
**REPORT TO PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2006**

SUBJECT REGIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE PLAN

PURPOSE

To address the urgent need for a Regional Disaster Response Plan for the Capital Region.

BACKGROUND

The Regional Emergency Coordinators Commission (RECC) was established by the CRD Board to share emergency response expertise and information and to plan and initiate interagency coordination to enhance disaster response capability in the Capital Region. The Commission has been effective in developing emergency transportation routes, coordinating snow removal between agencies and supporting the need for a regional hazmat response service, and has been a forum for exchanging emergency response information between a wide range of government related agencies.

Members of the RECC, the public, as well as agencies such as the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce, have questioned the effectiveness of the present emergency response organization during an area-wide disaster. The RECC has been active in its discussion regarding the need for a regional disaster response plan over the last few months and has taken steps to further identify and evaluate concerns with the present model and to initiate a process to bring the matter to the CRD Board leading to the development of a new regional disaster response model for the area.

ALTERNATIVES

1. That a regional disaster response plan be developed utilizing solely resources within the RECC.
2. That \$40,000 be approved to retain a consultant to assist the RECC in developing a regional disaster response plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

1. The RECC has discussed the possibility of its membership, which collectively possesses considerable expertise, donating the necessary time and resources to undertake the drafting of a new regional disaster plan. While some members have indicated willingness to proceed in this manner, others have indicated the lack of time to be a major constraint.
2. The estimated cost to hire a consultant to assist a steering committee of the RECC to develop the Plan is \$40,000. It is expected that the CRD could obtain funding from the Union of BC Municipalities for up to \$20,000 towards the study resulting in a net cost of approximately \$20,000.

COMMUNITY/PUBLIC IMPLICATIONS

The Capital Region's municipalities and electoral areas continue to evolve their individual emergency response plans. A longstanding disaster mutual aid agreement permits a municipality requiring assistance during an emergency to request resources from another. In reflection on the numerous large scale disasters which have occurred during 2005, the RECC has concluded that this method of service

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delivery, while responsive to emergency events within municipal boundaries and possibly between neighbouring municipalities, would be inadequate to respond to an area wide disaster within the CRD. A subcommittee of the RECC has been tasked to explore the need for and the benefits of a regional disaster response plan. The subcommittee has now reported back to the RECC with the following concerns and observations:

- Competition for limited local resources will be intense. Most municipalities will be seeking the same contractors to provide the same equipment and services and the first EOC in operation will move quickly to try to secure those contractors for its own municipality. Available resources may be underutilized or directed to a lower priority incident when a more effective overall response could be realized if the resources were assigned on a priority basis.
- Competition for out of region resources would also be anticipated. Requests for outside assistance will be routed separately from each of the 16 municipal or electoral area EOCs to the Provincial Emergency Program (PEP). By this action the area municipalities will leave PEP with the responsibility to evaluate the priority of each EOC when dispatching resources. A more effective operation would envision municipal prioritization in advance of such requests to PEP.
- Communications issues continue to be identified whenever a major disaster response has been mounted. A regional communications plan, with supporting infrastructure as necessary is the minimum requirement for an effective area-wide response.
- Inconsistent or incomplete messaging to the public and media. Previously developed by the RECC, the update and integration of this media plan is necessary to ensure consistent and accurate information is made available.
- Regional disaster plans are in place in other regional districts, and there may be models which can be adopted or used as a basis for a disaster response plan for the CRD.

INTERMUNICIPAL IMPLICATIONS

While the urgency for the development of a regional disaster response plan is consistently recognized by the RECC, it is also recognized that the task of achieving agreement around the best model to implement the plan may be a difficult one. The importance of retaining an independent consultant to address the many concerns of the member agencies and make a recommendation on the most appropriate and effective model is key.

OTHER

The RECC has agreed with the information presented from the subcommittee. The RECC agrees there is a need for a regional disaster response plan, acknowledges that it should first look at available models which might be appropriate for use in the Capital Region, but cannot commit the necessary time and resources to undertake this initiative in the short term without outside assistance. The RECC, therefore, looks to the CRD to provide financial assistance in developing a regional initiative.

As a result, the commission would recommend that a consultant be retained by the CRD to work with a steering committee of RECC members towards the following general terms of reference:

1. Agreement on the issues to be addressed through a regional disaster response plan.
2. Search out and identify models in use which address the concerns raised.
3. Recommend a model that is most effective for the Capital Region.
4. Once there is agreement on the model, develop the plan integrating all appropriate agencies.
5. Identify a strategy to test the plan. Identify costs to develop and organize an exercise.

6. Identify a methodology to maintain and update the plan on a regular basis.

It is anticipated that the time required to complete the project would be four months.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The many disasters in 2005 have demonstrated the need for the early and organized response to an area-wide disaster by local government authorities, and that such response is expected by the public. The RECC has agreed that the current emergency response model will fall short of those expectations if a similar event in the Capital Region were to occur at this time. The RECC supports a program to, and requests funding from the CRD for, development of a regional disaster response plan.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

That a budget of \$40,000 be approved to assist the RECC in the development of a regional disaster response plan and that CRD seek grants from the Union of BC Municipalities in the amount of \$20,000 towards the project with the balance, estimated at \$20,000, to be funded from the Feasibility Reserve Fund.

John Hill, Chair
Regional Emergency Coordinators Commission

Kelly Daniels, CAO
Concurrence

COMMENTS