

Municipality of Lakeshore – Report to Council

Community Services

Fire Services



To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Jason Suchiu, Fire Chief
Date: April 6, 2026
Subject: Lakeshore Fire Service Staffing Consideration

Recommendation

Approve the reduction of the complement of volunteer firefighters from 100 to 90 and convert the 10 volunteer firefighter positions into two full-time firefighters to be hired in Q4 of 2026; and

Approve firefighting staffing Option 3 for Administration to bring operational costing considerations in the 2027 and future Budget deliberations, all as presented at the April 28, 2026 meeting.

Strategic Objectives

3b) Modernizing and Enhancing Municipal Functions - Revise business processes to establish and employ a risk management framework, improved workflow management, and financial modelling to inform management of reserves

Background

At the September 9, 2024 meeting, Council approved the Fire Master Plan (FMP) completed by Emergency Management Group Inc. which supports fire protection service delivery within the Municipality of Lakeshore over the next 10 years (2023-2032). Identified in the FMP were several strategic priorities related to facilities, fleet and staffing.

Lakeshore is served by five fire stations, established to protect pre-amalgamation communities, housing a fleet of 11 fire apparatus. Many of these stations are aging, require repairs, lack modern amenities such as decontamination facilities, have limited capacity for modern apparatus, and are not optimally located for current response demands.

Apparatus typically has a 20–25 year service life and have historically been purchased based on existing station locations. While Council has supported recent fleet

replacements, six additional apparatus will reach their end-of-life within the next five years. Future replacements will be identified in upcoming budget cycles and should modernize the fleet to align with evolving community needs and be coordinated with planned fire station replacements.

One of the key strategic priorities identified as an immediate to mid-term item is the introduction of a full-time firefighter contingent to support the current volunteer response model. As calls for service continue to rise alongside community growth, staffing uncertainty has become an increasing challenge.

The Lakeshore Fire Service is comprised of a highly dedicated group of volunteer firefighters (VFF) who will remain a vital asset to the community for decades to come. However, the traditional volunteer model is beginning to show signs of response fatigue. Planning for a transition toward a 24-hour-a-day seven-days-a-week community coverage will be necessary over the life of the Fire Master Plan. More urgent pressures include the pending retirements of long-serving personnel and the need to strengthen support for new volunteers. Transitioning to a composite fire service by adding experienced full-time staff will be critical to maintaining the current level of service and ensuring a sustainable response model for the future.

Comments

Emergency Response Measurables

Since amalgamation in 1999, the Lakeshore Fire Service has staffed and responded to all types of emergencies based on the locations of the pre-amalgamation fire stations. Over the years, our service delivery model has continued to rely on an all-volunteer firefighting system to meet the community’s needs. The trends identified in the FMP remain consistent, and the details provided demonstrate ongoing tracking and analysis of service demands and performance.

The consistent increase in emergency response is directly tied to community development and population growth. Administration regularly reviews demands and availability of resources. The table below outlines the number of dispatches and total responses from each station, illustrating the personnel and equipment required to effectively manage these emergencies.

Calls For Service – By Station

Year	Dispatches	Stations						Totals
		1	2	3	4	5	HQ	
2023	672	271	77	166	90	125	NA	729
2024	702	283	134	196	138	156	62	969
2025	681	294	150	193	174	171	161	1,143

Approximately 67 percent of our service calls continue to be related to rescues, alarm activations, and fire-related incidents.

Responses By Type

	2023	Percent	2024	Percent	2025	Percent
Rescues	176	26.2 %	186	26.5 %	147	21.6 %
Alarm Activation	163	24.3 %	155	22.1 %	152	22.4 %
Fires	114	17 %	145	20.7 %	138	20.3 %
Medical	95	14.1 %	89	12.7 %	91	13.4 %
Carbon Monoxide	73	10.9 %	67	9.5 %	79	11.6 %
Chemical Leak / Odour	35	5.2 %	32	4.6 %	39	5.7 %
Public Hazard	67	10.0 %	28	4.0 %	34	5.5 %

On an annual basis, close to 45 percent of our call volume occurs between 08:00 and 16:00 hours.

Total Dispatches by Time of Day

	00:00 – 08:00h	08:00 – 16:00h	16:00 – 24:00h	Total
2023	146	290	236	672
2024	121	312	269	702
2025	121	321	239	681

To address call volumes between 08:00 and 16:00h adjustments were made to our response protocols, including deploying two stations to several districts to help fill staffing gaps. Despite these measures, weekday staffing remains a significant challenge, largely because many volunteer firefighters are unavailable due to full-time work, school, or family commitments.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standard that relates to our emergency response is NFPA 1720 - *Standard for the Organization and Development of Fire Suppression, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Volunteer Fire Departments*. The standard identifies the number of volunteer firefighter personnel for deployment and breaks it down into the following population density:

- Urban areas with populations greater than 1000 per square mile (2.6 km²) should have a minimum response of **15 staff within 9 minutes**, 90 percent of the time
- For suburban areas with a population of 500 – 1000 per square mile (2.6 km²) there should be a minimum response of **10 staff within 10 minutes**, 80 percent of the time
- In rural areas with populations less than 500 per square mile (2.6 km²) there should be a minimum response of **six (6) staff within 14 minutes**, 80 percent of the time

Lakeshore having a geographical size of 530 km² and a population of approximately 46,750 residents puts the response goals in the “Rural” criteria of striving to have six (6) staff within 14 minutes. It should also be noted that there are pockets of the community due to its population density that meet the “Suburban” criteria of 10 staff within 10 minutes.

Response times are measured beginning the moment the dispatch is completed, and firefighters are notified of the emergency. Assembly time refers to the time it takes a group of firefighters to arrive at the station, gear up, and depart on the responding apparatus. Over the past several years, assembly times have remained consistent at approximately 10 to 11 minutes, which is in line with typical volunteer fire service performance.

Total response time is the time it takes to travel to and arrive on the scene where the emergency has occurred. While this can vary based on travel distance from the responding station to the location of the incident, the average of all the stations are summarized in the table below.

Staffing Assembly – Response Time

Year	Average Personal 00:00-08:00h	Average Personal 08:00-16:00h	Average Personal 16:00-00:00h	Average Assembly Time	Average Response Time
2023	7	3	7	10:54	18:12
2024	6	2	6	10:44	15:19
2025	7	2	7	9:42	16:34

Currently we are not meeting the NFPA 1720 response criteria. To help move closer to the target of assembling six responders within 14 minutes, we bolster weekday coverage (Monday to Friday, 08:30–16:30h) by deploying the Fire Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Training Officer, and single full time firefighter. This strategy ensures a guaranteed response of one apparatus staffed with four to five personnel across all areas of the municipality. While beneficial for emergency response, this also places additional demands on administration, requiring staff to be redirected from their core duties.

By utilizing full- time personnel already at headquarters, assembly times are significantly reduced from approximately 10 minutes to about 90 seconds. This improvement allows crews to get on the road much faster and has proven to provide farther reaching response coverage giving greater success in meeting the 14- minute benchmark outlined in NFPA 1720 (see Appendix A – 14- Minute Full- Time Coverage Map).

Volunteer Firefighting Recruiting and Onboarding Investment

Across Ontario, volunteer fire services are experiencing increasing challenges with recruitment as fewer people are pursuing volunteer community service roles. Despite this trend, the Lakeshore Fire Service remains fortunate to have a strong core of long- serving volunteers.

Of our current complement of 81 volunteer firefighters, 33 have dedicated between 20 and 40 years to protecting and serving their community. This level of tenure is exceptional and speaks to the commitment of our members. It also highlights the need to plan to replace this depth of knowledge and experience.

From amalgamation, our service has maintained the capacity to support up to 100 volunteer firefighters, equivalent to a complement of 20 volunteers at each of our five

stations. This level of staffing was identified as when emergencies occur, typically only one out of every two or three firefighters is available to respond at any given time. Despite this established capacity, we continue to experience challenges in recruiting and retaining a full complement at each station.

Since 2022 we have recruited, trained, and equipped 43 new volunteer firefighters, of which 32 remain. Over the past several years, we have experienced a turnover rate of approximately 25 percent among new hires within their first two to three years after an average investment of \$22,260. Combined with anticipated retirements, trends indicate that we will continue to see roughly a dozen volunteer firefighters leave each year. Many departing new members cite call volumes and growing training requirements as pressures that are not able to be sustained with their full-time work, personal and family commitments.

With the implementation of O. Reg. 343/22 Firefighter Certification by the Ministry of the Solicitor General in July 2022, municipalities are now required to certify all firefighters through the NFPA 1001-1, NFPA 1001-2 and NFPA 1002 program. We provide this 320-hour course to all new volunteer recruits within the first 12 months of employment. Recruits are also required to pass their DZ training which includes two days of in-class training, 20 hours of driving, five hours of testing and practical theory. There are also 10 hours of online learning for municipal directed training as well as 12 hours of health and safety and mental wellness PEER support training.

Combined with rising call volumes, these additional commitments place significant demands on volunteers, contributing to increased stress, accelerated burnout, and challenges with long-term retention. The table below outlines the investment of the last three recruitment cycles. The average onboarding cost has been \$22,260.

Cost to Train and Outfit New VFF

Year	Recruits	Base Training Costs	Bunker Gear	Uniforms	Additional 2028 NFPA Training Requirements	Admin Costs	Total
2022	19	\$104,737	\$104,785	\$30,685	\$168,788	\$11,780	\$420,775
2024	14	\$55,236	\$77,210	\$22,610	\$124,370	\$8,680	\$288,106
2025	10	\$82,003	\$55,150	\$16,150	\$88,836	\$6,200	\$248,339
Totals	43	\$241,975	\$237,145	\$69,445	\$381,995	\$26,660	\$957,220

We have completed our 2026 volunteer firefighter recruitment process and will be onboarding 12 new members, bringing our total complement to 93 volunteer firefighters. As this intake concluded, several current members are departing highlighting the ongoing challenge of maintaining a volunteer firefighting complement over 90 people.

Current Daytime Coverage

In 2025, through a reorganization of fire administration, an Assistant Deputy Chief position was reclassified into a full-time firefighter role, with the position starting in January 2026. This change provides dedicated weekday support for emergency

responses between 08:30 and 16:30 Monday to Friday, strengthening daytime coverage across all stations along with deploying the Fire Chief, Deputy Chiefs, and Training Officer.

Historically, volunteer firefighters have been relied upon—based on availability—to assist with daytime building and equipment maintenance. On average, we pay approximately \$59,000 annually to bring volunteers in to perform these duties. While the addition of a full-time firefighter will not eliminate the need for volunteer support, it is expected to reduce these costs by approximately \$45,000 per year.

This position also enhances our ability to meet growing daytime demands for public education and community engagement. Currently, we spend about \$25,000 annually staffing these events with volunteer firefighters, many of which occur during weekday hours and can be difficult to get staff. The addition of this full-time firefighter, combined with our Training Officer, help meet these needs, with an anticipated cost reduction of approximately \$10,000 annually. Not all public education activities will be handled by full-time personnel, but overall capacity and efficiency will improve.

The full-time firefighter role further supports the completion of essential secondary tasks that previously required bringing in volunteer firefighters, including:

- Conducting smoke and carbon monoxide alarm follow-ups
- Transporting apparatus for maintenance and performing equipment upkeep
- Supporting cancer-prevention initiatives through decontamination and inspection of bunker gear, apparatus, equipment and stations
- Completing mandatory annual hose testing
- Performing pre-incident planning
- Carrying out minor station maintenance

Future Service Delivery Options

Today's average length of service for volunteer firefighters in Ontario is approximately five to seven years. Even though Lakeshore currently has 33 members with more than 20 years of service, we continue to experience a 25 percent turnover rate within the first three years of recruitment. Rising operational demands, higher turnover among new hires, and the impending retirement of long-serving staff underscores the need to adopt a long-term response model to support our existing volunteer force while ensuring we can sustain existing service levels well into the future.

In recognizing our ongoing challenges in supporting a complement of 100 volunteer firefighters, it is recommended that Council consider reducing our volunteer complement to 90 volunteer firefighters and converting the 10 volunteer firefighter positions into two full time firefighter roles in the last quarter of 2026. As well it is recommended Council adopt Option 3 as the staffing model for administration to bring forward operational costing considerations for future budgets.

Option 1 – Maintain the Status Quo

Except for our designated full-time firefighter, this option maintains service delivery through a fully volunteer firefighter model. As retirements or vacancies arise, every

effort will be made to fill these positions to sustain the appropriate complement of firefighters at each station.

Key considerations associated with this option include:

- **Unpredictable staffing levels:** While we have an exceptional group of dedicated volunteer firefighters, their availability is dependent on commitments outside of their full-time employment. As a result, there is no guaranteed number of personnel who will respond to an emergency.
- **Declining turnout:** Overall firefighter turnout per station has been decreasing over time.
- **Service level impacts:** As call volumes increase, assembly times lengthen, and turnout decreases, it is evident that there is a risk a lower level of service may be provided than in previous years.
- **Training requirements:** The commitment of over 400 hours of training to become a certified firefighter limits community interest in joining.
- **Retention Challenges:** Staff turnover averages 10–15 firefighters per year with some leaving to pursue full-time opportunities with career services. This turnover requires annual recruitment support from Human Resources and resulting in minimum onboarding costs of approximately \$22,260 per firefighter.

Option 2 – Part Time Staffing Model

This option maintains the current staffing structure of volunteer firefighters, supported by a full-time administrative team consisting of the Fire Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Training Officer, and one full-time firefighter who support emergency response coverage Monday through Friday from 08:30 to 16:30h. To continue daytime coverage the model also introduces a dedicated apparatus of one officer and three firefighter day-shift crew on Saturdays and Sundays, staffed by four volunteer firefighters working an eight-hour shift from 08:30 to 16:30h.

Key considerations for this option include:

- **Staffing stability:** Scheduled shifts provide greater predictability and support volunteer firefighters in committing to set times for emergency response.
- **Response assurance:** This model does not eliminate the need for station dispatches; rather, it ensures an additional staffed unit is available to support all stations.
- **Reduced response and assembly times during scheduled times:** A pre-assembled, staffed unit will arrive on scene significantly faster than traditional station-based volunteer responses.
- **Administrative demands:** Implementing and maintaining a volunteer-staffed weekend shift model requires substantial administrative effort to manage scheduling, availability, and replacement coverage for 52 weekends.
- **Reliability dependent on volunteer interest:** The model relies on the willingness and availability of volunteer firefighters to commit to weekend shifts. The bottle neck to the option is the availability of Officer (Supervisor) coverage. There remains a potential risk that some weekends may not be staffed as it adds another expectation to a volunteer group who are already stretched.

Option 3 – Establish a Composite Firefighting Model

Transition to a composite fire service by hiring a complement of seven full-time firefighters to support our volunteer firefighter model (two in Q4 of 2026, two in 2028 and three in 2029). This staffing level would provide a minimum of four full-time firefighters on a day shift rotation providing coverage seven days a week. As the community grows and call volumes increase, Administration would reassess this staffing model and report back to Council with recommendations regarding any need to expand the complement further.

Key considerations for this option include:

- **Stability and continuity:** Full-time career firefighters provide long-term stability, experience, and technical proficiency critical as approximately one-third of our current fire service approaches retirement.
- **Phased implementation:** A staged hiring plan over the next four years would build toward guaranteed staffing, ensuring reliable support for volunteer firefighters across the municipality.
- **Unionization considerations:** Establishing a full-time firefighter complement may introduce the potential for future unionization, which should be considered as part of long-term planning.
- **Optimized staffing:** As additional full-time firefighters are hired, the number of required volunteer firefighters per station may be evaluated, alleviating pressures with multi-station responses.
- **Public education:** Scheduled crews can be utilized to support community outreach and public education events.
- **Reduced recruitment:** With an annual need to recruit volunteer firefighters, Human Resources is experiencing ongoing hiring demands. A core group of full-time firefighters, combined with natural attrition of volunteers, would help ease recruitment pressures.
- **Elimination of Onboarding Costs:** As these positions would be filled from our current complement of certified volunteer firefighters.
- **Balanced service delivery:** As the full-time complement grows, Administration will continuously assess call volumes and station-specific staffing needs to ensure an appropriate balance of volunteer and full-time firefighters to meet community demands.

Financial Impacts

If Council approves converting 10 volunteer firefighter positions into two full-time firefighter positions in Q4 this year, the operating costs saved from duties currently performed by our single full-time firefighter and from unfilled volunteer positions can be redirected to support this transition, resulting in no financial impact for 2026.

Cost to cover salary and benefits for the two positions would be \$77,500. The total operational savings are \$138,122 as shown below:

Savings from Full Time Firefighter

Building and Equipment Maintenance	Public Education	Total
\$45,000	\$10,000	\$55,000

Savings from Unstaffed VFF Positions

Training Costs	Wages	Protective Equipment	Uniforms	Total
\$12,667	\$62,350	\$6,915	\$1,190	\$83,122

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the staffing options presented in this report. However, the analysis highlights several significant pressures the fire service will face in the coming years. The projected impacts for each option are outlined below. The option selected by Council will result in financial implications that will be incorporated into the 2027 budget and future budget cycles.

Option 1 – Maintain the Status Quo

Proceeding with this option would be based on current staffing levels of 100 volunteer firefighters and aligned with current budget planning. Each newly recruited volunteer firefighter requires a minimum onboarding investment of approximately \$22,260. This cost covers certification training, protective clothing and uniforms. Based on annual recruitment requirements of 10 to 15 volunteer firefighters, the minimum projected annual onboarding cost is estimated at \$222,600.

Option 2 – Part Time Staffing Model

In addition to our current operating budget, to proceed with this option the annual cost for one officer and three firefighters two days a week (Saturday and Sunday) from 08:00 to 16:00h.

Weekend Coverage (2026 Rates)

Firefighters	Weekly Cost	Number of Weeks	Total
4 people at 8 hours each day	\$2,284	52	\$118,743

In addition to these staffing costs, the administrative cost to complete the scheduling for the year would be approximately \$9,250. The overall projected cost for Option 2 is \$127,993 and would be in addition to the onboarding cost outlined in Option 1 for a total cost of \$350,593.

Option 3 – Establish a Composite Firefighting Model

A key advantage of this hybrid model is that there would be no onboarding, uniform, or protective equipment costs, as these positions would be filled by existing volunteer firefighters who are already certified, equipped, and fully outfitted.

If this transition is approved in the fourth quarter of 2026 and the operating budget is realigned for 2027 there would be no operating increase over 2026. We would implement a one-year gap before considering the addition of further full-time positions. This approach would support effective budget planning and provide the necessary time

to assess operational impacts and justify projected costs for 2028 and 2029 which would be an estimated annual amount of \$310,000 should Council wish to expand the full-time complement.

The projected operating budget impact in 2027 of converting 10 volunteer firefighter positions to two full-time positions is outlined below.

Budget Item	2026 Budget	2027 Budget (Projected)	Change
Full Time Wages	\$933,514	\$1,243,514	\$310,000
Volunteer Wages	\$1,019,974	\$794,054	\$(225,920)
Training	\$104,000	\$72,000	\$(32,000)
Uniforms	\$52,105	\$35,955	\$(16,150)
Recruitment	\$6,200	\$1,240	\$(4,960)
Bunker Gear	\$85,000	\$50,000	\$(35,000)
Total Operating Budget Impact	\$2,200,793	\$2,196,763	\$(4,030)

Option 3 provides a practical path forward by realigning total budget dollars to generate annual savings of \$4,030 while still delivering an enhanced level of service. This approach strengthens the municipality's ability to protect community assets, supports the safety and quality of life of Lakeshore residents, and represents a fiscally responsible path forward for the municipality.

Attachments

Appendix A - 14 Minute Full Time Coverage Map

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Lakeshore Fire Service Staffing Consideration.docx
Attachments:	- 14 Minute Response Time Map.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Apr 17, 2026

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

Prepared by Jason Suchiu

Approved by Justin Rousseau