



# REQUEST FOR DECISION (RFD)

Date: January 23, 2024  
To: Mayor Milligan and Members of Council  
From: Michael Boronowski, Chief Administrative Officer  
Subject: Fernie Fire Hall Site Selection

## RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council select Site 2, being 1500 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, also known as a portion of Prentice Park, as the future location for the replacement Fire Hall and direct staff to advance the next phases of pre-planning.

## PURPOSE

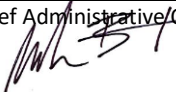

This report provides an update on the Fire Hall Site Selection report from November 28, 2023. It responds to Council questions from that meeting, addresses the suggested potential partnership with Interior Health, and recommends a site be selected to advance preplanning as per the scope of work. The November 28 report to Council, Technical Report, and Consultation Report have been attached for reference, as have a number of supporting documents for additional context.

## BACKGROUND

Following a number of assessments as previously reported to Council, Fernie's old, temporary fire hall at 692 – 3 avenue was decommissioned in 2022, with the understanding that a new fire hall needed to be built. The Fernie Fire and Emergency Services Department (FFESD) was relocated to the City of Fernie Operations Facility, and has been operating from this temporary location since that time.

This situation has provided a significantly safer operating environment but is temporary in nature due to code requirements for emergency facilities, and has adversely affected the efficiency of service delivery and response times which may impact the Community's FUS rating, and thus insurance.

Working with the consulting firm, Arcadis Architects (Canada) Inc. (Arcadis), staff executed an extensive planning study, including stakeholder and public engagement. This study included a review of FFESD operating requirements, a determination of the fundamental criteria for

Reviewed by:			
Chief Administrative Officer 	Director of Corporate Administration Services	Director of Finance 	Other:

selecting a suitable site to build an efficient fire hall within the intended timeline, and a set of requirements to analyze those sites that met the fundamental criteria.

All City-owned land was considered through the process. Additionally, a formal request for expressions of interest (REOI) to identify potential site partners and co-uses was issued, and direct outreach was undertaken to develop awareness of the EOI. While this provided a number of potential co-users and co-uses that could complement a functional fire hall, the two potential sites that were put forward did not meet the fundamental criteria identified through the initial planning work.

This process led to the identification of two suitable City-owned sites for further analysis:

Site 1: 902 2nd Avenue

Site 2: 1500 5th Avenue

### **November 2023 Presentation**

At the November 28, 2023 presentation to Council the project team and consultants presented the technical report and Request For Decision report attached. At that time, Council requested that staff engage Interior Health as a potential co-development partner, as information had come forward that Interior Health lands where the Elk Valley Hospital is located could potentially accommodate a project. Staff and the Mayor engaged with a number of Interior Health representatives who confirmed that any sort of project they might engage in would significantly delay the advancement of this project.

### **Community Involvement**

The project has, to-date, involved significant community engagement through online communications and engagement at [letstalk.fernle.ca](http://letstalk.fernle.ca), through an Open House, and through a Community Working Group that has over the past months been engaged with the consultant and staff to undertake a review of technical information and provide recommendations to the Project Team. Staff also worked with Arcadis to directly engage potential co-users and site stakeholders to develop an understanding of concerns and opportunities.

### **November 2023 Recommendation**

Through the work described above and as presented on November 28, 2023, Site 2 (1500 5th Avenue – a portion of Prentice Park) emerged as the recommended option due in large part to the site flexibility and potential for incorporating additional community programs and services on the site.

The report recommended Site 2 for its technical merits, enhanced response coverage, and potential to expand to accommodate future community growth and associated expansion in fire and emergency services. The report also considered the recommendations from FFESD, internal business units, the Community Working Group and public feedback collected through in-person and online engagement.

# DISCUSSION AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Developing on a Smaller Site

Following the November 2023 presentation, there have been a number of inquiries about the potential to build the new fire hall on a site under 1.5 acres.

The need for site size of 1.5 acres has been confirmed due to the program requirements for the site, based on:

- FFESD requirements
- Regulatory guidelines and industry standards
- Consultant experience from recent past projects

The FFESD requirements include space for maneuvering large fire apparatus, parking for a full crew of 10 Career and 30 paid on call firefighters requiring parking to support a full response, some on-site training space, and site servicing and amenities that are mandatory such as waste collection. Finally, anticipating a 50+ year lifespan, future growth and expansion should be accounted for.

MAJOR FFESD PROGRAM COMPONENTS	EST. REQUIRED AREA (ACRES)	EST. REQUIRED AREA (M <sup>2</sup> )	EST. REQUIRED AREA (FT <sup>2</sup> )	NOTES
Fire Hall Building	0.35	1,440	15,500	• Includes admin, living quarters, apparatus bays, and other fire operations areas.
On-Site Parking / Vehicular Maneuverability / Unhindered Access	0.70	2,834	30,500	• Includes 30 private stalls, 10 public stalls, drive aisles, and turning radius areas for apparatus vehicles. • Available on-site parking for all staff is essential to meeting the level of service of the FFESD. • Separated access between public and private traffic.
Site Service / Bylaw Zoning Requirements/ Outdoor Amenity	0.25	1,003	10,800	• Includes site service areas (generator, electrical transformer, waste & recycling, etc.) and accompanying landscaping, and anticipated zoning setback requirements are <u>mandatory requirements</u> that need to meet bylaws.
Accommodation For 15% Future Growth	0.20	801	8,625	• As this is anticipated to be a 50+ year service building, provisions for a level of future growth needs to be provided for anticipated density growth within existing City of Fernie service area.
<b>TOTAL AREA:</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>6,078</b>	<b>66,125</b>	

Figure 1. FFESD Program Area Breakdown

### **Further Review of an Alternative Site**

The vacant lot adjacent to the 7-11 and Red Apple has been raised as a potential location for further consideration at both the Council Town Hall and at the Community Working Group table.

While a portion of this site was proposed through the formal REOI process in August 2023, the site did not meet the fundamental criteria and was excluded at that time from further consideration.

Due to the continued inquiries related to this site, and discussions at the Community Working Group, additional review was undertaken to explore any potential for reconsideration of a smaller site.

Specific to the vacant highway lot::

Only the north end of site 1102 Highway #3, commonly known as The Red Apple site, was formally proposed through the EOI process by the property owner.

The site area proposed is 0.87 acres and as such, does not meet the minimum size requirement of 1.5 acres determined as the required size through the technical exercise previously described.

Direct access to Highway 3 would require reconfiguring intersections or Highway Access, and Provincial Approval for such, which is not guaranteed.

Existing power lines flank the site along 6 Avenue and 12 Street which may require relocation at increased cost.

The lot-size requires a tight turning radius for apparatus, requiring careful maneuvering when responding to calls.

The parking area is insufficient to accommodate the required career and paid-on-call fire fighters for full responses.

Further Community Working Group discussion about the potential viability of developing a site under 1.5 acres raised specific comparisons to fire halls in Canmore, Alberta and Missoula, Montana. Both these communities have fire halls located on compact lots near or on busy thoroughfares. Further review of these examples reinforced why sufficient space (min. 1.5 acres) is a fundamental requirement for Fernie's future fire hall.

### ***Canmore, AB***

The Project Team's review of the Canmore comparison confirmed their site was deemed inadequate in their 2016 And 2017 assessment and planning projects. Canmore has recently completed a new eight-bay fire hall on a site over 2.5 acres in size. Further, they have decided to decommission their urban firehall and convert it to office and meeting space as it does not support their operational requirements.

Recognizing Canmore is a larger community, staff projected population growth based on census data and found that Fernie could surpass Canmore's 2016/17 population by approximately 2040.

This suggests that beyond the inability of the site to meet the current technical requirements identified through pre-planning, it may need to be replaced or a second facility be built far in advance of the 50+ year life span planned for the new fire hall .

### ***Missoula, MT***

The project team engaged with staff in Missoula, Montana, where Fire Hall #1 is located on a small lot. Through that discussion it was confirmed that this is one of five fire halls in the community. While it was built in 1995, it can no longer be used for more than one type-1 pumper/engine as modern apparatus are too large for the facility. For reference, the City of Fernie operates three Type-1 engines.

Further, the facility provides no practical training space, is deficient in parking for response, and of their other halls Station 4 on 2.68 acres and Station 3 on 1.73 acres are more appropriate comparisons in terms of form and function.

### **Use of Baseball Diamonds at Prentice Park**

During the public engagement on site selection, the loss of a ball diamond at Prentice Park to accommodate a new fire hall was identified as an area of concern. Staff prepared the memo attached to this report provide insight on the level of activity at the Prentice Park Ball Diamonds, bookings of the diamonds at James White Park, and other potential considerations.

### **Next Steps**

The following phases of the project after a site is selected are outlined as follows:

Ongoing Processes (Continuing from current phase):

- Co-Use Partnerships: Continue to explore potential co-use partnerships and assess their compatibility with the fire hall's primary function while maximizing community utility.
- Community Involvement: Maintain ongoing engagement with the CWG and the public, keeping them informed about project progress and decisions. This transparent and inclusive approach will help build consensus and support for the selected fire hall site. This will include communication to the public (using the Let's Talk Fernie website) on some of the most frequently asked questions, including the required size of the site, the location in relation to the train tracks, and concerns about lost recreational space.

Post Site Selection Phases:

- Concept Design: Develop a concept fire hall design on the selected site incorporating any definable co-use partnerships.
- Project Costing: Develop a high-level cost estimate based on concept design to establish a preliminary Project Budget.

### **Concept Design and Project Costing**

The next phases of the Pre-Planning project will include detailed design and construction cost estimates for the period of 2024-2026 including costs associated with extending the temporary use permit of the current Fire Hall at 1492b Railway Avenue through to commissioning of the new Fire Hall.

The project team is recommending a site be selected to advance this phase, as site agnostic costing increases uncertainty and risk.

*While both sites are located in close proximity with one another within the Maintown grid road network, easily accessible and easily serviced by existing services, as well as on flat sites, there are a number of considerations that will require site-specific planning.*

### ***Risk Related to Delaying Site Selection***

In general, the risk is a delay in schedule and additional design costs. It will take time to run two concepts and two costing exercises and there would be additional costs to do a second concept. The first issue would be more pressing as this pushes the 2026 completion date target out further.

The project team also assessed the potential to design to just the recommended site, and adapt if required to an alternative site later in the process. This again would pose significant challenges as the nature of each site will impact the final design.

For example, Site 2 is a larger site and quite flexible for expansion – this would allow us to look at expanding outwards. Site 1 is more constrained, and we would have to approach any expansion as a vertical exercise which would require any additions to be above the fire hall and those uses would also have to address post disaster requirements. This illustrates that shifting a design from one site to another is not a straightforward translation.

The following items are additional considerations that increase uncertainty on design and cost when advancing design prior to finalizing a project site:

- Site specific conditions that affect anticipated construction costs:
  - Geotechnical conditions may require different engineered solutions at either site
  - Environmental conditions are unique per site and may require reclamation and/or remediation
  - Facility layout design would differ based on the site due to constraints such as size, no-build setback near CPKC tracks
- Delaying site selection delays the project schedule due to delaying the process to mitigate site encumbrances (right of reverter, rezoning, site due diligence studies)
- Determining appropriate co-use and partnership possibilities is site specific, and an important component of the funding strategy to be developed as part of the continued pre-planning phase.
- Buy-in and engagement from participants of further engagement on the facility design would be difficult since the design would seem theoretical and could change easily based on the determined site.
- Advancing a public process on funding such as a borrowing referendum without a site selected may significantly undermine confidence in the initiative.

**Post Site Selection**

**Site Investigation**

Despite differences in requirements for design and costing for the building, there is no marked difference between initial site investigation costs between the two sites.

Table 1 below provides a summary of these costs for each site. These costs will be presented to Council as part of the 2024 capital budget, and are summarized in the financial section below alongside expected costs for referendum and planning costs from ISL.

Site	Estimated Cost
Site 1: 902 2 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue	\$145k – 155k
Site 2: 1500 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	\$155k – 165k

*Table 1: Summary of Site Discovery Work for Each Site*

Due to the extensive engagement and collaboration efforts of the City to advance community and stakeholder engagement and address concerns, an increase in budget for contracted project management will be required. This is detailed in the financial considerations section of this report.

**INTERNAL CIRCULATION**

This report has been reviewed by the Director of Engineering and Public Works, the Manager of Communications, the Director of Corporate Administration Services, and the Director of Finance.

**LEGAL/STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS**

While this report focuses on the rationale for site selection, Council should be aware that it is highly likely that the City will need to borrow funds to complement available grants and reserves to complete this project. Approval of the electors is required for this type of long-term borrowing, and this section provides an overview of the authorities and process requirements involved.

The process for arranging long-term borrowing is established under the Community Charter and the Local Government Act and is set out in the “Long Term Borrowing Process” flowchart from the Municipal Finance Authority (MFA) attached to this report.

**Municipal Finance Authority**

All long-term financing under Section 179 of the *Community Charter* (loan authorization bylaws for long term borrowing), must be done through a regional district, and the Municipal Finance Authority of BC (MFA).

When a municipality is ready to request access to long-term financing, it must send the following information to its regional district:

- Adopted certified copy of Loan Authorization (LA) Bylaw
- Certificate of Approval for LA Bylaw, from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

- Liability Servicing Limit Certificate used for approval of LA Bylaw
- Certified copy of Municipal Security Issuing Resolution (MSIR) (resolution of Council to borrow)

The MSIR is the trigger for a regional district to include a municipality in a Security Issuing Bylaw and forms a key part of the legal documentation required for MFA financing. It is also used to prepare loan agreements and demand notes between a regional district and its member municipalities. The latest call for Certificates of Approval for Security Issuing Bylaws from the MFA is attached to this report for reference.

### **Timelines**

The MFA has two intake periods during the year: spring and fall at their Annual General Meeting (March) and their Semi-Annual Meeting (September).

To provide the MSIR to the regional district, which will submit it to the MFA, a adopted bylaw, itself requiring asset or elector approval, and inspector's approval must be complete.

Section 135 (4) of the Community Charter indicates that approval (referendum) or alternative approval (assent) must be obtained after the Bylaw has been given third reading and before it is adopted.

In both cases the process can start before readings of the bylaw begins, but the third reading must be completed prior to the finalization of the assent process.

Under the Community Charter we may seek either the Assent of the Electors, or the Approval of the Electors via the Alternative Approval Process. The "Alternative Approval" process is set out in the Community Charter, while the "assent process" is set out in the Local Government Act.

### **Alternative Approval**

Alternative Approval process is shorter and provides that a "general description of the bylaw" requiring approval is in the notice. The notice sets out the bylaw, the deadline for responses, and the form in which to respond. The notice must be published in the paper and the deadline is no less than 30 days from the date of the second publication notice. The timeline for Alternative Approval commences once council approves the process at a meeting. Publication and posting of the formal notice occur, and the time for responses would be indicated at least 30 days after the final publication date. This would take approximately 45 days from the date of the council meeting authorizing the Alternative Approval Process.

The process provides that electors may respond indicating they do not approve of the bylaw proceeding without a referendum. If less than 10% of the electors respond, then the threshold for Alternative Approval has been met per section 86(1)(c) of the Community Charter.

### **Assent**

The "Assent of the Electors" (referendum) process is under the Community Charter and Part 4 of the Local Government Act.



The timeline for setting the General voting day for an Assent vote is set out in section 174(2) of the Act. In this instance it directs that the voting day shall be not more than 80 days after the day the bylaw receives approval of the Inspector of Municipalities. Said approval is not provided until the Bylaw has received third reading. Unless an Alternative Approval Process was provided in which case it shall be not more than 80 days after the deadline for receiving responses in the Alternative Approval Process.

Assent is obtained if a majority of the votes counted as valid votes in favour of the bylaw, per section 171(1) of the Local Government Act.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH CORPORATE STRATEGIES & POLICIES**

The November 2023 report highlights, in detail, the alignment with policy objectives adopted in the City's Asset Management Policy.

Since that time, Council has adopted a Strategic Plan. In the development of that plan and through adoption Council acknowledged that the Fire Hall Replacement Project is one of the three imperative capital projects to be advanced.

Staff are also ensuring that the Fire Hall Replacement Project is being advanced with a focus on enabling Quality Services (Adopted Strategic Objective) that are dependable, sustainable, and meet the needs of the community through providing a long-term, purpose-built Fire Hall from which the FFESD can operate.

Staff believe this project and the process of detailed technical analysis and public engagement also advance this strategic objective through developing comprehensive technical information regarding need and site selection, and providing it in a highly transparent manner alongside multiple engagement opportunities.

Finally, the service-area analysis undertaken as part of the work with the project team and consultant, is an example of a service area review that includes community engagement, as prioritized in Council's strategic plan.

## **FINANCIAL/BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS**

For budgeting purposes, seeking approval of the electors by assent (referendum) should be estimated similarly to a general election for Council with some minor reductions. In 2022 we spent \$36,000 on the Council election. There are savings available, for instance, with a single question it not recommended we obtain voting machines for the referendum, which provides a reduction of approximately \$13,000 in cost.

This results in expected budget for the approval of the electors by assent of \$23,000.

Previously approved changes to the engineering services contract from ISL includes \$19,000 for the planning and engagement phases of this project.

These two amounts, alongside the \$165,000 site investigation, will be included in the 2024 capital budget presentation to Council on February 21<sup>st</sup>.

## **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

Presently, the Director of Engineering and Public Works and the Chief Administrative Officer have assumed internal project leadership for the conclusion of site selection and initiation of design and costing.

Once a site is selected, technical work on that specific site will be undertaken by staff in the Engineering and Public Works Department with support from consulting engineers. This work was budgeted for 2024, and will require amendments as noted above to advance.

Additionally, managing the temporary occupancy related to the overall timeline will require some staff and consultant time to ensure that operations can continue from its present location, and the Building Officials will be required to undertake additional permitting reviews.

## **EXTERNAL AGENCY/PUBLIC COMMENTS**

These have been previously provided to Council, and the consultation report and previous presentation are attached for reference.

## **COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS**

Once a site is selected, direct engagement will continue with stakeholders, potential co-use partners, and the Community Working Group.

The Fire Hall Replacement Project page on Let's Talk will be updated with the site selection decision, process recap, and project next step. Public communications will be developed to support site specific considerations during subsequent phases such as the potential loss of a ball diamond in Prentice Park and solutions for minimizing impacts for existing users.

Further, a communications and engagement plan will be developed, and educational materials created to support a referendum or alternative approval process on the required borrowing bylaw.

## **OPTIONS**

Council May:

1. THAT Council select Site 2, being 1500 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, also known as a portion of Prentice Park, as the future location for the replacement Fire Hall and direct staff to advance the next phases of pre-planning.
2. Resolve to select Site 1, being 902 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, as the future location for the replacement Fire Hall and direct staff to advance the next phases of pre-planning.
3. Direct staff otherwise.

## CONCLUSION


This report provides an update regarding the questions and considerations from Council and the community following the November 28, 2023 report on the Fire Hall Replacement Project.

Staff continue to recommend Site 2 - 1500 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Prentice Park) as the future location for the Fire Hall due to the technical advantages of the site and the opportunities for maximizing community benefit through co-use that it presents.

While the City of Fernie is in the envious position of having two publicly-owned sites that are able to accommodate the future Fire Hall, this site has been recommended as optimal for this purpose.

Site selection at this stage will allow for direct stakeholder consultation to refine requirements and costing, detailed site testing and remediation where required, and the finalization of a funding strategy within a workable timeline to obtain approval of the electors for any required borrowing to meet the timeline for a new operational Fire Hall in 2026.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the project team,



Michael Boronowski, Chief Administrative Officer

### Attachments:

1. 2023-11-28 CDR Fire Hall Site Selection Update
2. 2023-12-22 Technical Report
3. Fernie Firehall Council Presentation 2023-11-28
4. Parks Facilities Recreation Memo – Ball Diamond Use
5. MFA long-term borrowing process flowchart
6. MFA Letter re Spring 2024 Long Term borrowing opportunity