



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIRE DEPT: ADDITIONAL BC AMBULANCE STAFF NEEDED LOCALLY

Department to Continue to Provide Critical Response Assistance

PRINCE RUPERT, JULY 25th, 2022 – In an effort to ensure that the Fire Department always has adequate staff capacity for fire response, Prince Rupert City Council resolved tonight to support limiting Fire Department support to BC Ambulance to 'purple' or critical calls only. Additionally, they resolved to pursue an agreement that would enable the City to invoice BC Ambulance for incidents where firefighters are required to drive the ambulance. The City is working closely with the MLA's Office on solutions to the problem, who are aware and understand the issue.

“Unfortunately, the shortage in ambulatory care in Prince Rupert has really come to a head. Fire Department staff are currently attending medical calls more often than fire calls, and even driving the ambulance on a weekly basis due to lack of ambulance staffing,” said Fire Chief Jeff Beckwith. “This takes staff away from their primary duties of fire protection, and we do not have a fulsome enough agreement in place with the Province to be supplementing the ambulance service to this extent. Even though we will absolutely continue to be here to respond to critical incidents, we need to ensure we always have our capacity available to respond to our primary community responsibility – fire protection.”

As an example, in July, firefighters attended 4 medical patients at 3 different events simultaneously. This resulted in overtime to backfill staff at the Fire Hall, which were

then called out to a structure fire. Despite being able to respond to all events in this particular circumstance, there is not always a guarantee that staff will be available for overtime, leaving the Department and community in a vulnerable position.

The Department's backfilling of ambulatory care, which has been escalating over the past several years, also means that costs to the City have slowly been creeping up. Since April, there have been 68 incidents which created overtime due to firefighters driving ambulances and ambulance delays on scene, at significant cost to City taxpayers.

The goal for the City moving ahead is to seek an agreement to make the City whole for services rendered, while continuing to ensure that the Department provides necessary support for critical medical, so that the health of residents is not put at risk.

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