Agenda - Executive Policy Committee - March 12, 2003

REPORTS

Item No. 7 Implementation of Two Additional Ambulances
File GF-3 (Vol. 25)

COUNCIL DECISION:

On July 17, 2002, Council adopted Clause 4 of the Report of the Executive Policy Committee dated July 17, 2002, which recommended:

I. That two additional 24-hour equivalent ambulances be put into service immediately.

II. That the Fire Paramedic Service's permanent establishment be increased by twenty-four (24) paramedics to staff these units.

III. That the additional ambulances and associated resources be funded from the anticipated 2002 photo technology revenues.

IV. That the balance of funding for this initiative in 2003 and beyond be referred to the 2003 Budget Process.

V. That the Chief Administrative Officer be delegated responsibility to negotiate a new "Emergency Medical Response and Inter-facility Transfer Services Agreement", on the basis of user pay 50 percent, the City 25 percent and the Province 25 percent

VI. That the Chief Administrative Officer proceed with the amalgamation of fire and paramedic services and the final amalgamation plan be submitted to Council for approval.

VII. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing, including the execution of any documents related thereto.

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Implementation of Two Additional Ambulances

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4. The Executive Policy Committee has been advised that rising emergency medical call volumes necessitate the addition of ambulance resources. There have been several occasions where no ambulances are available to be dispatched, and these occurrences have been increasing.

Manitoba Health's commitment to fund the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) portion of operational costs alleviates the need for immediate negotiations with the WRHA for additional funds. Negotiations can be aimed towards obtaining funding for the years 2004 and beyond to keep this additional ambulance in service.

Over the past few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of emergency medical calls received by the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service (WFPS). There have been several occasions where no ambulances were available to be dispatched, and these occurrences have been increasing.

The increases in call volume are due to a number of factors, including the increase in number and age of Winnipeg's population, increased utilization of the service and reorganizations within the WRHA.

Over the past few years, there has been a steady increase in the number of Emergency Medical Service calls received by the WFPS, resulting in increasing occasions where units are simultaneously committed to calls and unavailable for another call. This currently occurs at least once per twelve-hour shift, and on some night shifts, this situation has lasted for several hours.

Two additional twenty-four-hour equivalent ambulances would enable the Service to decrease the strain on its resources and reduce or eliminate the times when no resources are available for dispatch. This would also relieve some of the additional stress on the paramedics who must cope with the ever-increasing call volumes on a twenty-four-hour basis. However, implementation of two additional ambulances would require the hiring of twenty-four more paramedics.

The WFPS currently has thirteen twenty-four-hour equivalent ambulances. The addition of two more twenty-four-hour equivalent ambulances will bring this number to fifteen twenty-four-hour equivalent ambulances, which is still less than the sixteen twenty-four-hour equivalent ambulances recommended in the TriData report. Currently, ambulance resources are already over-burdened, and when faced with steadily increasing call volumes, are insufficient. The workloads currently experienced in the WFPS are contributing to increased response times, decreased unit availability, and undue amounts of stress placed upon the paramedics.

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Ambulance service is funded through a cost-sharing agreement with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. The service is currently funded approximately 50 percent by ambulance fees, 25 percent by the City of Winnipeg and 25 percent by the WRHA.

Manitoba Health will fund the WRHA portion of their operational costs for a period of two years. The City of Winnipeg is responsible for its share of operational costs for the remainder of 2002 ($134,220.00) and for every year thereafter. Additional operational funding must be obtained from the WRHA for general expense increases in addition to the funding of these ambulance units, regardless.

In return for Manitoba Health's commitment to fund the operation of these additional ambulances, WFPS will allow the Province's rural paramedics a chance to ride on high-volume ambulances to obtain skills and preceptorship to complete their training program. The WFPS considers this a win-win situation, the Province's training needs are fulfilled, and the WFPS gets much-needed additional ambulance resources. The preceptorship requirement does not place a burden on the WFPS, because it results in an additional paramedic riding on some ambulances.

In 2000, the City of Winnipeg entered into a three-year agreement with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority for the provision of ambulance services. While the agreement has not yet expired, the expansion of the scope of services, growth and demand for services, and the new funding commitment from the Province, necessitates a review of the current agreement to incorporate these new realities. One of the principles of a new agreement with the Province and WRHA is that the City will proceed with the amalgamation of fire and ambulance services. It is therefore also recommended that the Chief Administrative Officer be delegated responsibility to negotiate a new agreement on behalf of the City.

The Executive Policy Committee recommends:

VII. That two additional 24-hour equivalent ambulances be put into service immediately.

VIII. That the Fire Paramedic Service's permanent establishment be increased by twenty-four (24) paramedics to staff these units.

IX. That the additional ambulances and associated resources be funded from the anticipated 2002 photo technology revenues.

X. That the balance of funding for this initiative in 2003 and beyond be referred to the 2003 Budget Process.

XI. That the Chief Administrative Officer be delegated responsibility to negotiate a new "Emergency Medical Response and Inter-facility Transfer Services Agreement", on the basis of user pay 50 percent, the City 25 percent and the Province 25 percent

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XII. That the Chief Administrative Officer proceed with the amalgamation of fire and paramedic services and the final amalgamation plan be submitted to Council for approval.

XIII. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing, including the execution of any documents related thereto.

ADOPTED BY COUNCIL -
July 17, 2002