

On Monday, November 9, 2020, the North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department planning committee made a presentation to the cottagers of the North Whiteshell area and was facilitated through the Whiteshell Cottagers' Association. This presentation outlined efforts to date, and plans to move forward to establish a fire department in the North Whiteshell area of the Whiteshell Provincial Park. The following questions were submitted by a number of cottagers that attended the presentation and the questions have been grouped by topic to facilitate responses.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

LOCATION

- Q *Ken our last meeting we held in Rennie, we discussed fire house being located in Rennie or Rennie parks yard. Has this been discussed further? Is Rennie included in this plan? Thank you*
- Q *Just to clarify trailer locations, Big Whiteshell, White Lake and Brereton lake, nothing in the Betula or Eleanor areas?*
- Q *Brereton represents 23% of the cottages and no proposed trailer location? Why*
- Q *How dependent and what is foresight regarding the placement of trailers at lodges? What happens if lodge ownership changes and repositioning of trailers in area?*

The initial planned trailer locations are Nutimik, White, and Big Whiteshell Lakes, with the following proposed primary response areas:

- Nutimik Lake Trailer Location – Sylvia Lake, Eleanor Lake, Margaret Lake, Otter Falls, Dorothy Lake, Barrier Bay, Nutimik Lake, Betula Lake
- White Lake Trailer Location – White Lake, Jessica Lake, Red Rock Lake, Brereton Lake
- Big Whiteshell Trailer Location – Big Whiteshell Lake, Green Lake

These proposed locations contemplate a number of factors including cottage and recreation density, timely response to the largest geographic area and suitable storage locations for trailer placement. Initial considerations also factored the ability to provide backup (alternate response) to locations outside the primary coverage area for a response trailer. For example; the White Lake location provides back up for Nutimik and Big Whiteshell areas. The preliminary locations are currently proposed, based on these factors. Locations may be modified to better match volunteer availability or additional impacts such as a future mutual aid agreement being established with Rennie, Rural Municipality of Reynolds.

Lodge owners have been consulted and encouraged to participate both as volunteers and to store equipment as required. In support, several Lodge owners have offered to store and maintain access to the fire department response trailers. We anticipate this enthusiasm to continue, however should any lodge request a trailer reposition, options are available to utilize provincial land or other business locations in the area.

VOLUNTEERS

- Q *what is the average age of the volunteers?*
- Q *how many volunteers are full time residents of the park?*
- Q *Will more volunteers be considered*
- Q *I would hate to see an elderly volunteer get injured trying to save an asset that can be replaced.*

To become a volunteer firefighter, individuals must successfully complete the department training and safety programs, be physically capable of completing the duties, and have suitable availability to respond. Age is not a factor and at this point we have not established personnel records permitting us to report any demographics. In addition, there are different roles to be filled and we will do our best to accommodate anyone who is willing to donate their time to the community. The department will have policies in place to prevent volunteers from needlessly putting themselves at risk. Our most valuable asset is the people that volunteer their time to the community and we intend to do everything we can to protect them.

Twenty four volunteers, seven of whom are permanent residents, are anticipated to be included in the initial NWVFD training recruitment. Additional volunteers have expressed interest in future training classes, and three more individuals volunteered after this week's meeting, bringing the volunteer total to 30 at present. The NWVFD welcomes additional volunteers, who can contact us at northwhiteshellvfdi@gmail.com to be considered for future recruit classes.

FEES

- Q *Is this potential project going to be mandatory involvement by "all" cottage owners if it goes through?*
- Q *Have you considered pro-rating the cottager fee, based on how far from the nearest "station" their cottage is, ie if my cottage is far from the station, I should pay less than someone whose cottage is close and could actually benefit from the service.*
- Q *As you will be requiring all cottage owners to pay the 80.00 per year, should there not be a vote?*
- Q *if you have surplus funds in the future. why not lower the cottage fees?*
- Q *How are you going to ensure everyone pays because you have not allowed for bad debts*
- Q *has the Gov of Mb approved the \$80 per year fee assessment or is that still a proposal?*
- Q *if the cottagers will be asked to support this through a \$80 per year fee, how are the business owners asked to support this?*
- Q *Is this fee for all cottagers or only members of the Whiteshell Cottagers Association?*
- Q *how can the south whiteshell fire department justify spending \$480 k on a fire truck.. now they are raising their annual fees to offset their out of control spending habits.*
- Q *the north whiteshell fd is on the same path. i heard water rescue. more buildings . more trucks. road rescue. it never ends.*

While the Province has fully supported the fire department initiative the proposed service fee of \$80 has not yet been finalized. The fee would be assessed to all properties (cottages, lodges, camps, etc.) in the North Whiteshell by the Province, as a separate amount included on the existing park and lease fee invoice administered by the province. The Province would subsequently transfer this full amount to the fire department. It is important to note this fire department assessment is not subject to Provincial Park fee increases initiated/regulated by the Provincial Government.

While lodges and businesses are initially being assessed the same fees as cottagers, many have indicated a willingness to participate in other forms with the fire department, including resource trailer storage and servicing, and are anticipated to partner in department fundraising efforts.

The North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department committee has been steadfast in the relationship with the Whiteshell Cottage Association and the Province. As stated during the presentation, stakeholder representatives will be included in the annual review process and future expansion of the services provided will be formulated between the parties.

The question regarding South Whiteshell Fire Department has been referred to that Department for their response

BUDGET

- Q *Do you have the sustainable communities grant?*
- Q *the south white shell fd spends over \$200 k per year they are a established entity.. how do think you can have a start up operation on these budget numbers?*
- Q *Whose authority is being used to initiate these annual costs?*
- Q *you have only allotted a one time cost of 60 k to outfit the fire fighter. what about ongoing turnover of the personal? say 5 new volunteers per year?*
- Q *How much has been set aside for maintenance and replacement of equipment?*

The South Whiteshell Fire Department (SWFD) is mature volunteer department delivering a robust service for a number of years. The North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department is similarly proposing a 'volunteer' department that only reimburses members for expenses incurred in approved educational programs or in providing the service. In other words, the NWVFD members will not receive a salary or hourly rate for time served from cottage fees or the annual assessment collected by the Province. Department members will be covered by Workers Compensation for any injuries that occur while participating in department activities. Any change to that model would only be made after further stakeholder consultation.

The North Whiteshell has a similar number of cottages to the South Whiteshell. As noted in the presentation, the South Whiteshell shared their financial reporting which has been used as a basis for operating and administrative budget planning where possible. Items such as capital expenses and operating expenses have been researched directly by the North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department committee. Based on the above approach, we believe the budget is reasonable for the initial period.

The North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department committee has received a grant from the Province of Manitoba – Building Sustainable Communities Program, and is administering the budget accordingly.

Fundraising events will be part of the department's activities. We anticipate those fundraising events combined with frugal purchasing practices such as investing in used equipment will keep the budget cycle in check. We have applied for, and anticipate acceptance from CRA for Charitable organization status, and once approved, we will be able to issue tax receipts for these donations.

COTTAGERS' INSURANCE

- Q *will the trailers or trucks result in reduction in annual cottage insurance premiums?*
- Q *the original proposal indicated a fire department. this would make people believe they would get a reduction in the insurance rates that would off set the annual fee. this is not the case.*

There are numerous factors that influence property insurance costs and as such, the committee recommends the individual owners consult with their insurance providers to determine if an offsetting reduction would be available.

SERVICE LEVELS

- Q *why is there no preventative aspect to this proposal?*
- Q *if you're mandate is to save the neighboring cottage and history has shown that that type of damage has never occurred what is it you are really proposing.*
- Q *Medical emergency first responders? Would or could this be something to consider? Would be interested to learn how many medical emergencies occur in the north whiteshell per year?*
- Q *the north whiteshell has more heart attacks, drownings and car accidents annually than fires. that is a problem that needs addressing.*

There will be assessments and recommendations offered regarding property protection and fire prevention measures as they are a common component of fire department activities. The Office of the Fire Commissioner has been consulted and is committed to making their Manitoba Fire Smart Program available. This is a free program that the fire department would utilize to provide information to residents on how to protect their properties from fire.

The number of structure fires in the park is not well documented, and because seasonal property insurance is generally attached to a primary residence policy the location of the claim is not readily available from the insurance providers contacted. The North Whiteshell Park has grown significantly over the years in terms of property values, number of cottages, outbuildings, and traffic levels. Between cottages, outbuildings, camps, lodges, and churches it is estimated in excess of \$500 million dollars in property value exists that has no fire protection. The Fire Department is positioned to respond to future occurrences as they may occur, and will address more than cottage fires.

One needs only to consult with the South Whiteshell area or any other rural community to appreciate the value of what is brought to a community by a fire department.

Medical First Response and vehicle extrication are future considerations identified by the committee. It is anticipated that some volunteers will be licensed paramedics; all other volunteers will eventually be trained in first aid / CPR. In the interim, an AED (Automatic External Defibrillator) program has been identified to place AEDs in some of the lodges for year round public access. Assuming the support and funding for those programs is in place, the committee anticipates delivering medical first response in the next 5 year plan as the department matures. Additionally, the department would participate in community education and awareness programs regarding AED locations and use to maximize their benefit to the community.

EQUIPMENT

- Q *Existing trailers that you have?*
- Q *can there be water on the trailers as well?*
- Q *i question the \$20 k per trailer is realistic.*

The trailers and equipment have been specified but not put to tender yet. The trailers will not carry water as they will be stored outdoors and would likely exceed the tow limits of available trucks. The department will be using portable pumps that can be easily and quickly be deployed by one or two people to a neighbouring dock, beach, boat launch, etc. to supply the required water to fight a fire.

Preliminary estimates and consultation with manufacturers were factors in proposed budget for the trailers and equipment.

INFORMATION / NEXT STEPS

- Q *it would be great if this presentation can be posted somewhere for later review.*
- Q *Can we get copies of the financial plan slides for a closer look?*
- Q *Where is it possible to review the survey results presented tonight?*
- Q *why has this proposal been allowed to proceed this far before the budget and plan was provided for all stakeholders to see?*
- Q *Is this a done deal? Is this going forward no matter what?*
- Q *Now that we have more info, will another survey be issued to see if there really is support? Based on actual facts and not just ideas like the first survey.*

The presentation has been posted on the Whiteshell Cottage Association website for further review, and the survey will be made available on the website as well.

Beyond the incorporation process, there have been no dollars spent to date. The committee includes broad stakeholder representation, including provincial representatives as part of the initial planning, who along with the South Whiteshell Fire Department have provided significant knowledge to assist in the planning process.

It has taken significant time and effort since the survey was conducted, and the mandate confirmed to plan the implementation of a service delivery model of a true volunteer fire department. This initiative received an overwhelming mandate from cottagers in the original survey, however without the concurrence and support of the Province, the department will not proceed. There is no plan to conduct a subsequent survey at this time.

OTHER

- Q *how many fires resulted in the neighboring cottage being damaged?*
- Q *Why was the restaurant/bar in Westhawk not saved when the fire hall is less than a kilometre away?*
- Q *Good presentation. And your group has done a lot of work. However, I'm still not convinced that a volunteer FD could respond quickly enough to make a difference if we were to experience a fire.*
- Q *Great presentation, wish you luck in your department. Grant Fissette Deputy chief South Whiteshell fire*

The number of structure fires in the park is not well documented, and because seasonal property insurance is generally attached to a primary residence policy the location of the claim is not readily available from the insurance providers contacted.

Concerns about response times are valid with any volunteer fire department. Volunteer fire departments exist across Canada because they are affordable, and without them, almost any fire in a structure results in significant loss of property and all too frequently life.

The question regarding the restaurant fire at Westhawk Lake has been referred to the South Whiteshell Fire Department. The North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department committee appreciates the support and advice provided by the South Whiteshell Fire Department.

Summary and Next Steps

Going forward, the NWVFD will collaborate on a regular basis with all stakeholders including the Province of Manitoba. It is important to note that the Fire Chief, together with the Board of Directors, will be responsible for making all strategic decisions and managing the day to day operations.

As the next step in this process, the North Whiteshell Volunteer Fire Department Inc. will be forwarding the business plan and the power point presentation reviewed at the November 9th meeting, along with the follow up questions and responses from the meeting, to the Whiteshell Cottagers Association and the Province of Manitoba for their review and next steps. Should you have any questions related to the documents noted, please contact the NWVFD committee at northwhiteshellvfd@gmail.com.