

Subject: Ottawa Fire Services 2023 Annual Report

File Number: ACS2024-EPS-OFS-0004

**Report to Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services Committee on 17
June 2024**

and Council 26 June 2024

Submitted on June 6, 2024 by Paul Hutt, Fire Chief, Ottawa Fire Services

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Ward: Citywide

Objet : Rapport annuel 2023 du Service des incendies d'Ottawa

Numéro de dossier : ACS2024-EPS-OFS-0004

**Rapport présenté au Comité des services de protection et de préparation aux
situations d'urgence**

Rapport soumis le 17 juin 2024

et au Conseil le 26 juin 2024

Soumis le 2024-06-06 par Paul Hutt, chef du Service des incendies d'Ottawa

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REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Emergency Preparedness and Protective Services Committee recommend that Council receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des services de protection et de préparation aux situations d'urgence recommande au Conseil de prendre connaissance de ce rapport.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a summary of Ottawa Fire Services' activities during 2023, including information about fire protection services, prevention initiatives, performance metrics, ongoing projects, programs, and noteworthy highlights from 2023. The report will also highlight how Ottawa Fire Services will align the service's mission, vision, and values to provide fire programs and services while prioritizing the well-being of staff. The Ottawa Fire Services 2023 Annual Report also provides information on programs in place to mitigate increased demand for service and allow the service to continue meeting the emergency response standards to residents as the city grows. The report aligns with the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priority "A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all".

Assumption and Analysis

Ottawa Fire Services is responsible for public fire safety education, application of fire safety standards and enforcement, and emergency response for fire suppression, medical emergency calls, rescue operations and other special operations.

In 2023, the Ottawa Fire Services handled 106,667 communications centre calls and made 85,910 apparatus responses. Unfortunately, there were also 7 fire and incident-related fatalities during this time. Despite these challenges, Ottawa Fire Services maintains a steadfast commitment to continuous fire safety and prevention, making it a top priority.

The year 2023 saw Ottawa Fire Services responding to a higher number of incidents compared to previous years, with a total of 33,114 incidents addressed. This marks a notable 16 per cent increase from the incidents handled in 2022. Several factors contributed to this increase, including population growth, urban intensification, advancements in construction techniques, and the ongoing demand for medical response services. These trends highlight the evolving needs and challenges faced by fire services in serving the community.

Throughout 2023, Ottawa Fire Services consistently responded to a growing number of complex and severe incidents, especially those related to extreme weather. These events encompassed a range of challenges, starting with the February Orleans

explosion, followed by the April ice storm that caused widespread power outages. In July, the Barrhaven Tornado added to the demands, along with the August rainstorm, flooding, and subsequent power outages. The Findlay Creek tornado further compounded these challenges. The October General Hospital fire and resulting power outage presented yet another significant test for Fire Services staff.

In 2023 staff demonstrated their ability to adapt to a rapidly changing situation by adjusting roles and responsibilities and operational procedures to protect the nation's capital with honour.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications to receiving this report for information.

Public Consultation/Input

No public consultation or input was undertaken by Ottawa Fire Services in the development of the Ottawa Fire Services 2023 Annual Report.

Ottawa Fire Services has a robust public education program in place to educate and inform residents.

RÉSUMÉ

Version française - send Executive Summary for translation through Broca

BACKGROUND

Ottawa Fire Services takes a proactive approach to protecting the community and recognizes the importance of implementing the three lines of defence in accordance with the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*:

1. Public Fire Safety Education
2. Fire Safety Standards and Enforcement
3. Emergency Response

Description of Ottawa Fire Services

Ottawa Fire Services is the largest composite fire service (combination of career and volunteer resources) in Canada and provides an effective modern emergency service to

the community. Ottawa Fire Services responds from 45 stations strategically located across the city to serve Ottawa's large geographic area.

Ottawa Fire Services 1,500 staff includes firefighters as well as inspection, education, safety, communications, and administrative personnel. Ottawa Fire Services operates from five divisions and the Office of the Fire Chief.

Training and Safety

The Training Division delivers in-house training to personnel across all divisions within Ottawa Fire Services. As a provincially recognized training provider under the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal's Academic Standards and Evaluations branch, the Training Division offers courses and accreditation for relevant National Fire Prevention Association standards using in-house instructors. In 2023, the Training Division expanded its service offerings to provide training and certification to response partners within the City of Ottawa and Eastern Ontario.

The Safety Division is responsible for fostering a culture of safety, learning, and service excellence within Ottawa Fire Services. It conducts research, develops up-to-date training, and ensures the safety of staff during emergency scenes. The Safety Division also manages critical assets, including personal protective equipment, and oversees air management training (self-contained breathing apparatus respirator use).

Urban and Special Operations

The Urban Operations division is responsible for fire suppression, fire rescue, tiered medical response, and incident management services in urban areas.

Special Operations is responsible for wildland fires, auto extrication, technical rescues (water/ ice, trench, collapse, confined space, high angle), urban search and rescue, and hazardous materials (HAZMAT) and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive response.

Rural Operations

Rural Operations is responsible for fire suppression, fire rescue, tiered medical response, water and ice rescue, auto extrication, wildland fires, and incident management services, mostly in rural areas.

Community Standards and Communication

Community Standards and Communications is responsible for engaging and educating the public on fire safety. Safety programs, inspections, investigations, and code

enforcement are carried out by Fire Prevention. This division also houses the Ottawa Fire Services Communications Centre which provides bilingual dispatch services to the City of Ottawa as well as surrounding areas.

Operational Support Services

Operational Support Services provides support to core operations, programs and activities including shift scheduling, performance analysis, purchasing and contract administration, management of all facilities, uniforms, Geographic Information Systems, and Fire Data Management support.

Service Delivery Model

The Ottawa Fire Services service delivery model is a comprehensive framework designed to ensure effective and efficient emergency response, community engagement, and organizational sustainability. At the core of this model are several key pillars that guide Ottawa Fire Service's operations and initiatives.

Operations within Ottawa Fire Services are structured to respond effectively to various emergency situations, including fires, medical emergencies, hazardous materials incidents, and rescues. Highly trained firefighters and specialized teams are equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and protocols to handle diverse challenges while prioritizing public safety and property preservation.

Community standards and communications engage with the community through educational outreach, fire prevention programs, and public awareness campaigns to promote safety measures and reduce the incidence of emergencies. Clear and timely communication channels ensure that residents are informed about safety protocols, emergency preparedness, and services, fostering a collaborative relationship between Ottawa Fire Services and the community.

Training and safety provide continuous training programs, drills, and exercises ensure that Ottawa Fire Services personnel maintain high levels of proficiency and readiness to respond to emergencies effectively. Safety protocols and procedures are rigorously enforced to protect both firefighters and the public during emergency operations.

Capital assets management is integral to Ottawa Fire Service's ability to maintain and deploy essential firefighting equipment, vehicles, and infrastructure. Regular inspections, maintenance schedules, and strategic investments in modern firefighting technology ensure that firefighters remain well-equipped to handle evolving challenges

and operational needs.

Operational support and administration functions provide the necessary logistical, administrative, and strategic support to Ottawa Fire Services operations. These include resource allocation, budget management, policy development, and interagency coordination to streamline operations and enhance overall efficiency.

By integrating these pillars into its service delivery model, Ottawa Fire Services ensures a cohesive and effective approach to emergency response, community engagement, personnel training, asset management, and organizational support, ultimately contributing to public safety and well-being in the Ottawa community.

Mission, vision, and values

Ottawa Fire Services is guided by a mission, vision, and values that define its commitment to the safety and well-being of the residents and visitors of Ottawa. The guiding principles ensure the highest standards of service delivery, professionalism, and community engagement.

Mission: Ottawa Fire Services protects the lives, property, and environment for the residents of and visitors to the City of Ottawa.

Vision: To progressively advance our emergency responses, training, education, prevention and safety standards to meet the ever-evolving needs of our community. To be a caring, healthy, and diverse workplace that is committed to change. To be a service that leads with new technology, techniques and equipment. To be professional, accountable, customer-centric and safety oriented.

Values: Ottawa Fire Services values are standing together, working together, serving together, as reflected by teamwork, honour, integrity, commitment, and pride.

Call volume, incident volume and apparatus response volume

Ottawa Fire Services takes pride in ensuring residents are receiving the best possible emergency response. The service regularly reviews and analyzes recorded data to ensure continuous service delivery to the community. Along with total response time performance at the 90th percentile, the primary measures that determine service demand and associated resource requirements are total number of calls received, total number of incidents, and total number of apparatus responses.

Ottawa Fire Services tracks every request for service using the dispatch system, this is referred to as call volume. Emergency incident response data is categorized based on

the information received by the communications division at the time of the initial call. Total call volume is the number of calls received directly by the Ottawa Fire Services Communications Centre or down streamed by the primary 9-1-1 Centre (Ottawa Police). Multiple calls may be received for the same incident.

Incident volume is the recorded total of emergency incidents that require response. An emergency incident is any situation to which the service responds to deliver emergency services including rescue, fire suppression, emergency medical care, or special operations. Some incidents may turn out to be false alarms or situations where assistance is not required.

Apparatus response volume is the total number of apparatuses dispatched to all incidents. The number of apparatuses dispatched to each incident is based on the effective response force. Apparatuses may include pumps, ladders or other vehicles or motorized equipment.

This report and Document 1 detail the results for 2023 for call volume, incident volume and apparatus response volume, as well as trends for the last 5 years.

Accredited fire service status

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services began the process to be a reaccredited agency with the Commission on Fire Accreditation International as part of a key initiative within one of the four main pillars of the Ottawa Fire Services 2023 Strategic Plan, Dedication to Continuous Improvement. Over the past four years, Ottawa Fire Services gathered information on operations, special operations, training, inspections, investigations, communications, asset management and administration to complete the two main components of the accreditation process, the Self-Assessment Manual and a Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover. These documents provided a comprehensive look at each division and its deployment strategy to ensure it is operating efficiently and effectively. These documents were examined by peer evaluators comprised of leaders from fire services across North America.

The Self-Assessment Manual is a comprehensive and transparent account of all areas of the fire service. The report is broken down into 11 categories each of which contains performance indicators that compare Ottawa Fire Services to industry best practices and standards. The categories of the Self-Assessment Manual are:

1. Governance and Administration
2. Assessment and Planning

3. Goals and Objectives
4. Financial Resources
5. Community Risk Reduction Programs
6. Physical Resources
7. Human Resources
8. Training and Competency
9. Essential Resources
10. External Systems Relationships
11. Health and Safety

The Self-Assessment Manual evaluates fire services on over 250 performance indicators, of which more than 80 are core competencies that Ottawa Fire Services must immediately comply with to receive accreditation. The performance indicators are spread over the 11 categories to assess all aspects of the service. Each performance indicator also has a plan to ensure Ottawa Fire Services obtains compliance. These plans were established by Ottawa Fire Services and validated by the peer assessors. The Self-Assessment Manual is a guiding document used for work-plans and strategic planning and provides a model for continuous improvement.

The Community Risk Assessment/Standards of Cover serves as Ottawa Fire Services integrated risk management plan. It is a comprehensive deployment analysis that defines the written procedures, which determine the distribution and concentration of fixed and mobile Ottawa Fire Services assets. The document will assist Ottawa Fire Services in ensuring a safe and effective emergency response force for fire suppression, rescue, emergency medical response, and specialty response situations that are recognized by industry best practices and to establish response times that are held to industry standards.

Leading organizations in the fire service industry, including the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office and the National Fire Protection Association have adopted a risk-based deployment model that is based on the response time of an effective emergency response force (number of firefighters) to specific risks in each community (population density and building type) based on the arrival of the first crew on scene. Through the completion of the Standards of Cover, Ottawa Fire Services was able to modify its

deployment strategy to align with industry best practice and has adopted a risk-based deployment model based on an effective response force and response times that are recognized internationally. These standards were then applied across the city and will be used to develop a new Station Location Study, which will be brought forward to Committee and Council later in this Term.

Ottawa Fire Services accreditation status is re-assessed every five years. Ottawa Fire Services is required to submit an annual compliance report that provides a status update to the requirements of accreditation. To assist in maintaining compliance, Ottawa Fire Services has established a comprehensive performance measurement framework that includes all critical performance benchmarks.

These performance measurements result in improved reporting on operational performance from a statistical accuracy perspective and has established a quarterly reporting cycle that will include all key indicators. The accreditation process will ensure Ottawa Fire Services continues to provide quality services to the City of Ottawa and will play a vital role for developing a new strategic plan.

Municipal fire services are mandated by the Fire Protection and Prevention Act to provide a level of service that is in accordance with local needs and circumstances. Ottawa Fire Services performance standards, known as standards of cover, set out the level of response to each type of call, including how fast and how many resources should respond. The past standards of cover were developed as part of the Commission on Fire Accreditation International accreditation process and approved by City Council in 2015 ([ACS2015-COS-EPS-0021](#)).

The updated Community Risk Assessment and Standards of Cover are based on risks and analysis of growth, demand for service and incident occurrence trends, as well as industry best practice. Ottawa Fire Services measures both first on scene total response time performance and effective response force total response time performance at the 90th percentile.

First on scene refers to the first apparatus to arrive at the scene of an emergency. Effective response force refers the minimum number of firefighters and equipment that must reach a specific emergency incident location within a maximum prescribed time. The Standards of Cover prescribes the effective response force for each incident response type.

The Community Risk Assessment/Standards of Cover report (Document 2) detail Ottawa Fire Services total response time performance for fire, medical, rescue, and

HAZMAT emergencies.

Impact of construction materials and climate change

The impact of changes in materials used in manufacturing and construction, and environmental conditions on firefighting has significantly altered the operational landscape for Ottawa Fire Services, prompting a swift and adaptive response to emerging challenges.

One notable effect is the evolution of modern building design, construction practices, and materials, including the increased use of synthetic materials and plastics containing hydrocarbons. These factors have led to hotter fires and the production of dense, black, highly toxic smoke, compressing the timeframes within which fire crews must arrive on scene and effectively combat fires.

Global increases in wildfire activity have also heightened awareness of wildfire causes, consequences, and risk mitigation strategies. Human encroachment into greenspaces has contributed to a rise in wildfires sparked by human activities, adding to the challenges faced by firefighting agencies like Ottawa Fire Services. Furthermore, climate change has intensified the frequency and severity of various emergencies such as power outages, flooding, tornadoes, severe winds, and ice storms. These events necessitate increased resource deployment, strategic planning, and coordinated response efforts by Ottawa Fire Services to safeguard the community.

Despite these complex challenges, Ottawa Fire Services remains proactive in evaluating and planning for climate change impacts on firefighting operations. This includes strategic considerations for future levels of service, investments in new training methodologies, upgrades to vehicles and equipment, and the adoption of innovative technologies. By embracing these changes and leveraging proactive measures, Ottawa Fire Services reaffirms its commitment to ensuring the safety, resilience, and well-being of the community while maintaining operational excellence in the face of evolving environmental challenges.

DISCUSSION

Ottawa Fire Services is continuously working to meet and exceed industry standards, ensuring the safety and well-being of the community it serves. The composite model employing both career and volunteer firefighters translates to a collaborative and community-focused approach. The challenges posed by the unique geography of Ottawa demonstrate the service's adaptability and commitment to overcoming obstacles and delivering effective service. Ottawa Fire Services has established performance

indicators based on a review of international standards, industry best practice, current capabilities, and available resources. Internal targets for improved performance have been set for each type of emergency service provided by the agency.

The objectives and accomplishments described in this report demonstrate continued commitment to the safety of property, residents, and visitors to the city of Ottawa.

Performance

Analysis of recorded data for 2023 indicates a notable increase in the number of calls, incidents, and apparatus responses. However, despite this surge in activity, response time standards were successfully met across all categories in 2023.

Call volume

Call volumes, to the Ottawa Fire Services Communications Centre, have grown over the past year. In 2023 the number of calls jumped to 106,667 from 99,596 in the previous year. Table 7 in Document 1 shows the Ottawa Fire Services Communications Centre's call volume for the past five years. The 2023 call volume is a 15 per cent increase over the previous 4-year average.

This call volume increase is being reported across emergency services. For Ottawa Fire Services there was a 24 per cent increase in medical under the tiered response agreement. A tiered response refers to the process of a coordinated response of the three emergency services to various types of medical emergency.

False alarm calls, in 2023, once again have increased over the previous year. In 2023 false fire alarm calls increased 14 per cent. The increase is significantly related to the lack of maintenance on fire alarm systems in buildings where they are required under the Ontario Fire Code and when testing is not previously reported to fire dispatch.

Efficient call volume management enables Ottawa Fire Services to provide effective fire protection and timely emergency responses by reducing the total time from the moment a call for service is received to the moment staff arrive on scene.

Incident volume

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services recorded 85,910 vehicle responses to 33,114 incidents which represents a difference of 16 per cent in incidents and 15 per cent in apparatus responses from 2022. This increase can be related to population growth, development and extreme weather events.

As the population of an area increases, so does the likelihood of fire incidents. More

people mean more homes, businesses, and infrastructure that are susceptible to fires and emergencies. In addition, ongoing development and expansion, there is an increase in the number of buildings, residential areas, and commercial establishments. This growth has led to more fire and emergency incidents due to factors such as construction-related hazards, electrical faults, or human error. Finally, extreme weather events and climate change has led to more frequent and severe weather events such as storms, floods, and wildfires. These events result in a higher number of emergencies, including structural fires, wildland brush and grass fires, and incidents related to storm damage.

Document 1, Table 1 shows the volume of incidents from 2019 through to 2023 that Ottawa Fire Services responded to, and Table 2 shows the number of apparatus responses for the same time. There are several factors that may affect response times from year to year, including construction zones, weather conditions, time of day, traffic patterns and traffic intensification and station cover off as resources are directed to an ongoing incident.

Table 2 in Document 1 shows the complete information about call volume for each incident type between 2019 and 2023.

Apparatus response volume

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services recorded 85,910 apparatus responses which represents an increase of 15 per cent from 2022.

Table 3 in Document 1 shows the number of apparatus responses from 2019 to 2023.

Response Time Standards

In 2023 Ottawa Fire Service met its response time standards in all available categories.

Tables 3 and 4 in Document 1 show the first on scene total response time performance at the 90th percentile for each type of incident between 2019 and 2023.

Tables 5 and 6 in Document 1 show the effective response force total response time performance at the 90th percentile for each type of incident between 2019 and 2023.

As Ottawa continues to grow and develop, the demand for emergency services increases. New residential and commercial areas require adequate coverage by fire stations. Ensuring that fire stations are strategically located to serve expanding neighborhoods is essential. The total number of calls received significantly impacts response times. As Ottawa's population grows, so does the volume of incidents. Increased urbanization and more complex infrastructure contribute to a higher workload

for Ottawa Fire Services.

Construction projects and road closures affect travel routes. Detours and blocked roads can delay fire trucks en route to incidents. Ottawa Fire Services must adapt to changing traffic patterns due to ongoing construction. Response times can vary based on the time of day. During rush hours, traffic congestion may delay fire trucks. Nighttime responses may encounter different challenges related to visibility and staffing levels.

Extreme weather events, such as heavy snowfall, ice storms, or flooding, impact response times. Slippery roads, reduced visibility, and hazardous conditions require additional caution during emergency responses. In addition, urban traffic congestion affects travel times. Ottawa's growing population and increased urban density contribute to more congested roads. Efficient routing and real-time traffic updates are crucial for timely responses.

When resources are directed to an ongoing incident (such as a large fire or major accident), nearby fire stations may experience temporary cover-off. This means that other stations must handle additional calls, potentially affecting response times in those areas. Ottawa Fire Services operates from 45 strategically located fire stations. The geographic spread influences response times. Stations closer to incident locations can arrive faster, while those farther away face longer travel times.

Ottawa Fire Services faces a dynamic landscape of incidents, population growth, and evolving challenges. By considering these factors and implementing strategic measures, they strive to provide timely and effective emergency response services to the community as the city continues to grow and develop.

Fire Prevention and Education

In 2023, Fire Prevention received 1,079 requests for fire safety information. During this period, the Public Education team participated in 487 educational events. In 2023, the Fire Prevention team returned to the more effective door-to-door campaign for the "Wake Up: Get a Working Smoke Alarm" program, although virtual options are still offered. Through the program, residents were encouraged to test their smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms, replace the batteries and check the expiry dates on the alarms. These in-person and door-to-door fire education efforts reached over 13,830 homes, emphasizing the importance of working smoke alarms.

The "After the Fire" program was refreshed to provide timely fire safety information to residents shortly after significant fires in their local communities. Fire prevention officers

visited affected homes, discussed the significance of working alarms, and encouraged residents to practice home escape planning. The total number of visits for this program in 2023 was 500.

Furthermore, in 2023, Enbridge Gas generously donated over 1,000 smoke alarms with carbon monoxide detection to Ottawa Fire Services. Staff members have been installing these dual alarms in homes where smoke alarms are needed. These alarms were delivered to homes identified by the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, during Ottawa Fire Service inspections, and through the annual door-to-door Wake Up! program to ensure that the alarms reach those most in need. Enbridge Gas also partnered with Ottawa Fire Services to promote carbon monoxide safety in commercials that ran during the month of December in 2023.

Fire Code Inspections and Enforcement

Ottawa Fire Services Inspectors are responsible for ensuring that buildings within the city comply with the Ontario Fire Code. Inspections cover various aspects, including licensing requirements for businesses including garages, public halls, restaurants, liquor licenses, fire-safety plans, fire routes, and vulnerable occupancies. Inspections may be initiated based on complaints, requests, or firefighter-identified issues. Proactive inspections also address retrofit requirements.

When violations of the Ontario Fire Code are found, inspectors work with property owners to establish appropriate timeframes for compliance. If requirements are not met within the specified period, enforcement actions are taken. In 2023, fire prevention officers completed over 3,000 inspections. These included mandatory annual inspections of vulnerable occupancies to ensure that seniors and people with disabilities are living in buildings that are safe and free of Fire Code violations. Ottawa Fire Services conducts inspections for over 200 vulnerable occupancies annually.

Fire Investigations

After any fire causing damage or loss exceeding \$50,000 or resulting in injury or death, an Ottawa Fire Services fire investigator conducts on-site investigations. Investigators meticulously collect, analyze, and report detailed data related to the fire incident. Their focus includes determining the source(s) of ignition, understanding fire growth and development, and identifying the sequence of events leading to the ignition of combustible materials. The cause of each fire is reported to the Ontario Fire Marshal's office. Ottawa Fire Services investigated 279 fires in 2023.

Key Responses

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services continued to respond to complex and severe incidents.

February Orleans explosion (February 15, 2023)

In February, Ottawa Fire Services faced a major incident, an explosion in the Orleans area. Responding to such emergencies requires swift action and coordination. The explosion likely resulted in structural damage, injuries, and potential fires. Firefighters worked tirelessly to contain the situation, provide medical assistance, and secure the affected area.

April ice storm (April 8 to 10, 2023)

The April ice storm brought challenging conditions. Ice accumulation on power lines and trees led to widespread power outages. Ottawa Fire Services played a crucial role in ensuring public safety during this natural disaster. They assisted with evacuations, addressed downed power lines, and managed flooding caused by melting ice and snow.

Barrhaven tornado (July 13, 2023)

Tornadoes are rare but devastating events. In July, a tornado struck the Barrhaven neighborhood, causing destruction to homes, infrastructure, and landscapes. Ottawa Fire Services responded promptly to rescue trapped individuals, secure hazardous areas, and prevent further damage. Coordinating efforts with other emergency services was essential during this crisis.

Findlay Creek tornado (August 3, 2023)

Another tornado struck the Findlay Creek area, posing significant challenges. Ottawa Fire Services mobilized resources to assess damage, clear debris, and provide aid to affected residents. Tornadoes often create chaotic scenes, requiring efficient communication and strategic deployment of personnel and equipment.

August rainstorm (August 27 to 29, 2023)

Heavy rainstorms can lead to flash floods and power disruptions. In August, Ottawa experienced intense rainfall, resulting in localized flooding. Firefighters assisted residents in flooded areas, evacuated vulnerable populations, and ensured safety near electrical hazards. Their quick response helped mitigate property damage and protect lives.

October General Hospital fire and power outage (October 27, 2023)

Fires in healthcare facilities demand immediate attention. In October, a fire broke out at a general hospital, jeopardizing patient safety and critical infrastructure. Ottawa Fire

Services swiftly contained the fire, evacuated patients, and ensured continuity of care. The associated power outage added complexity to the situation, emphasizing the need for preparedness and adaptability.

Increasing Size and Frequency of Protests in Ottawa (Throughout 2023)

Protests and demonstrations have become more frequent and larger in scale. Ottawa Fire Services faced the challenge of managing safety during these events. The Ottawa Fire Services Fire Support Unit played a vital role in crowd control, ensuring public safety, and collaborating with law enforcement. Balancing emergency response duties with protest management requires specialized training and coordination.

Ottawa Fire Services demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and professionalism in responding to these diverse incidents. Their commitment to safeguarding the community remains unwavering, even in the face of these highly complex emergencies.

Equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives

Ottawa Fire Services is committed to supporting equity, diversity, and inclusion within the workplace and across Ottawa's many communities and neighbourhoods. Ottawa Fire Service has several programs aimed at ensuring the needs of diverse groups or individuals are considered.

Recruitment and hiring strategy

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services introduced a new recruitment and hiring strategy focused on attracting a greater number of qualified individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers within the service. This strategic initiative aims to bolster the diversity of the Ottawa Fire Services workforce, reflecting the varied demographics of the city it serves. Ottawa Fire Services is actively monitoring the effectiveness of this strategy to ensure the recruitment and selection of strong candidates that embody the diversity and inclusivity values upheld by the organization.

Part of the application process offers candidates the opportunity to complete the City's "Count Me In!" questionnaire. The "Count Me In!" questionnaire is part of the City's, and Ottawa Fire Services, efforts to gather demographic data and feedback to better understand and address equity, diversity, and inclusion matters from applicants. The questionnaire includes questions related to demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability status, and other relevant identifiers. The data helps Ottawa Fire Services assess the inclusivity and identify areas for improvement.

Throughout 2023, Ottawa Fire Services successfully hired 53 recruit candidates

annually for career firefighter positions, filling crucial vacancies within the service. Additionally, the Rural Operations Division welcomed 59 new rural volunteer firefighters, strengthening firefighting capabilities in rural areas. Notably, the recruitment efforts in 2023 resulted in 19 per cent of new career recruits being women and 17 per cent identifying as representing diversity groups, marking a positive step towards gender diversity within the firefighting profession. Women accounted for 14 per cent of the new rural firefighter recruits during the same period, showcasing efforts to engage and welcome diverse talent into firefighting roles.

Ottawa Fire Services remains committed to actively engaging women and individuals from diverse populations who are considering applying for firefighter positions. The organization recognizes that increasing racial and gender diversity within its ranks not only enriches the service but also enhances its ability to address the diverse needs of Ottawa residents effectively. By fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment, Ottawa Fire Services aims to attract and retain top talent from all backgrounds, ensuring a strong and representative firefighting force dedicated to serving the community with excellence.

Camp FFIT

Ottawa Fire Services Camp FFIT is a pioneering initiative that has transformed the landscape of firefighting by empowering young women to pursue careers in this traditionally male-dominated field. In 2010, Camp FFIT held its inaugural camp, marking the beginning of a groundbreaking journey to empower and inspire young women in firefighting roles. This historic event not only laid the foundation for Camp FFIT but also played a pivotal role in the establishment of Fire Service Women Ontario, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing gender equity in firefighting professions.

The creation of Camp FFIT led to significant recognition within the firefighting community and beyond. It became the first young women's fire camp in Canada, setting a historic precedent for inclusivity and empowerment in a male-dominated industry. Camp FFIT's commitment to equity and diversity was further acknowledged through nominations for the City's Equity and Diversity Award, highlighting its role as a beacon of positive change.

Over the past 15 years, Camp FFIT has continued to empower and inspire future leaders in firefighting. With 320 campers having participated in the program and 24 young women ready to join each summer, Camp FFIT's impact on the next generation of firefighting leaders is undeniable. Notably, the camp's commitment to inclusivity is reflected in its decision to remove the initial participation fee, ensuring that financial

barriers do not hinder aspiring young women from accessing this transformative experience.

Camp FFIT's enduring legacy as an agent of change and empowerment is exemplified by the recognition received, including being presented with the Mayor's Agent of Change Coin. Camp FFIT symbolizes the Ottawa Fire Services dedication to empowering young women, breaking barriers, and fostering diversity and inclusion in firefighting and emergency services.

Ottawa Fire Services Fire Venturers Program

The Ottawa Fire Services Venturers Program is a collaborative initiative between Ottawa Fire Services and Scouts Canada. Designed for youth aged 14 to 18, this program provides a unique opportunity for participants to gain insights into the day-to-day experiences of firefighters and develop valuable firefighting skills.

The Venturers Program allows young people to immerse themselves in the world of firefighting. Through hands-on activities, workshops, and interactions with Ottawa Fire Services staff, participants gain practical knowledge about firefighting techniques, equipment, and emergency response protocols.

Beyond technical skills, the program offers a valuable perspective on the challenges and rewards of a firefighter's role. Participants learn about teamwork, leadership, and community service, essential qualities for anyone interested in working in fire services.

The program was launched in 2019 with an initial cohort of 12 participants. These young Venturers met approximately twice a month to learn from experienced firefighters and engage in practical exercises.

Recognizing the ever-changing needs of diverse youth, Ottawa Fire Services adapted the program over time. This adaptability ensures that the Venturers Program remains relevant and inclusive. In 2023, the program took significant steps to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Ottawa Fire Services actively reached out to a broader range of youth, ensuring that the program was accessible to individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and communities. The program aimed to increase the diversity of participants. By welcoming young people of different genders, ethnicities, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, the Venturers Program reflects the rich tapestry of Ottawa's population.

Ottawa Fire Services provided cultural competency training to staff involved in the program. This training helps them understand and appreciate the unique perspectives

and needs of diverse youth. The program incorporated activities that celebrate diversity, promote understanding, and foster a sense of belonging. Participants learned about cultural traditions, languages, and customs, creating an inclusive environment.

Beyond the immediate experiences, the Venturers Program emphasizes educational opportunities. Participants explore pathways to careers in fire services, including post-secondary education, certifications, and specialized training. Ottawa Fire Services encourages Venturers to consider firefighting as a profession and provides guidance on the educational steps required to pursue this rewarding career.

Ottawa Fire Services Venturers Program not only imparts firefighting skills but also nurtures a sense of community, resilience, and inclusivity. By embracing diversity and adapting to changing needs, the program inspires the next generation of firefighters while fostering a stronger, more compassionate community.

Ambassador Program promoting diversity and inclusion

The Ottawa Fire Services Ambassador Program is a dynamic initiative that actively engages staff members to create influential change in their communities. Here are the key aspects of this program:

In 2023, the Ambassador Program continued to provide a unique opportunity for Ottawa Fire Services staff. Ambassadors use their personal stories and experiences to challenge perceptions and break down stereotypes associated with firefighting. By sharing their journeys, challenges, and triumphs, these ambassadors aim to inspire others and showcase firefighting as a desirable career path and a rewarding place to work.

Ottawa Fire Services Ambassadors offer presentations to various community groups, associations, and informal gatherings. Their goal is to engage with diverse audiences and provide insights into the fire service profession.

These presentations cover topics such as firefighting skills, career pathways, and the positive impact firefighters have on their communities. Ambassadors actively address misconceptions and encourage individuals from all backgrounds to consider firefighting as a viable career choice.

Building relationships and creating new outreach opportunities are integral to Ottawa Fire Services' recruitment strategy. Ambassadors focus on connecting with underrepresented community groups and youth. By actively engaging with these communities, the program aims to foster interest, dispel myths, and encourage diverse

individuals to explore firefighting as a potential career.

As part of their comprehensive strategy, Ottawa Fire Services established the Ambassador Working Group. Launched in 2021, this group plays a pivotal role in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within the fire service. Working group members collaborate with the Emergency and Protective Services Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. Their responsibilities include fostering an accepting workplace culture across all divisions of Ottawa Fire Services.

Over the past year, the working group has been actively involved in community engagement. Ambassadors visited schools to engage with students, share their experiences, and inspire the next generation of firefighters. Ambassadors also participated in school board job fairs, providing information about firefighting careers and addressing questions from interested students.

The program delivers presentations to local organizations, emphasizing the importance of diversity in fire services. The working group also became members of a national equity, diversity, and inclusion group, contributing to broader discussions and initiatives.

The Ottawa Fire Services Ambassador Program actively promotes diversity, challenges stereotypes, and fosters an inclusive environment. By sharing their stories and engaging with various communities, these ambassadors play a vital role in shaping the future of firefighting in Ottawa.

Strategic Planning

In 2023 Ottawa Fire Services has refreshed the strategic priorities which demonstrate the commitment to continuously improving emergency services for residents, performing effective risk planning and proactive fire protection and prevention:

1. Dedication to continuous improvement
2. Working with our community
3. Supporting our people
4. Critical investments

These four priorities will help Ottawa Fire Services address upcoming opportunities and challenges and ensure that the projects and programs contribute to the ability to deliver Council approved services to residents.

Dedication to continuous improvement initiatives

Some of the key goals under this priority include meeting provincial requirements for firefighter training and certification with a sustainable delivery model. Through this process Ottawa Fire Services will provide certifications for all fire suppression personnel. This includes exterior and interior fire attack, officer training, emergency communications and dispatching as well as the full suite of specialty services provided for hazardous materials, rope rescue, structural collapse, surface water, swift water and ice rescue.

Ottawa Fire Services is also preparing for and starting the reaccreditation process with an international fire accreditation agency. This is a key part of improving the performance in key service areas and making continuous improvement.

Working with our community initiatives

Some of the key goals under this priority include extending partnerships and relationships with community housing groups to provide fire and life safety education with an emphasis on ensuring all residents have working smoke alarms on every story and outside all sleeping areas, a working carbon monoxide alarm, and emphasizing the importance of creating a home fire-escape plan.

Ottawa Fire Services believes in reflecting the community we serve. The entire community benefits when people are included. As the community becomes more and more diverse Ottawa Fire Services continues to increase engagement and strengthen the trust with 2SLGBTQ+ community. Ottawa Fire Services are planning and delivering programs and services to continue to foster these relationships and create more opportunities to connect with other underrepresented community groups.

Supporting our people initiatives

A key goal under this priority is identifying and implementing effective and relevant mental health programs. Although firefighters have been trained to engage in extreme conditions, current training does not comprehensively address or provide resources for the post-response mental health needs. Firefighters are regularly exposed, and often first on scene, to critical incidents and traumatic events that place them at increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD), critical incident stress or other mental illnesses. First responders experience PTSD and critical incident stress at a much higher rate than the rest of the population. This leads to increased work absences, burnout, illness, and high turnover rates. Ottawa Fire Services aims to prevent and reduce mental health issues while addressing intrinsic barriers to seeking help such as lack of understanding or stigma.

Critical investment initiatives

Some of the key goals under this priority include an updated station location study, investments for stations 45 and 81, upgrades to the station alerting and paging system, and a new training centre.

New Fire Station 45

The new fire station on March Road officially opened on March 11, 2024. The new station represents a significant enhancement to the community's emergency response capabilities in Kanata North and South March. Fire Station 45 has been strategically established to improve the first on scene response time and turnout time for an effective response force in the area. The facility is equipped with state-of-the-art resources and staffed by dedicated firefighters, urban and rural, who are ready to serve and protect the community.

The need to relocate and staff the new Station 45 in response to urban density development in Kanata North was initially identified to council in the 2015 fire service station location study. Construction plans were integrated into the community development process, with funding and lands secured accordingly.

The acquisition of a new pump apparatus to accommodate the suppression staff was completed in 2023, aligning with the initial occupancy timeline. The addition of two firefighters per platoon is designed to meet the vehicle response requirements for urban density risk and enhance the Emergency Response Force assembly in this growing community.

Fire Station 81

Designs for the renovations to Station 81 in Stittsville are being developed which will allow for the staffing of the Pump with four career firefighters. Staff have begun planning for the expansion of Station 81 at 1631 Stittsville Main Street which will then become a composite station, adding a career response of 4 personnel to the existing volunteer complement. The capital cost of this project will be funded through development charges and tax.

Station alerting and paging

The station alerting and paging project aims to enhance station call-out and paging abilities through the implementation of new technology. The station alerting system is used to notify urban fire stations of an emergency call and the paging system is the primary method used to notify Volunteer Firefighters of calls.

In 2023 Ottawa Fire Services worked with Bell to conduct system acceptance testing and enhance the configuration and coverage area of the paging system. The implementation is planned for early 2024. The station alerting system replacement scope of work has been separated into a standalone project and will continue to progress in 2024.

Training centre project

The Ottawa Fire Service has been pursuing options for a new comprehensive training and research centre. The current training centre was built in 1977, to meet the needs of the former City of Ottawa Fire Service. Given the growth of the city since amalgamation, nearby construction, and the condemning of the burn building, the facility has reached its capacity for effective training delivery. Ottawa's population is expected to increase to 1.4 million people by 2046, a significant increase of 40 per cent since 2018, as summarized in the table below. This growth will put pressure on existing assets and services requires new or expanded assets to meet growing needs.

Community partners have been identified to ensure the new facility can be utilized by a broad range of end user groups. The process has moved to securing a financially viable construction, commissioning, use and maintenance structure. A public-private partnership venture is one option given the current surplus in commercial lands within the City of Ottawa.

In the interim Ottawa Fire Services has undertaken several initiatives to support ongoing training and development including modifying training to reduce smoke and noise, along with the development of a temporary Barnsdale Site on 18 acres of land owned by Solid Waste Services. Additionally, training props has been limited to modular systems capable of being relocated to other sites in the future. These include a Drager propane roll over and car fire simulators along with a modular structural firefighting live fire unit.

Ottawa Fire Services continues to work with interdepartmental partners in Finance, Planning, and Development to prepare preliminary estimates of the cost of developing a new training centre to support fire and its emergency services partners. The estimate includes forecasts of growth needs required to serve the city's growing population, enhancement needs based on accessibility requirements, and input from subject matter experts, requirements for special operations training, and to meet updated fire training standards.

A look ahead

Dedicated mental health professional

In 2023, Ottawa Fire Services took a step towards prioritizing the mental well-being of its personnel by hiring a temporary full-time mental health professional. This dedicated position was established to provide essential psychological support aimed at enhancing employee wellness and mitigating occupational stress injuries within the workforce. The decision to allocate resources towards mental health reflects Ottawa Fire Services' proactive approach to addressing the challenges faced by emergency responders in high-stress environments.

The introduction of this temporary role comes in response to the steady increase in Workplace Safety and Insurance Board claims and sick leave usage among Ottawa Fire Services personnel. By offering specialized support services, Ottawa Fire Services aims to foster a healthier work environment and promote overall well-being among its dedicated team members. The focus on mental health aligns with Ottawa Fire Services' commitment to supporting its personnel not just in their operational roles but also in their personal health and resilience.

Ottawa Fire Services has conducted a review of the feasibility of establishing a permanent full-time equivalent mental health care and psychological support position. This proposed position is strategically designed to meet the ongoing mental health needs of Ottawa Fire Services personnel, ensuring continuous access to crucial support services.

By embedding dedicated mental health resources within the organization, Ottawa Fire Services aims to reinforce its commitment to employee well-being, resilience, and the overall effectiveness of its operations in serving the Ottawa community.

Peer Support Program and mental health training

Ottawa Fire Services is committed to the physical and mental health of all staff and as such continues to support the Mental Health Peer Support Program. Trained volunteers from within each division provide their colleagues with confidential, emotional and social support in a safe, non-judgmental. There were approximately 300 requests for assistance each year. Additionally, ongoing training opportunities are provided to all staff to raise awareness and encourage them to reach out for support when required. Ottawa Fire Services also continued to support its mental health peer support team by implementing the Road to Mental Readiness training for staff. This program offers

resilience and mental health training from qualified trainers, clinicians and operators to meet the needs of staff and their families.

Updated station location study in 2025

Urban expansion has continued notably in Kanata West, Orleans, Barrhaven, and Finlay Creek, alongside growth in rural communities primarily with single-family residences and small-scale agricultural enterprises. A significant development area in the Southeast of Ottawa is currently in the planning stages and has the potential to house up to 45,000 residents. This growth will be a key element in the 2025 Station Location Study.

In 2008 Ottawa Fire Services completed its first Station Location study ([ACS2008-CPS-OFS-0001](#)) and in 2015 a second study was approved by Council ([ACS2015-COS-EPS-0021](#)). Since then, there has been significant growth in the City of Ottawa, including a 7.6 per cent population increase. Ottawa Fire Services will be presenting a new Station Location Study in 2025, outlining recommendations for necessary investments in facilities, fleet, and staffing to address growth and development pressures, urban boundary expansion, and population projections from the new Official Plan.

Conclusion

Ottawa Fire Services will continue to focus on the service delivery model, emphasizing fire prevention, code enforcement, and education outreach initiatives. These efforts aim to reduce fire incidents and ensure that residents and property owners adhere to safety measures for their well-being. Ottawa Fire Services recognizes the importance of recruitment and hiring practices that prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion, reflecting the diverse community it serves.

In addition to these core principles, Ottawa Fire Services ensures transparency and alignment with organizational goals by communicating performance evaluations and assessments of key responses that help Ottawa Fire Services fine-tune the strategic initiatives and focus on continuous improvement and adaptability to evolving challenges in emergency response scenarios.

One area of significant investment for Ottawa Fire Services is mental health initiatives, through the addition of a full-time dedicated resource to provide psychological supports to improve employee wellness and reduce occupational stress injuries. This investment will equip Ottawa Fire Services staff with crucial skills and resources to foster resilience and promote overall well-being. By prioritizing mental health, Ottawa Fire Services ensures its personnel are prepared to handle the demands of their roles effectively.

Ottawa Fire Services maintains its dedication to delivering effective and efficient emergency services to Ottawa residents. By emphasizing fire prevention, embracing diversity in recruitment, Ottawa Fire Services remains a dynamic and innovative force within Canada's firefighting community, continually striving for excellence in service delivery and community safety.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments in receiving the information in this report.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)

There are no comments associated by Ward Councillors associated with this report as this is a city-wide item.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

Ottawa Fire Services serves the needs of the diverse and growing community and follows the City's accessibility legislative framework. This includes adherence to the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005) and the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, 191/11, meeting the City of Ottawa's Accessibility Policy, and following the City's Accessibility Design Standards to the greatest extent possible.

INDIGENOUS, GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS

Ottawa Fire Services is committed to the Corporate Diversity and Inclusion Plan. Recognizing that vulnerable populations are disproportionately impacted by emergencies, Ottawa Fire Services incorporates an equity, diversity and inclusion lens into its emergency response and outreach and education work.

Gender and equity programs delivered by Ottawa Fire Services are described in this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The services provided by the Ottawa Fire Service align with the 2023-2026 Term of Council Priority of "A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all".

DISPOSITION

Ottawa Fire Services will action any direction received as part of consideration of this report.

Document 1

2023 Ottawa Fire Services Annual Report Data

Document 2

Ottawa Fire Services Community Risk Assessment/Standards of Cover Report