

Coombs-Hilliers Volunteer Fire Department – Rescue Truck

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Regional District of Nanaimo Board approve the purchase of a used 4x4 Rescue Truck for up to \$63,000 from the Reserve Fund to replace the existing 2005 Coombs-Hilliers Rescue 103, and that the 2025-2029 Regional District of Nanaimo Financial Plan be amended accordingly.
2. That the Regional District of Nanaimo Board approve the deferral of the replacement of Coombs-Hilliers Rescue 103 from 2028 to 2030 in the 2026-2030 Regional District of Nanaimo Financial Plan.

BACKGROUND

The Coombs-Hilliers Volunteer Fire Department currently operates a Tender, Engine, and Rescue truck out of Station #2, located on the Alberni Highway. The department's current rescue apparatus, Rescue 103, is a 2005 Rosenbauer Spartan Gladiator custom cab wet rescue unit (equipped with a pump and water tank). Acquired used from the United States in late 2021, the vehicle has approximately 123,000 km on it. Over the past year, approximately \$15,000 has been spent on repairs, including pump and fuel system work and a turbo replacement in 2024. In addition to costly repairs, the vehicle's size, weight, and lack of four-wheel drive have increasingly limited its operational effectiveness. Specifically in the Coombs-Hilliers rural areas which commonly has rough gravel roads and narrow foliage-lined driveways with little or no turnarounds for large trucks.

Given these limitations and the rising maintenance costs, the department has explored more efficient and cost-effective alternatives. The North Cedar Fire Department is selling a 2010 Ford F550 7.3L diesel rescue truck with a custom rescue box, for \$45,000. This vehicle is four-wheel drive and significantly smaller, making it better suited for rugged terrain and tight access points. While some minor upfitting and re-decating would be required, it represents a potentially economical solution.

Rescue 103 is currently scheduled for replacement in 2028 under the 2025–2029 RDN Financial Plan, with a projected cost of \$500,000. However, based on current market conditions, a similarly configured replacement to the existing Rescue 103 would far exceed \$1,000,000 in 2028. The purchase of the North Cedar truck and sale of the old Rescue 103 would allow the fire department to delay the replacement of the new truck until at least 2030. The smaller rescue truck from North Cedar, with no pump or storage capacity, would be significantly less money to replace, at an estimated cost of \$600,000 including escalation and applicable taxes by 2030. Because Fire Underwriter Survey (FUS) has no requirements for rescue trucks, these units (provided they are not used for FUS accreditation) have more flexibility based on operational requirements regarding replacement and specifications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Rescue from North Cedar Fire Department is \$48,000 plus the upfitting and re-decating for \$15,000 for a total of \$63,000 which will be funded from the Vehicle and Equipment Reserve which has sufficient funds to accommodate this purchase.

Staff have identified similar trucks to the current Rescue 103 which are for sale around \$40,000-\$60,000, it would be the intention to recover as much as possible for the replacement. All the funds recovered from the sale of the current Rescue 103 would be returned to the Vehicle and Equipment Reserve Fund.

The replacement of Rescue 103 planned for 2028 will be delayed until at least 2030, thus removing that replacement from the 2025-2029 Financial Plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

Fire protection is a service that is supported by staff work and expected by the communities currently receiving it, under the understanding that it will continue as an important part of RDN service as broadly described in the "Our Role" section of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan. Beyond that, the Strategic Plan does not explicitly identify fire protection as a Strategic Focus Area.

REVIEWED BY:

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