

## **REQUEST FOR DECISION REPORT**

**TO: Committee of the Whole**

**FROM: Ryan Thoms, Manager of Emergency Services**

**IN COLLABORATION WITH:**

**SUBJECT: Public Engagement for Electoral Area 'E' Emergency Dispatch**

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### **ACTION/RECOMMENDATION**

THAT the Committee recommend the Board reconfirm direction to staff to undertake a public engagement process over the coming months to provide the public in Electoral Area 'E' with relevant comparative information for the two dispatch system options, Amended Option C (Northern 911) and North Island 911.

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### **PURPOSE/SUMMARY**

To reconfirm the public engagement process toward development of a qRD Board policy decision pertaining to emergency dispatch for Electoral Area 'E'.

### **BACKGROUND**

There is currently no requirement in British Columbia for local governments to provide telephone 9-1-1 services and while there are standards for the operational provision of emergency dispatch services, there is no established standard that must be followed for those who do provide called-in telephone 9-1-1 or any other telephone number used to report emergencies and contact emergency dispatch services in BC.

The qRD has established the Lasqueti Island Volunteer Fire Department and therefore requires a system to effectively dispatch emergency responders. In 2014 staff recommended extending the qRD's Regional 9-1-1 service to Electoral Area 'E' to provide the LIVFD emergency dispatch service. Community opposition to 9-1-1 service resulted in the appointment of the Electoral Area 'E' Emergency Dispatch Advisory Committee, consulting expertise from Chris Kellett & Associates, and the eventual provisional implementation of the current dispatch service by Northern 911 per the system described as Amended Option C. The Board has not yet made a final decision on emergency dispatch system services. Without any provincial requirement the choice

of emergency dispatch system for Lasqueti Island is a matter of policy that can be decided by the Board.

At its meeting on November 25, 2021, the Board reported on its receipt of reports comparing the Lasqueti dispatch system options Amended Option C (Northern 911) and the North Island 911 and directed staff to develop public engagement material to provide the relevant comparative information for public understanding to be delivered in 2022.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Safety Stewardship

## **TYPE OF DECISION**

Directive Decision

## **HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT/RELATIONSHIP**

Emergency services rely on prompt dispatch services. The effectiveness of dispatch services has a direct effect on the safe deployment of qathet Regional District (qRD) fire department resources. Dispatch failures or delays can cause significant stress and result in negative health and safety consequences. The LIVFD currently has 31 members on its roster including firefighters, medical first responders, and response coordinators, whose health and safety may be impacted by the effectiveness of the dispatch system.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPACT/RELATIONSHIP**

The qRD has established the LIVFD and therefore must ensure an effective dispatch system to support the deployment of LIVFD services. The Board may choose to offer a dispatch level of service on Lasqueti Island that is different than the 9-1-1 service established elsewhere in the region though this comes with some risk. The Board should consider this as a core policy decision which may provide immunity from the potential risk of negligence claims. On October 21, 2021, the Supreme Court of Canada released its decision in the *Marchi v. Nelson (City)* case and used the opportunity to clarify the distinction between which decisions made by public bodies should be immune from liability because they are core policy decisions and which decisions should be subject to review by the courts. Core policy decisions are based on public policy considerations, such as economic, social and political factors. They must be rational and not taken in bad faith.

## **LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY, BYLAW OR POLICY IMPACT/RELATIONSHIP**

The Lasqueti Island Fire Protection Service is established by qRD bylaw thereby confirming the qRD as the Authority Having Jurisdiction for the Lasqueti Island

Volunteer Fire Department (LIVFD). There is currently no specific legislation directing levels of called-in emergency reporting or emergency services dispatch systems in British Columbia. qRD Policy 2.9 guides public engagement activities.

## DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Staff propose the following public engagement process:

1. Development of a project page made available in late June on the qRD website under "Current Projects and Initiatives". The project page is intended to provide the public with background information about the emergency dispatch options and information on upcoming engagement opportunities.
2. Public event hosted on Lasqueti Island in late July, 2022 for an opportunity for the public to receive information about the two dispatch options being considered by the Board, ask questions, and provide comments. Exact date and location to be determined.
3. Survey to be made available online and hard copies in the community during the month of August. The survey will describe the two dispatch options and seek input from respondents. The survey results will be collected and publicly received at a future qRD Board meeting.

The intent of the public engagement project page and the community engagement session will be to share relevant information with the public about the two emergency dispatch options. Specific topics will include public emergency calling, house numbering, communications between dispatch and LIVFD, and anticipated costs.

Staff have also investigated the impacts of the arrival of Next Generation 9-1-1 services and determined that as the transition occurs in the coming years to NG9-1-1 to include options such as texting or other digital communications, it appears that Amended Option C, emergency dispatch provided through Northern 911, will be unaffected by these changes and, therefore, the new communications option enhancements will be inoperable. That is because anyone calling in to report an emergency are not dialing or punching in the universal 911 numbers, they are dialing a 10 or 11 digit telephone number that Northern 911 is receiving at their end. With the networking and collaborating currently underway for the transition to the new NG9-1-1, Telus advises that if there is no locally established telephone 9-1-1 service then even after the transition to NG9-1-1, people on Lasqueti who happen to dial or punch in 911 from their phones will get the following:

**“You are calling from an area not served by 911. Please stay on the line and a TELUS operator will assist you.”**

Although Northern 911 are providing the contracted emergency dispatch service, their name itself is misleading and the service they provide through Amended Option C, is confusing as they are technically not actually delivering a telephone 9-1-1 service since on Lasqueti, because again, the contact number is a 10 or 11 digit telephone number;

not 911. Their emergency dispatch service is a no frills service delivered through the reception of a 10 or 11 digit telephone number.

This information should be shared with the public as it may have a bearing on residents' interest in the two dispatch options.

Based in part on the recent successful LIVFD capital planning survey staff are recommending to offer a brief survey for Area 'E' residents to provide input on their interests in emergency dispatch. The survey will be made available through the month of August and must be concluded prior to beginning of the local government election process.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Funding for public engagement has been allocated in the 2022 Lasqueti Fire Protection Service budget.

### **PUBLIC AND/OR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT REQUIRED OR PERFORMED**

The proposed public engagement process is described above.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is no required standard for emergency dispatch systems in British Columbia. The Board may, therefore, determine this as a policy decision. Core policy decisions made by the Board upon weighing community factors may be protected from liability claims. The above described public engagement is intended to support the Board to come to this core policy decision.

**Approved By:**

Ryan Thoms, Manager of Emergency Services  
Al Radke, Chief Administrative Officer

**Status:**

Approved - 09 Jun 2022  
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