

# Municipality of Lakeshore – Report to Council

## Community Health and Safety

### Fire Services



**To:** Mayor & Members of Council  
**From:** Don Williamson, Fire Chief  
**Date:** February 13, 2024  
**Subject:** 2024 Fire Department Radio System Lease Extension

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### Recommendation

Direct the Clerk to read By-law 24-2024, being a By-law to authorize Digital Radio-Communication System Contract Extension 2024 Fire Department Radio System Lease Extension, as presented at the March 19, 2024 Council meeting.

### Background

The intent of this report is to provide some insight on the fire service radio history, the challenges moving forward, that work is being done to investigate collaborative options, and that Lakeshore needs to extend the expiring radio lease agreement for a minimum of 1 year to February 2025.

From 1962 through to the early 2000s most of the Essex County fire services communicated on one radio channel that was used for both pager activation and 2-way radio communications. Multiple fire services responding to emergencies at the same time created confusion, radio congestion, and safety concerns on that single channel.

After amalgamation in 1999 a Regional Radio System Advisory Committee was established to review options and costs for a multi-channel, interoperable radio system. While this study was occurring, some fire services (LaSalle, Kingsville, and Leamington) implemented their own communication systems.

In 2005 after presenting several regional radio system options and associated costs, a County Council consensus could not be reached. It was decided that each municipality would determine their own radio solution.

Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Essex and Amherstburg all agreed to work together and implement a UHF radio system through Kelcom infrastructure. It offered interoperability between the 4 fire services while providing separate operational channels for each municipality. Kelcom also improved the paging system from a single tower transmit site

located in the Town of Essex to multiple tower sites providing 100% street level coverage for both regional paging and network radio coverage. That infrastructure improvement required each of the four municipalities to replace all their radio equipment and commit to a 10-year lease with Kelcom until February 2016.

The following is a short chronology of the lease history.

- 2013 the system was upgraded to modernize the communication network with technology of the day.
- 2016 a 3-year lease renewal was initiated while introducing a 15% rate reduction for network radio costs.
- 2019 a 2-year lease renewal was initiated including an additional 34% rate reduction for network radio fees and a 20% reduction in pager service fees.
- 2021 Lakeshore Council approved a Kelcom renewal for an additional 3 years at the 2019 rates.

## **Comments**

The January 2021 report to Council explained that the 8-year-old Kelcom radio system continues to be supported through 2024 -2025 with the provider's intent to upgrade the system through 2025.

The participating 4 County fire services discussions have been limited regarding other radio solutions. The 4 municipalities realize the benefit of a cost shared system that provides geographical coverage and the ability to talk to each other and the dispatch center on the same radio network. However, the complexities of potential options that are not equal to all, the associated costs, and yet to be determined factors create a challenge to any one solution.

Finding a solution agreeable to everyone is challenging and involves many municipal decision makers. The current Kelcom system has the capacity and coverage area for all the other Essex County municipal fire services to connect. This system will require modernization in 2025 and would provide a common, cost-shared county fire services radio network as a possible solution.

However, since our original partner discussions, the Town of Amherstburg moved to a Windsor Police Services (WPS) policing model. The ad hoc radio system used by WPS in Amherstburg is currently being replaced to properly connect with the City of Windsor radio system, which is shared by WPS, Windsor Fire, Transit Windsor, and other city operations. The plan is that Amherstburg Fire Department will transition in 2024 from the Kelcom radio system currently shared with the 3 other county fire services, onto the city radio system.

The Town of Tecumseh has also expressed interest in moving onto the city system. However, the city resources that manage the city radio system (WPS) are tied up with the Amherstburg upgrade and additional city radio system enhancements are required to accept any additional users.

It should be noted that the city radio system coverage area will not reach Lakeshore and only covers a limited part of the west end of the Town of Essex. Therefore, Essex and Lakeshore are out of range.

Expanding the city system out into the county would require a signal coverage study to determine where and how many additional tower sites would be required. This study would be conducted by Motorola through a WPS request. Unfortunately, there are no WPS resources available and based on information at this time, this potential study could be 3 or more years away. Cost estimates for the study, identifying required tower sites and associated infrastructure costs, and our radio gear replacement costs cannot be estimated as they are related to each other.

In 2020, Lakeshore Council approved a 5-year, \$110,000 per year contribution to reserves commitment, in preparation for the impending fire radio network/ hardware modernization. It is administration's intent to continue discussions with our remaining regional partners and a solution with or without them will be identified.

It should be noted however that due to budget constraints only \$110,000 has been encumbered and approved in prior administrative reviews of the budget. Once a solution and associated costs are identified, a funding source will be needed for this important public safety capital project.

Unfortunately, we are not positioned to drive results for a potential city radio solution, nor do we need to currently. Our current Kelcom radio and pager systems will continue to work. However, as Amherstburg and Tecumseh eventually transition onto the city system, the viability for Kelcom to maintain our current radio systems shared with Essex may be challenged.

For now, we need to continue the status quo and extend our current radio systems (paging and network) agreement for another year. With Kelcom's plan to upgrade their infrastructure, we'll look to see how best that meets our operational needs and that of our neighbours while identifying any other potential options.

### **Others Consulted**

Tim Schweyer – Services Director Kelcom Radio

Fire Chief Steve Laforet – City of Windsor

Fire Chief Bruce Montone – Town of Amherstburg

Fire Chief Wade Bondy – Town of Tecumseh

Former Fire Chief Rick Arnel – Town of Essex

### **Financial Impacts**

Lakeshore would continue to pay for the services as established in the 2019 agreement. The rates are approximately \$31,000 annually for the network portion of the radio system and \$13,000 annually for the paging system.

The future radio system infrastructure and hardware will need to be costed and a funding model determined at that time. As of today, \$110,000 dollars will remain encumbered for the capital project.

The current Kelcom Radio System lease is permitted by the single-source provisions of the Purchasing By-law.

### **Report Approval Details**

Document Title:	2024 Fire Department Radio System Lease Extension.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Mar 14, 2024

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

Prepared by Don Williamson

Submitted by Frank Jeney

Approved by Justin Rousseau, Mike Martin and Truper McBride