

Property Maintenance Inspection Increased Staffing

ISSUE

Property Maintenance and Nuisance Abatement inspections are conducted on a complaint-based priority system. Current staffing levels have led to increased wait times in addressing lower priority complaints. Beyond addressing the backlog that has occurred, a proactive approach is needed to ensure compliance is maintained.

BACKGROUND

At the January 27, 2020 Regular Business Meeting of City Council, the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development and Community services presented item 8.1.4 Licensing Rental Properties and Regulation of Nuisance Calls for Emergency Services that focused on the potential of licensing properties. Council resolved:

“That Administration be directed to investigate further and report back on the financial implications of implementing Option 1; increase staffing to facilitate proactive property maintenance inspections, as outlined in the January 14, 2020 report of the General Manager, Community Services Department”.

Based on the above noted resolution, being related to reporting back on the staffing and resources required to facilitate proactive property maintenance inspections, the lead on this file was appointed to the Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD).

CURRENT STATUS

At the 2020-2021 budget deliberations, the SFD was provided funding for 1.5 positions. This funding was to address a backlog of property maintenance concerns. Following this, a 0.5 position was afforded through SFD’s cost recovery program. As of January 2021, two fire bylaw inspectors have been addressing property maintenance concerns.

The cost recovery program was implemented in July of 2020 that captures the cost of time in lieu of wages for SFD personnel when necessary actions are taken to remedy deficiencies. This occurs where non-compliance is met after issuing an Order to Remedy or Notice to Remedy. Cost recovery is placed onto the property tax roll which includes external contractor costs and SFD labour.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

SFD dispatchers required physical distancing during COVID-19. The SFD Executive Officers worked with The International Association of Fire Fighters, Local No. 80 to adjust work duties when staffing levels permitted. Dispatchers were redeployed to conduct inspections on Priority 3 complaints when minimum staffing allowed. The backlog of complaints, dating up to the end of 2019, were addressed. This approach placed safety at the forefront and allowed the opportunity to address the backlog of property maintenance complaints.

Property Maintenance Inspection Increased Staffing

In the spring of 2021, a focused approach by fire bylaw inspectors and fire inspectors addressed all 2020 complaints. This allowed for a clear view of what staff can inspect in 2021.

	Complaints Priority 1	Complaints Priority 2	Complaints Priority 3
2019	27	95	182
2020	26	85	75

Evaluation of 2021 data to August 17th shows that 675 complaints have been addressed by the two fire bylaw inspectors. Projecting these numbers over a one-year period shows one fire bylaw inspector can address 586 complaints. The table below shows the backlog. Using this data, it is estimated the total number of complaints at the end of 2021 will be approximately 2,850 requiring the resources of 5.0 fire bylaw inspectors to fully address property maintenance concerns.

	Complaints Received	Complaints Inspected	Complaints Not Inspected
2019	3,135	3,135	0
2020	2,799	2,778	21
2021	1,998	946	1,052

To support City Council priorities for an integrated and effective system of services, the importance of housing stability is reflected in the City's approach to Community Safety and Well-being. One key action is to strengthen focus on safe and stable housing and neighbourhoods through proactive collaboration around property maintenance, neighbourhood safety, and bylaw compliance.

At the onset of COVID-19, an internal audit and restructure occurred. Under a current new model, with the support of a Risk Reduction Coordinator (RRC), formerly a Secretary II position, fire inspector time has been reduced by 366 hours which improved the number of days to gain compliance (see Appendix 1). There were 328 complaints that resulted in enforcement supported by the RRC through the demolition and property remediation process. The creation of an SFD Community Liaison Officer (SFD CLO) is forthcoming to strengthen trust and build stronger relationships. The addition of an SFD CLO would be proactive in promoting and educating the community on the connection between the SFD and maintaining housing versus rehousing. A proactive versus reactive approach would address housing and property concerns before becoming a risk or potential risk to life and requiring a closure. This will assist in the reduction or severity of fires and reduce the cost and resource to internal and external stakeholders. Key functions of the SFD CLO would include:

- promoting *Bylaw 8175 Property Maintenance and Nuisance Abatement Bylaw, 2003*,
- promoting fire prevention measures and the connection to safe housing,
- supporting SFD endeavours to be the first line of contact to avoid closures that contribute to homelessness for those with complex needs within the community,
- providing housing solutions and education,

Property Maintenance Inspection Increased Staffing

- evaluating data that impacts resource allocation (data will also be used as a perspective element for identifying community risk prior to the development of a Community Risk Reduction Plan outlined in National Fire Protection Association 1300 – Standard on Community Risk Assessment and Community Risk Reduction Plan Development)
- delivering focused messaging in priority neighbourhoods, and
- acting as liaison to engage the community and stakeholders to identify solutions and create safer neighbourhoods.

Appendix 2 is a heat map identifying a consistent trend in neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of property maintenance concerns from January 2019 - July 2021. Pleasant Hill, Caswell Hill, and Riversdale show the greatest need for a proactive approach. Moving forward, comprehensive data analysis will provide valuable resource allocation for the SFD community risk reduction team to support the needs of the community.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Included in the 2022 Indicative budget is the request to have the 1.5 FTE fire bylaw inspector positions become permanent, and to increase staffing by 0.5 FTEs (\$42,000) to bring the staffing levels to 2.0 permanent FTEs. Also included in 2022 is \$50,000 in anticipated cost recovery stemming from the demolition and property remediation process. In 2023 there is a request for one additional fire bylaw inspector for \$85,000. If approved, this would provide funding for 3.0 fire bylaw inspectors by 2023.

Not included in the indicative budget or in the budget operating options for 2022-2023 are two additional fire bylaw inspector positions (\$85,000 each, bringing the total FTEs to 5.0) and the Community Relations Coordinator position (\$120,000).

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Social impact with community being supported in a proactive approach to maintain housing versus rehousing supporting wellbeing within the community.

NEXT STEPS

Further analysis on efficiencies and a proactive approach will be ongoing with a progress report plan for 2023.

APPENDICES

1. Number of Days to Gain Compliance by Priority
2. January 2021 - July 2021 Property Maintenance Concerns Heat Map

Report Approval

Written by: Yvonne Raymer, Assistant Chief
Reviewed by: Teresa Quon, Senior Financial Business Partner
Approved by: Morgan Hackl, Fire Chief

Admin Report - Property Maintenance Inspection Increased Staffing.docx