



# INFORMATION REPORT

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>TO:</b>                | Chair and Members<br>Emergency & Community Services Committee                                |
| <b>COMMITTEE DATE:</b>    | January 23, 2017   |
| <b>SUBJECT/REPORT NO:</b> | Consideration of User Fees for Rope Rescue Calls<br>(CES17002) (City Wide)                   |
| <b>WARD(S) AFFECTED:</b>  | City Wide  |
| <b>PREPARED BY:</b>       | Frank Biancucci, Assistant Deputy Chief (Retired)<br>David Cunliffe, Fire Chief 905-546-3343 |
| <b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>      | Joe-Anne Priel<br>General Manager<br>Community & Emergency Services Department               |
| <b>SIGNATURE:</b>         |  |

**Council Direction:**

Not Applicable

**Information:**

The HFD is responsible for providing a wide range of emergency services to the community including High Angle Rope Rescue (HARR) commonly referred to as rope rescue utilizing a recognized standard of training and equipment to ensure both the safety of staff and the injured persons. The Hamilton Fire Department (HFD) undertook a review of rope rescue occurrences over an eight (8) year period to understand the response frequency over the subject period and consideration of a specific User Fee applicable for rope rescues. The review was in part prompted by community sentiment on the frequency of rope rescues, including the concern that the services of the HFD were being unnecessarily diverted to address rope rescues at the City's various natural vistas at the expense of the HFD's ability to respond to other real time emergencies including fires.

With respect to the HFD's operational responsibilities, the Establishing and Regulating By-law applicable to the HFD (Bylaw 68-34, as amended) identifies the various services to be provided, including rescues, and, as such, the resources and applicable costs required to perform the rescues are included in the Department's operating budget. While rope rescues require significant levels of resources based on their complexity, these responses do not limit the department's ability to simultaneously respond to other multiple emergency calls.

---

*OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.*

*OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.*

*OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.*

**SUBJECT: Consideration of User Fees for Rope Rescue Calls (CES17002) (City Wide) - Page 2 of 4**

---

Part of the review was the consideration of implementing a specific Rope Rescue User Fee with the costs or portion of the costs incurred by the HFD during rope rescues to be paid by the person(s) rescued during a rescue operation. The consideration of such a fee would be deemed to act as a deterrent for persons using the various City of Hamilton waterfalls/vistas.

The review identified significant concerns that the implementation of a User Fee would have a negative impact on the person(s) requiring urgent emergency rescue due to a catastrophic fall or injury. The overwhelming concern is that such a fee may prompt the person(s) injured or person(s) with the injured party to avoid a potential User Fee by taking matters into their own hands and avoiding calling 911 for help causing them to further jeopardize their safety and risk greater injury. Additionally, persons not injured, may initiate assistance in lieu of calling for help (911) and further jeopardize their own safety and further impact the magnitude of the rescue operation.

Since 2009 to current 2016 (November), the HFD responded to a total of 104 rope rescue calls at various locations throughout the City of Hamilton.

| <b>Year</b>  | <b># Rope Rescue Calls</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| <b>2009</b>  | 4                          |
| <b>2010</b>  | 7                          |
| <b>2011</b>  | 8                          |
| <b>2012</b>  | 12                         |
| <b>2013</b>  | 15                         |
| <b>2014</b>  | 18                         |
| <b>2015</b>  | 15                         |
| <b>2016</b>  | 25                         |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>104</b>                 |

Of the total number of rope rescues undertaken during this time period close to 50% (51) occurred at five of the better known water attractions in the City of Hamilton: Tews Falls 11; Websters Falls 10; Albion Falls 17; Devils Punch Bowl 10; and, Felkers Falls 3. The remaining 53 rope rescue calls occurred at various other locations throughout the City of Hamilton, including escarpment locations like the Mountain Brow, Kenilworth Stairs and the Garth Stairs, etc.

Consultation was undertaken with the Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) and the City of Hamilton relative to the number of users of the nature areas and trail systems and potential public safety strategies that might be undertaken in lieu of a specific user fee. Based on the known attendance for Tews Falls/Websters Falls for 2015 – 120,000 visitors – three rope rescues were performed at these combined locations which represents a relatively small percentage of incidents in comparison to the widespread

---

*OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.*

*OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.*

*OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.*

**SUBJECT: Consideration of User Fees for Rope Rescue Calls (CES17002) (City Wide) - Page 3 of 4**

---

use of these attractions. During the three incidents, a total of six (6) people were rescued – five (5) were residents and one (1) was a non-resident.

A review of the rope rescue incidences determined that although there has been an increase of rope rescues since 2009, with the most intensive years being from 2013 to current year, this increase is consistent to some extent with information provided by the HCA on known visitor attendance for Tews Falls/Websters Falls for the target year 2015.

The review also looked at the comparator of residents to non-residents relative to the persons who were rescued over the subject period. The findings indicate that the proportion of residents rescued was greater than non-residents for all review years. In 2014, the number of non-residents rescued was 36% (14) compared to 64% (25) residents; in 2015, 23% (7) non-residents were rescued compared to 77% (24) residents; for 2016 to date 27% (12) non-residents have been rescued compared to 73% (33) residents.

| <b>Year</b>  | <b># Rope Rescue Calls</b> | <b># of Residents Rescued</b> | <b># of Non-residents Rescued</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>2009</b>  | 4                          | 6                             | 4                                 |
| <b>2010</b>  | 7                          | 11                            | 3                                 |
| <b>2011</b>  | 8                          | 8                             | 1                                 |
| <b>2012</b>  | 12                         | 13                            | 2                                 |
| <b>2013</b>  | 15                         | 18                            | 3                                 |
| <b>2014</b>  | 18                         | 25                            | 14                                |
| <b>2015</b>  | 15                         | 24                            | 7                                 |
| <b>2016</b>  | 23                         | 36                            | 12                                |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>102</b>                 | <b>138</b>                    | <b>46</b>                         |

It is felt that applying a user fee for non-residents may not provide the expected level of deterrent given that non-resident rescues make up only 25% of the total user group being rescued.

Consultation was undertaken with the following fire departments in close proximity to the City of Hamilton who performed rope rescues, to determine if they currently have a user fee specific to rope rescues or were considering implementing a fee:

Niagara Falls Fire Department (NFFD)  
St. Catharines Fire and Emergency Services (SCFES)  
Centre Wellington Fire & Rescue (CWF&R) – Elora Gorge

These departments identified the same challenges experienced by the HFD in that rope rescues require significant staffing and resources to ensure that both the safety of the patient and the staff conducting the rescue are not compromised.

Of the departments contacted neither the NFFD or SCFES currently have a user fee in place, although they did note that there has been discussion by the department to consider a user fee for rope rescues. Centre Wellington Fire & Rescue does not have a user fee in place for rope rescues in areas under the control of Centre Wellington. They are, however, compensated \$900 by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) for rescues on property under the control of the GRCA.

One of the issues that all of the departments noted was that part of the difficulty in establishing a process for a fee is the ability to recover costs from a victim of the accident.

To summarize, the following needs to be taken into consideration if a user fee for rope rescue is being contemplated:

- the department is structured and resourced to operationally perform rope rescues while meeting its other emergency responsibilities
- the implementation of a rope rescue user fee may deter people from calling for help, potentially endangering themselves and others
- residents of the City pay for the service as part of their residential taxes
- based on the findings, applying a user fee to non-residents may not have a significant impact on the reduction of the number of rope rescues
- the difficulty in establishing a process to recover costs from an individual who is the victim of the accident

The HFD is committed to working collaboratively with all agencies having control over the various natural resources, waterfalls and cascades within the City of Hamilton to help educate the visiting public with practical safety tips to ensure a safe and enjoyable outing.