HR, etc.)
- Evaluation of the three strategies

In evaluating the in-depth results for each of the three strategies, the following was taken into consideration:

- The current climate for municipalities in the fall of 2022 is dramatically different then it was at the time of the project's initiation in the fall of 2021;
- The refreshed Fire Master Plans have reinforced previous recommendations for advances within each of the departments. It would appear that opportunities for continued growth and enhancement of standalone departments are available;
- Georgina and East Gwillimbury fire and emergency departments have a history of collaboration which has proven to be successful. The ESCI study has highlighted further opportunities to explore the relationship with respect to shared services;
- As anticipated, the analysis indicates that a consolidated composite department would not yield cost savings;
- While consolidation should be kept as an ultimate goal for consideration, there are analytical gaps that impede making a decision to proceed. Implementing specific data collection methodologies over the next few years could prove extremely helpful for future assessment;
- As noted earlier, the two municipalities are not quite aligned in their current state (for example population differences and corresponding call volumes);
- Objectives for each department continue to be met;
- There are no unexpected increases in costs for either fire and emergency services department at this time; and
- The time is not right for consolidation. As noted by ESCI, "while some benefits could be gained from a consolidation, they may not be significant enough in comparison to the challenges and losses that would be experienced".

The above is reflected in detail in the ESCI Report (executive summary section), whereby the consultant has expressed their opinion with respect to consolidation: "ESCI did not identify significant value increases in response or financial metrics that could not be reasonably achieved through each department maintaining its own identity and pursuing shared services".

## **In-depth joint fire fleet services study was undertaken to supplement ESCI assessment**

One of the suggested shared services examined in the ESCI report under Strategy 2 (modernized standalone departments with shared services), was fleet services. It was determined early in the work that this proposal had promise and in turn, fleet specialists, Mercury Associates Inc., were retained for an in-depth review. Mercury is the largest dedicated fleet management consulting firm in North America. Its expertise includes helping organizations to improve fleet management practices, increase operational safety and efficiency, optimize asset utilization and reliability, and operate a cost competitive fleet operation. As well, Mercury has some familiarity with Georgina's Operations and Infrastructure Department, Fleet Division, having undertaken work on their behalf in the past.

The study was limited to the maintenance and repair functions for the fire fleet assets in the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Georgina. Currently GFRS vehicles are serviced by Georgina's Operations and Infrastructure Department, Fleet Division, and ESCC vehicles are serviced by a third-party fleet maintenance contractor Dependable, located in Brampton. The question at hand was whether ECSS vehicles could also be serviced under the terms of a performance contract and if so, would there be benefits for both departments.

The study undertaken was extensive and among a number of benefits, highlighted the following:

- Efficiency improvement with clarity of roles and responsibilities for fire services and its clients;
- Increased compliance for preventative maintenance and inspection resulting in improved risk management, reduction in vehicle breakdowns, lower operating costs;
- Ability to service various types of vehicles with potential to reduce vehicle downtime and cost;
- Improved data accuracy and control with one technology platform for fleet – improved data collection, cost transparency and decision making based on data;
- Lower operating cost with a practical multi-year replacement plan;
- Improved pricing with contracts with key suppliers (e.g., volume discounts, rebates, etc.); and
- The opportunity for future expansion of services.

The results of the Mercury study are encouraging and have the potential for benefits in the short-term. Georgina's fleet staff, in collaboration with both fire and emergency services, will work on the service transition planning and a service agreement development throughout 2023. Implementation would follow in 2024, subject to funding approvals through the 2024 budget process.

### **Shared services is the preferred strategy based on consultant's assessment**

Given ESCI's opinion, that reasons to consolidate at this time are not compelling, and in light of the comments listed above, staff are recommending to proceed with the Strategy 2 (modernized standalone departments with shared services). Benefits of this approach include:

- Momentum has been developed through the work of this project. Building on the relationships and collaboration can produce positive results;
- Opportunities remain for each fire and emergency services department to grow individually and modernize service delivery;
- As outlined within the Mercury report, both departments can benefit from a skilled and fully resourced fire fleet service, to be provided by Georgina's fleet services division; and
- According to ESCI, sharing services between two fire and emergency departments has often been the impetus that sets the stage for consolidation.

The fire chiefs have also discussed aligning other areas of business that could eventually lead to efficiencies, access to broader resources and set the stage for future discussion regarding consolidation. For example, areas such as the following, but not limited to, could lead to short-term and long-term benefits:

- Developing common data collection standards that will eventually assist in a revisit to the concept of a consolidated composite department;
- Developing where possible, common measurable performance standards for the three lines of defence;
- Where possible, creating common "trigger points" associated with growth;
- Aligning the municipal fire by-laws with common language, where possible;
- Aligning standard operating procedures, standard operating guidelines, human resource policies and other policies with mutual language, where possible;
- Aligning vehicle and equipment standards, where possible ;
- Exploring harmonization of Community Risk Assessment plans;
- Leverage corporate Equity, Diversity, Inclusion strategy that would be used by both fire services for future recruitment purposes; and
- Identifying further opportunities to align work procedures and service delivery.

## 5. RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN:

**PROMOTE**  
a high quality of life



**Build a healthy, safe and accessible community**

- Develop a Waterfront Strategy
- Update the Recreation and Cultural Services Master Plan
- Refresh the Trails and Active Transportation Study
- Design and construct a Multi-use Recreation Complex (MURC)
- Refresh the Municipal Cultural Plan
- Implement the Library Master Plan
- Advocate for improved age-in-place and health care services
- Implement the Fire Services Protection Master Plan
- Refresh the Emergency Preparedness Plan

## 6. FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY IMPACT:

Implementation costs, associated with the fleet services transition, will be brought forward as part of the 2024 budget process. All pre-work in advance of implementation will be done by internal staff with no additional budget required.

Exploring potential shared services opportunities will be done by internal staff, with no additional budget required for 2023.

Implementation of the Fire Master Plan recommendations will be considered through future budget processes.

## 7. PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND NOTICE REQUIREMENTS:

Public information meetings were held for each community (June 28, 2022 in East Gwillimbury and June 29, 2022 in Georgina). The sessions were livestreamed and the recordings have been posted on the Towns' websites.

For the purposes of seeking further public input in a convenient manner, an online survey was prepared and released in advance of the public information meetings. The survey remained open until the end of July and resulted in 100 responses for East Gwillimbury and 137 responses for Georgina being collected.

## 8. CONCLUSION:

This project identified three strategies to assess the potential for service efficiencies for the Town of Georgina Fire and Rescue Services and the Town of East Gwillimbury Emergency and Community Safety Services. In addition, as part of the project scope, both Fire Master Plans were updated with a focus on the Towns' growth projections. An



in-depth fire fleet services study was also undertaken to supplement the ESCI final report.

The study concluded that both communities are well serviced by their fire and emergency services departments. While the study does not recommend consolidating the two fire departments, it does identify opportunities for shared services. This would potentially bring both municipalities in further alignment regarding their policies, procedures, data management, and other components. A consolidated composite department remains of interest to both municipalities.

A similar report and recommendations will be considered by both Councils.

### **APPROVALS**

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Maureen McCauley  
Consultant

Recommended By: Ron Jenkins  
Director of Emergency Services, Fire Chief

Approved By: Ryan Cronsberry  
Chief Administrative Officer

### ***Attachments:***

**Attachment 1** – ESCI Final Report “Innovation and Modernization of the Fire Services for the Town of Georgina and the Town of East Gwillimbury”

**Attachment 2** – Mercury Executive Summary and Report “The Town of Georgina and the Town of East Gwillimbury Joint Fire Fleet Services Alternatives Assessment”

**Attachment 3** – Refreshed Fire Master Plan