

# **Municipality of Lakeshore - Report to Council**

## **Legislative & Legal Services**

### **Fire Services**



**To:** Mayor & Members of Council

**From:** Don Williamson, Fire Chief

**Date:** January 21, 2021

**Subject:** 2021 Fire Department Radio System Lease Agreement Extension

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### **Recommendation**

Authorize the Mayor and Clerk to execute the Master Digital Radio System Contract Extension-Feb 2021 Lakeshore, as described in the report of the Fire Chief presented at the February 2, 2021 Council meeting; and,

That the necessary by-law be prepared.

### **Background**

The intent of this report is to provide some insight on the fire service radio system 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 another 3 years into February 2024.

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

Following the 1999 amalgamation of several county municipalities into the present group of 7, 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 departments decided to stay with their own systems (Leamington, Kingsville and LaSalle). In 2005 after presenting several regional radio system opportunities and associated costs, County Council consensus could not be reached.

Lakeshore had its own VHF system at the time and could not provide 100% street level

radio coverage across the municipality, firefighter pager activation was inconsistent based on one's location and staff responding from outside the municipality could not hear or communicate because signal coverage was limited to our own geographical area.

It was decided that each municipality would determine their own solution. Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Essex and Amherstburg all agreed to work together. A UHF system through Kelcom infrastructure was approved and provided interoperability between the 4 departments with separate channels to communicate. Kelcom also improved the paging system from the single broadcast tower site located in the Town of Essex and tied it into multiple sites across Essex - Windsor providing regional paging coverage and 100 percent street level radio network coverage.

That new system in 2005 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 4 fire services paid a monthly radio fee under the lease agreement that covered the infrastructure operational costs and included radio maintenance.

In 2013 the system required upgrading to modernize the dated communication network. The following system enhancements were implemented at no additional cost;

- a) Updated the existing analog system to a digital network,
- b) Replaced the existing radios and hardware with new digital equipment,
- c) All radio maintenance and a lifetime equipment warranty were included

In February 2016 the 10 year lease agreement ended and Council approved a 3 year extension that included a 15% rate reduction for the monthly network radio cost.

In February 2019 an additional lease agreement was approved by Council to extend another 2 years into February 2021 with additional rate reductions of 20% on the paging side and 34% on the network radio side.

This now brings us to the February 2021 lease agreement expiry.

## **Comments**

The intent of the short 2 year term (2019 to 2021 with an option to extend) was to provide the 4 participating County fire services, the chance to collectively review other radio system options. Consideration would be based on fire service health and safety requirements, Next Generation 911 technology, advances in radio infrastructure, fire service user needs, provincial radio network possibilities, and indirect discussions with the City of Windsor regarding potential connection into their radio network.

Kelcom has confirmed that our existing radio network infrastructure continues to be supported by Motorola through 2024. Beyond that is what the industry calls "best effort"

support. Our current radio hardware which Lakeshore owns, is supported for 3 more years with “best effort” support in 2024 and 2025. In other words the time on our current Motorola supported system is running out.

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

The fire departments of Kingsville and LaSalle each have their own different radio systems and are dispatched by The LaSalle Police Service.

Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Amherstburg and Essex share a common radio system, Leamington has their own system, and the City of Windsor has their own radio network and these 6 departments are all dispatched by the Windsor Fire Department.

Finding a common radio solution agreeable to everyone is challenging and involves many decision makers. The current 4 fire service system has the capacity and coverage area for the other Essex County municipal fire services to connect. The system would still require modernization as explained above and would provide a common, cost shared county fire services radio network as a potential solution.

Lakeshore is the most disadvantaged in that our geographical size and location present signal coverage challenges not experienced as much by others. That’s why the current Kelcom tower placements across the region provide us the regional paging and network radio coverage for our volunteer firefighting staff that travel around Essex-Windsor and throughout the Lakeshore area.

There are ongoing informal discussions regarding the direction of fire service radio communications but no concrete direction or costing as of yet. It would be in Lakeshore’s interests to partner with other municipalities on a regional cost shared radio approach. Lakeshore’s current radio system costs are based on the 4 fire service user groups. If one or more municipalities move off into other solutions, our costs goes up and the sustainability of that system could be in question.

In 2020 Council approved a 5 year, \$100,000 per year commitment to reserves in preparation for the impending fire radio network/ hardware modernization. It is administration’s intent, to continue discussions with our regional partners and that a solution with or without them will be identified before 2025.

For now, we need to continue status quo and extend our current radio system agreement

for the next 3 years with the included option to extend further if required.

### **Others Consulted**

Tim Schweyer – Service Director Kelcom Radio

Town of Essex Fire Chief Rick Arnel

Town of Amherstburg Fire Chief Bruce Montone

Town of Tecumseh Fire Chief Wade Bondy

### **Financial Impacts**

There are no additional financial impacts from this report. The Municipality would continue to pay for the services as established in the 2019 agreement. The rates are approximately \$46,000 annually for the network portion of the radio system and \$16,000 annually for paging system.

**Attachment(s):** Master Digital Radio System Contract Extension Feb 2021 Lakeshore

### **Report Approval Details**

Document Title:	2021 Fire Department Radio System Lease Extension.docx
Attachments:	- Master Digital Radio System Contract Extension Feb 2021 Lakeshore.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jan 28, 2021

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

Kristen Newman

Rosanna Pellerito

Truper McBride