



STAFF REPORT TO COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

DATE OF REPORT October 10, 2024
MEETING TYPE & DATE Committee of the Whole of October 30, 2024
FROM: Emergency Management Cowichan
Strategic Services Division
SUBJECT: Regional Emergency Management Service Update and
Confirmation of Mandate
FILE:

PURPOSE/INTRODUCTION

This report updates the Committee of the Whole on Emergency Management Cowichan's continuing development as a regional emergency management service and confirms its mandate.

RECOMMENDED RESOLUTIONS

That the Committee of the Whole recommend to the CVRD Board on October 30, 2024 that:

1. The CVRD renew and update the existing Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Agreement by one year to December 31, 2025 (with options for renewal) with its member municipalities;
2. That the CVRD initiate negotiations with its member municipalities for an updated Schedule to the Cowichan Local Authority Agreement, including the recommendations of the CAO Advisory for a technical advisory function, improved communications coordination, and a stipulation to activate a regional response for all emergencies within the CVRD.
3. That CVRD pause any development towards a stand-alone regional emergency management organization.
4. That the CVRD begin the development of an updated regional emergency management service bylaw that reflects the local government requirements of the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (2023) and provides a template for Member Municipality emergency management bylaw development.

BACKGROUND

In June of 2022, the CVRD Board resolved that the CVRD Emergency Program should embark on modernization towards an increasingly regionalized model:

1. *Option 1 of the Innova Strategy Group (ISG) report dated May 2022 be approved for further development of associated policies and operational details.*

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2. *A report be provided to the Board outlining a recommended transition plan to Option 3 of the Innova Strategy Group (ISG) report dated May 2022 by the end of 2023.*

For reference, the options presented in the Innova Strategy Group report to the CVRD Board were:

1. CVRD DEPARTMENT - Creating a new Emergency Management model that remains a function of the CVRD but with the addition of an advisory body comprised of municipal representatives.
2. STAND ALONE INDEPENDENT MODEL - Creating a new Emergency Management model that is a fully standalone entity that is owned and governed co-equally by the CVRD and the member municipalities.
3. STAND ALONE MODEL ADMINISTRATIVELY SUPPORTED BY THE CVRD - Creating a new Emergency Management model that is arms-length from the CVRD, has its own governance body, but shares administrative functions and administrative support from the CVRD.

Since that resolution, there have been significant changes to both Provincial emergency management legislation and the regional emergency management service. The CVRD Emergency Program has rebranded to Emergency Management Cowichan (EMC) and increased public presence through community events and communications engagement. Several foundational regional emergency management projects have been completed or are nearing completion, including but not limited to:

- Regional Hazard, Risk, and Vulnerability Analysis (HRVA) with a public-facing communication tool
- Regional Evacuation Plans (set to be completed for all areas of the CVRD and Member Municipalities in 2025)
- Flood hazard Regional River Dashboard Project (spring 2025)
- Regional Emergency Support Services (ESS) Plan (finalized version by the end of 2024)
- Regional Emergency Management Training Plan (finalized version by end of 2024)
- Continued leveraging UBCM grant funds to acquire and modernize regional emergency management equipment and tools, including ESS and Regional Emergency Operations Center (REOC) supplies.
- Indigenous engagement directed towards relationship building and reconciliation and to reflect the requirements of the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (RFP released in October 2024)

This report includes a copy of the 2024/25 EMC Work Plan and an updated EMC organizational chart.

ANALYSIS

Emergency Management Cowichan has been guided by the EMC Chief Administrative Officer Advisory Group (EMC CAO Advisory), which meets at least quarterly and as needed to review the development of EMC's capabilities, discuss emerging issues, and provide direction on interpretation of the June 2022 resolution from the CVRD Board. The responsibilities of the EMC CAO Advisory are vested in the Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Agreement, the current version of which is set to expire on December 31, 2024.

The BC Emergency and Disaster Management Act came into force in October of 2023, but regulations have yet to be developed or released in two key areas:

- Local Authority Regulation
- Multi-jurisdictional Emergency Management Organization Regulation

Given the significant increase in local authority responsibilities in the new Act, and based on significant discussion in the last year, the EMC CAO Advisory is in unanimous agreement that exploration of a stand-alone regional emergency management organization should be paused and be considered by the CVRD board and member municipalities after the legislative framework for local authorities is clarified through regulation. The EMC CAO Advisory has recommended that EMC continue focusing on building operational readiness and regional capacity. This recommendation is reflected in the 2024/25 EMC Work Plan (attached), which focuses substantially on increased training (including exercises) for and with CVRD/Member Municipality staff, external partners and volunteers, revision and update of the Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Plan (last updated in 2019), increased collaboration with external partners including Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGBs), and continued development of community- and hazard-specific emergency response plans based on the regional HRVA.

The Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Agreement currently supports the regional emergency management service, which is set to expire on December 31, 2024. Discussions with the EMC CAO Advisory have led to the recommendation that the existing Agreement be extended, with negotiations to commence as soon as directed to update the Schedule of the Agreement as follows:

- *Specific collaboration measures between the CVRD and Member Municipalities for public communications about emergency management, including during emergency response operations*
- *An update to the regional response model to clarify that all emergencies requiring the activation of an emergency operations center for response coordination will be considered regional emergencies, regardless of whether the impacts of the emergency are constrained to one municipality or the CVRD Electoral Areas. Response will be coordinated centrally at a Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC). It will draw on staff from Member Municipalities and the CVRD, providing the opportunity for regional resilience by exposing staff from all Agreement partners to real-world response operations.*
- *The introduction of a technical working group with representation from Member Municipalities to ensure CAOs receive technical emergency management information from those of their staff best placed to interpret the implications of regional emergency management measures and strategies on each Member Municipality's operations.*

The proposed update to the regional response model does not represent a net increase to regional emergency management service workload. Instead, it realigns EMC staff time and resources during emergencies to simplify response while reducing operational impact on all Agreement partners.

The EMC CAO Advisory has recommended that the Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Agreement be renewed for one year (with further renewal options) and that EMC's strategic direction be assessed against forthcoming provincial regulations before the next renewal date of January 1, 2026.

As a consequence of the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (2023) coming into force, all regional districts and municipalities in BC are assessing the validity of their emergency management bylaws. The CVRD's Bylaw 1909, which establishes a regional emergency management service, requires an update to reflect local authority responsibilities under the new Act and ensure that continued development of the regional emergency management service is supported by local legislation that accurately reflects the responsibilities, obligations, and work areas agreed by the Board and Member Municipality Councils. EMC intends to begin this work in 2025 to update the CVRD Bylaw and provide a Bylaw template for CVRD Member Municipalities to use at their discretion.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS

N/A

STRATEGIC/BUSINESS PLAN CONSIDERATIONS

Strategic Objective 3.3 - Fully implement Emergency Management Cowichan as a regional service to enhance emergency planning and preparedness as required and in alignment with the modernized Emergency Management legislation and regulations

Referred to (upon completion):

- ☐ Community Services (*Cowichan Community Centre, Cowichan Lake Recreation, South Cowichan Recreation, Arts & Culture, Facilities & Transit*)
- ☐ Corporate Services (*Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legislative Services*)
- ☐ Operations (*Utilities, Parks & Trails, Recycling & Waste Management*)
- ☐ Land Use Services (*Community Planning, Strategic Initiatives, Development Services, Building Inspection & Bylaw Enforcement*)
- ☐ Strategic Services (*Communications & Engagement, Economic Development, Emergency Management, Environmental Services*)

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Reviewed for form and content and approved for submission to the Committee:

Resolution:

☒ Corporate Officer

Financial Considerations:

☒ Chief Financial Officer

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – EMC 2024/25 Work Plan

Attachment B – EMC Update Slide Presentation

Attachment C – Cowichan Local Authority Emergency Management Agreement 2022 - 2024