

HALIFAX

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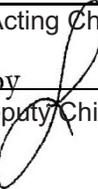
Item No. 14.1.3
Halifax Regional Council
January 12, 2016

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed by 

SUBMITTED BY:

John Traves, Q.C. Acting Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: December 23, 2015

SUBJECT: Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Recruitment Process

ORIGIN

March 2011 direction from Council to Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency (HRFE) to revise the career Firefighter recruitment process.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Halifax Regional Municipality Charter 2008, c. 39 Section 35(2)(b) the Chief Administrative Officer may appoint, suspend and remove all employees of the Municipality, with power to further delegate this authority;

Administrative Order 24 Respecting Fire & Emergency Service in Halifax Regional Municipality, Section 1(5)(2) The Chief Officer may appoint to the Fire Service any person qualified under subsection (1) when a vacancy occurs through the death, retirement, resignation or discharge of a member with the result that the complement of the Fire Service is below the staff complement approved by Council or where the Council increases the staff complement of the Fire Service.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council direct Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency to return to Regional Council to report back on the effectiveness of the new recruitment process six months after the establishment of the career Firefighter Consideration for Hire Pool.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency (HRFE) conducted a career Firefighter recruitment process which resulted in the creation of an eligibility list without an expiration date. In March 2011, a review of the process and outstanding eligibility list was undertaken which resulted in Halifax Regional Council directing HRFE to return to Council in six months with a revised recruitment process in consideration of operational requirements, forecasted hiring needs and industry best practices while also incorporating the following:

- Fairness and transparency of the process, requirements and standards against which candidates will be measured.
- An outreach strategy aimed at attracting candidates from the various communities within HRM, including the protected groups (Aboriginal Persons, Females, Racially Visible Persons and Persons with Disabilities).
- Consider developing an option to assess HRFE volunteer candidates to recognize their training and experience acquired through time served as a volunteer Firefighter.

In December 2011, it was determined that the existing career Firefighter eligibility list would not be expired. With this decision, there was no requirement to establish a new recruitment process until the existing career Firefighter eligibility list was exhausted. Currently, three candidates remain on the eligibility list. Therefore, HRFE will undertake a career Firefighter recruitment process in 2016.

DISCUSSION

As directed by Council, the following items were considered in the development of a new career Firefighter recruitment process:

Forecasted Operational Requirements

Currently, there are 16 vacant positions. Based on historic retirement trends, another 12 to 16 retirements may occur by the end of 2016.

Career Firefighter recruit training currently takes place over a sixteen-week-period (including pre-course preparation) and is delivered to a maximum of 16 career recruits at a time. HRFE is able to run two recruitment training sessions each year, for a maximum annual hire of thirty-two (32) Firefighters.

Based on all of these considerations, we anticipate the hire of between 16 and 32 Firefighters between April 1, 2016 and March 31, 2017.

Industry Best Practices

HRFE conducted an industry best practice review with eight major municipalities across Canada. The findings show that the minimum application requirements vary, with some municipalities calling for the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1001 and 1002 certification from a recognized training institution for applicants to be considered, while others require Grade 12 or equivalent and opt to train recruits to NFPA standards upon hire. There is consistency across the municipalities contacted in the use of aptitude testing, physical abilities testing, panel interviews, and medical assessment in the selection process. The security clearance requirements also vary from one municipality to another and may include criminal records check, drivers abstract, integrity interviews, and polygraph.

Fairness & Transparency in the Recruitment Process

HRFE will undertake a merit based recruitment and selection process. This process will include aptitude testing, physical abilities testing, and a panel interview. The skills, abilities and competencies measured through each of these phases are in alignment with the requirements for the position of Firefighter.

When the general recruitment call is issued, an outline of the recruitment process and associated timelines will be published. Frequently Asked Questions and links to all applicable information will be posted on the on halifax.ca website with a link to HRFE website. This will allow applicants an opportunity to prepare and plan accordingly. The step by step process is outlined in Appendix A - HRFE Career Firefighter Selection Process (2016).

HRFE has undertaken a number of revisions to the career Firefighter recruitment process intended to remove identified barriers by eliminating the need for post-secondary certification and all costs previously incurred by candidates at various phases of the selection process. This provides opportunity for a broader pool of applicants to pursue a career as a Firefighter with HRFE. Minimum qualifications to apply are:

- Grade 12 education or equivalent.
- Nova Scotia Class 5 Driver's License (or equivalent from another province) with driver's abstract demonstrating a safe and responsible driving record.
- Criminal record check with no job-related convictions of a criminal offense for which a pardon has not been granted.
- Ability to communicate clearly in English (oral and written form) under demanding, high-pressure situations.

Applicants who meet these screening requirements will proceed to the first phase of the selection process, a written Firefighter aptitude test which is in alignment with the competencies required for this position. An aptitude test is used as part of the selection process by all eight municipalities contacted during the best practice review. Using the generally accepted ratio of three candidates for every vacancy, the top 150 candidates who meet the minimum cut off score in the aptitude test will move forward. The second phase of the selection process is physical abilities testing based on *bona fide* occupational requirements for Firefighters and is used as part of the selection process by all eight municipalities contacted during the best practice review. The top 100 candidates who successfully complete the physical abilities testing and meet the minimum cut off score will move to the third phase in the selection process, a panel interview.

Candidates who successfully complete the first three phases of the selection process will be placed in a Consideration for Hire Pool. As operational requirements dictate, candidates will move through the remaining phases in the selection process:

- reference checks
- criminal records & drivers abstract checks
- integrity interview
- medical assessment

The Consideration for Hire Pool will remain in effect for one year, expiring on March 31, 2017. However, if currently unknown operational requirements dictate, the Consideration for Hire Pool expiration date may be extended to March 31, 2018. If the operational requirements exceed the number of candidates in the Consideration for Hire Pool, additional qualified candidates may be moved forward through the selection process.

Outreach & Community Representation

HRFE is committed to fairness throughout the hiring process and in having recruit classes representative of the communities we serve. This will be achieved through community outreach efforts, removal of identifiable barriers, and consideration of all designated groups when making decisions regarding the make-up of recruit classes.

HRFE has convened an Outreach Committee. Committee members are actively engaging with members of the African Nova Scotian Community, Aboriginals, new Canadians, LGBTQ communities and women who are interested in becoming Firefighters, to encourage individuals from these communities to consider a career in the fire service. The work of the Outreach Committee will be an ongoing effort.

In consideration of feedback received following the 2007 career Firefighter recruitment process, HRFE has eliminated all candidate costs associated with the career Firefighter recruitment and selection process. As previously mentioned, HRFE has also eliminated the requirement for Firefighter Level 1 and first-aid certification to enter the selection process. In advance of the upcoming recruitment, information sessions will be held to ensure all applicants have access to information and resources to assist them in preparing for the selection process.

It is the expectation of HRFE that these efforts will result in the number of applicants and recruits from the aforementioned groups being representative of the community. HRFE will return to Council in six months to provide an update on the effectiveness of the outreach efforts in attracting candidates who self-identify as female, visible minority, Aboriginal or persons with disabilities.

Consideration for Volunteers

Volunteers play an important role within HRFE, with twenty-four fire stations within the Halifax Regional Municipality fully supported by HRFE volunteer members and another seventeen composite fire stations supported in part by volunteer members. To train and equip each volunteer member, HRFE spends several thousand dollars and numerous resources in providing the volunteer members with the training required to be a volunteer Firefighter. Many individuals become volunteers with HRFE in the hope it will afford them the opportunity to transition to the role of career Firefighter at some point. Our statistics show that the attrition point for many volunteers occurs between one and five years of volunteer service.

In recognition of their volunteer service, and to encourage increased and continued participation in the HRFE volunteer service, HRFE volunteers in good standing who meet the minimum cut off score in the aptitude test at phase 1 of the selection process will be awarded up to five percentage points (5%) to be added to their score. HRFE volunteers will receive one percentage point (1%) for each year of volunteer service in accordance with HRFE Policy P-044 Participation Requirements for Active Membership Status for Volunteer Firefighters (Appendix B), up to a maximum of five percentage points (5%). These additional points may impact placement of an HRFE volunteer Firefighter in the top 150 candidates moving to phase 2 of the selection process. Additionally, the training and experience acquired through time served as an HRFE volunteer Firefighter should make these volunteer candidates more familiar with the components in the physical abilities testing, as they are based on actual tasks a Firefighter may perform at a fire scene.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The anticipated cost to administer the recruitment and selection process is approximately \$75,000. These funds will come from the approved HRFE 2015/16 operating budget.

The first hire from this recruitment process will be September 2016. This hire will address the twelve current Firefighter vacancies and anticipated vacancies which are funded through the current wage model.

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

N/A

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

ALTERNATIVES

The March 2011 directive from Council was for HRFE to develop a new recruitment process. Therefore, we have not identified any other options at this time.

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A – HRFE Career Firefighter Selection Process (2016)
Appendix B – Policy P-044

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.php> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210, or Fax 902.490.4208.

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Financial Approval by:

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Original Signed

Appendix A - HRFE Career Firefighter Selection Process (2016)

Please note timelines are tentative and may be adjusted prior to the issue of the general recruitment call.

Application (Jan 14-30, 2016)

- General recruitment call issued. Posted on halifax.ca website with a link to HRFE website, complemented by social media and other advertising.
- Job posting will outline all steps in the recruitment and selection process and provide projected schedule for each step.
- Interested citizens will apply through the on-line applicant tracking system.

Written Aptitude Test – Phase 1 (Feb 15-19, 2016)

- Applicants who meet minimum qualifications are screened in to write entry level Firefighter aptitude test.
- The aptitude test measures reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, map reading, writing ability, interpersonal skills, teamwork, logical reasoning, mechanical aptitude and spatial rotation ability.
- Test scored by vendor. Results provided to HRFE.
- Cut-off score of 70%.
- Top 150 candidates proceed to Phase 2.

Physical Abilities Testing - Phase 2 (March 7-11)

- Gledhill Firefighter Abilities Protocol based on Firefighter bona fide (job-related) occupational requirements.
- Testing proctored and scored by Kinesiologists through an external service provider. Results provided to HRFE.
- Candidates must successfully complete all components.
- Scored based on time to complete.
- Cut-off score of 70%
- Top 100 candidates who successfully complete the testing proceed to Phase 3.

Panel Interview – Phase 3 (April 1-May 15, 2016)

- Panel interview conducted by two representatives of HRFE and a Sr. Human Resources Consultant.
- Behavioural & situational questions based on core competencies for the position.
- Candidates must achieve cut off score of 70% to be considered for Phase 4.

Consideration for Hire Pool – Phase 4 (June 1, 2016)

- Candidates who successfully complete Phases 1-3 will be given an overall weighted score based on the following formula:
 - 20% of aptitude test score
 - 30% of physical abilities test score
 - 50% of panel interview score
- Candidates who achieve an overall minimum cut off score of 70% will be placed in a Consideration for Hire Pool.
- **The Consideration for Hire Pool will remain in effect for one year, expiring on March 31, 2017.** However, if currently unknown operational requirements dictate, the Consideration for Hire Pool expiration date may be extended to March 31, 2018.
- Candidates move through the remaining phases in the selection process as operational requirements dictate the need to hire a recruit class.
- Placement in the Consideration for Hire Pool is not a guarantee of future employment. This is a highly competitive process and not all candidates who meet the minimum cut off score will be hired. Hiring will be dictated by operational requirements.

Security Clearance – Phase 5

- Criminal Records Check, Child Abuse Registry Check and Drivers Abstract.
- Employment Reference Checks.
- Candidates may be eliminated at this phase if the results do not meet position requirements.
- Conducted by an external service provider. Results provided to HRFE.

Integrity Interview – Phase 6

- Integrity Interview Questionnaire completed by candidates.
- Integrity Interview conducted through external service provider. Results provided to HRFE.
- Integrity Interview is designed to elicit truthful information from the candidate and to gain insight in to an applicant's possible participation in behaviours that are not aligned with the requirements of the position.
- Candidates may be eliminated at this phase.

Medical Evaluation – Phase 7

- Based on National Fire Protection Association 1582 - Standard on Comprehensive Occupational Medical Program for Fire Departments.
- Conducted by medical practitioners through external service provider. Fit for Duty document provided to HRFE.
- Candidates may be eliminated at this phase.

Offer of Employment

- Issued to candidates upon successful completion of all phases of the selection process.

HALIFAX REGIONAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY

P o l i c y M a n u a l

Subject: PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP STATUS FOR VOLUNTEER FIRE FIGHTERS	Policy No: P-044
Division: ADMINISTRATION	Page 1 of 2
Issued by: OPERATIONS (B. Turpin)	Date of issue: 2010/05/28
Approval: 	
Forms required:	Revision date:
File information: VFAC - approved February 8, 2010	

PURPOSE: To define *Active Member* of the volunteer fire service through participation requirements for attendance at meetings, participation in training programs, and attendance at emergency events.

To establish a minimum participation standard for active members of Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency.

POLICY: Active Membership Status:

- 1) Members who meet or exceed the participation levels identified below are to be recognized as *Active Members* of the volunteer fire service wherever that status needs to be identified by Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency.
- 2) Individual departments may exceed this standard where warranted and supported by the membership.
- 3) Members who do not fit the parameters for *Active Member* may apply to be retained as Support Members where positions are available within the authorized complement. Participation requirements for operational support members are the same as those stated for active members. Administrative support members are expected to commit 2 hours per week to station activities.

Definitions:

Attendance at meetings: The number of meetings includes all regularly scheduled meetings the member is expected to attend. This is normally monthly, but in the case of officers, may include additional management meetings or representation of the department in another context.

Attendance at training sessions: The number of training events includes all regularly

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scheduled department training, including courses required to reach basic firefighter membership requirements. Special training events organized for and expected to involve participation of the majority of members may also be included.

Attendance at emergency responses: This includes all responses by the department to render emergency aid.

Participation Standard:

- 1) All members are expected to attend all meetings, training and emergency responses of the station to which they are assigned.
- 2) At the end of each calendar quarter the Chief (Volunteer Captains in Zone 6) or designate shall meet with members who fall below 50% participation in any of the three categories to discuss their lack of attendance and provide appropriate coaching. Notes of these discussions shall be kept in the manner prescribed in the Progressive Discipline Process.
- 3) Members who fall below 33 % attendance at meetings and training or below 20% attendance at emergency responses may be removed from active service and are no longer entitled to the benefits of active membership. Examples of benefits are vehicle licenses, pagers, protective clothing, other clothing, etc.
- 4) Lists of active members shall be submitted annually to the BOC for review. The Board shall forward the Active Membership List to the Deputy Chief Director or designate on or before September 30th. The Board shall update the list as changes occur.