

Mill Bay Fire Protection District Strategic Plan 2024



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Introduction

The Mill Bay Fire Department was first created in 1948 and became a Provincial Improvement District incorporated by Letters Patent in 1963. The Fire Department provides emergency response, fire prevention and education services to all or most of the communities of Mill Bay, Cobble Hill, Arbutus Ridge, Malahat First Nation and surrounding areas.

The Mill Bay Fire Department is a composite fire department, made up of 3 full time paid firefighters, including the Chief, Training Officer and a Maintenance Firefighter, two permanent part-time positions and between 25 and 35 volunteer paid-on-call and auxiliary members.

The Mill Bay Fire Department is administered by the Fire Protection District Board of Trustees and the District Administrator/Treasurer/Secretary. The seven Trustees on the Board are property owners within the protection district and are elected at the AGM for 3-year staggered terms. The Administrator is an employee of the Fire Protection District. The Trustees are responsible for setting annual budgets, hiring administration staff and career members, including the Fire Chief and providing “high level” oversight in the operations and management of the Fire Department.

It was decided in the Spring of 2024 to embark on a Strategic Planning process. The rationale for this exercise was the belief that our protection area would undergo substantial commercial, residential and population growth in the coming 5 to 10 years. Another motivator was the fact that our last strategic planning efforts were completed in 2021, and our department and community have continued to evolve since then, with new leadership at the Department and at the Board of Trustees.

A committee was struck consisting of five trustees, M. Taylor, G. Kendall, J. Anderson including the Board Chair D. Lestock-Kay and Vice-Chair D. Slade as well as Chief C. McInerney and Deputy Chief S. Melanson. The committee is being chaired by Board Vice-Chair D. Slade.

It was decided by the committee that this planning process would be done “in house”, without the use of planning professionals or consultants. It was also decided that we would engage with the entire Department and the full Board of Trustees periodically throughout the process to ensure that all members had the opportunity to have their ideas, opinions and concerns considered in creating the Strategic Plan. The timeline targeted for the planning process was for five and ten years into the future. The timeline for completing the Plan was the Fall of 2024.



Desired Outcomes of the planning process

- Identify areas of weakness and strength within the organization and seek ways to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses.
- Make defensible projections on future growth and the impacts such growth will have on our financial and human resources and our ability to deliver top quality emergency response, training and education for our members and citizens.
- Take steps to be as “nimble” as possible in the face of uncertainty around growth, staffing and the future needs of our organization and community.
- Identify items and areas of equipment, facilities and training that we will need and/or want to invest in, in the coming years.
- Accept that, despite our best efforts and intentions we will never be able to accurately predict the future.

Changes over the past 20 years

Over the past 20 years, the Mill Bay Fire Protection District has grown in area, with the addition of significant lands in the Bamberton area South of Mill Bay. Fire Department call volumes have gone up dramatically as has our district’s number of homes and population, as well as the volume of traffic on our roads and the Trans-Canada Highway

20 Years ago, in 2004 the annual budget for the MBFD was \$249,500 including an annual renewal reserve contribution of \$50,000. At this time (2004) the department had a total of 32 members (plus an unknown number of Auxiliary members), all of whom were volunteers. Total calls in 2004 were 254 of which the majority, 133, were First Responder calls.

Over the past 10 years, our department has been going through a transition from a “fully volunteer” department to a composite (Career and Volunteer/Paid On-Call members) department with a gradually increasing number of career members. Starting with a part-time career Chief, we have progressed to a complement of three full-time career members, a Fire



Chief, a Training Officer, and a Maintenance Firefighter, complimented by two Part-Time Career positions and a team of Volunteer/Paid On-Call members.

Our 2024 membership is a total of approximately 35, which includes two Auxiliary Members. (Virtually unchanged since 2004 despite extensive recruiting efforts and increased call volumes).

Our 2024 budget is \$1,755,000, including an annual renewal reserve contribution of \$200,000. Total call volume for this year, including statistics to the end of 2024 are 478. The majority of calls continue to be First Responder with a year-end total of 336.

The above noted changes to a composite department have had a significant impact on the fire protection mil rate and cost to tax-payers. (the mil rate is the multiplier per \$1,000 property value that determines the property taxation amount for specific services such as fire protection)

Fire Protection Mil Rate Changes and effects on a \$500,000 property.

- 2006 fire protection mil rate of 0.51600 equals \$258.00 in property tax.
- 2014 fire protection mil rate of 0.62350 equals \$311.75 in property tax.
- 2019 fire protection mil rate of 0.58933 equals \$294.67 in property tax.
- 2024 fire protection mil rate of 0.62464 equals \$312.32 in property tax.

The mil rate numbers above suggest only modest changes in the taxation rate over nearly 20 years, but they do not reflect that property values will have increased by at least 100% since 2006. A doubling of property value would result in a doubling of the dollar value/cost of the applied mil rate. On the other side of that equation is the fact that due to inflation, it would take approximately \$150 today to purchase goods and services that would have cost \$100 in 2006.



Rational for change

The key drivers of our move to a composite department were changes to the training requirements by the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the extreme shortage of daytime human resources to respond to emergencies on weekdays during the normal workday.

The changes in training requirements dictated that we must train and equip ourselves to the same standard as career fire departments, the accompanying paperwork and training logistics created a greatly increased burden on the Chief Officers and Training Department. This was ultimately addressed by hiring a full-time Chief and Training Officer.

The shortage of daytime, weekday staffing to respond to calls required us to regularly resort to mutual aid from neighboring departments who were often also facing daytime staffing shortages. The additional hiring of a Maintenance Firefighter and part-time Fire Prevention Firefighter has given us confidence that on the vast majority of weekdays, we will have at least two and usually three fully trained Fire Fighters on duty to respond to local emergencies in a timely fashion.

At the same time, we have been continuously struggling to recruit and retain members at a time when volunteerism seems to be waning. To address this, we have gradually been adding to the remuneration and health and insurance benefits that our non-career members receive. This now includes free gym membership, a Health Care Spending Account (HSA), a comprehensive insurance package and a “take home” compensation for calls and practices that averages approximately \$8,000 per member per year.

These changes have been costly. The hiring of a Fire Fighter with benefits adds approximately \$100,000 to the annual budget, while the training of a Fire Fighter to the NFPA 1001 standard cost approximately \$10,000 for courses, plus approximately \$5,000 in remuneration for attending practices and training sessions.

There is no doubt that these changes and improvements in coverage and compensation that were required to maintain a first-class Fire Department have resulted in an increase in cost to property owners. The overall increase has been and will continue to be partly offset by growth and the increased tax base that growth provides.



It is worth noting that maintaining a well-equipped, staffed and trained fire department results in reductions in insurance costs for landowners.

It is anticipated that achieving Superior Shuttle Tanker Service will decrease home insurance rates for all residents in the district, even if they have existing fire hydrant service and it will dramatically reduce home insurance costs for those living in areas not serviced by fire hydrants.

Objectives

The first stage of the planning process was to review the previous plan, then to identify the major areas that needed consideration and add sub-categories for a fulsome view of where we need to focus our attention and efforts to fulfill our long-term goals.

Main Categories:

- 1) Training
- 2) Superior Shuttle Tanker Service
- 3) Growth Projections/preparedness
- 4) Succession Planning (Administrator & Fire Board/Employees and Officers)
- 5) Facilities/Land Acquisition
- 6) Major Equipment, replacement and additions
- 7) Staffing/Recruitment and Retention
- 8) Fire Prevention/Wildfire Preparedness
- 9) First Nations
- 10) Funding



Training

Ensure our department and our members are prepared and able to meet the needs of our growing and changing community.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Maintain sufficient 1001 Firefighter Level 2 trained personnel to sustain Full-service status.	✓		
Provide NFPA 1021 Fire Officer 1 training for all Officers.	✓		
Provide NFPA 1002 training for ariels, tenders and engines.	✓		
Provide First Responder Level 3 training for all members.	✓		
Train Captains to Fire Officer 2	✓		
Maintain specialty teams, i.e.: Hazmat, Rope Rescue, Confined Space, Trench.	✓		
Complete training building (see facilities).			✓

Superior Shuttle Tanker Service

Provide water to adequately fight fires in areas of our district that are not serviced by high volume fire hydrants.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Seek accreditation within two years (before the end of 2026).	✓		



Growth Preparedness

Improve our ability to assess and respond appropriately to growth within our district.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Acquire up to date growth estimates from CVRD.		✓	
Prioritize CVRD/Fire Dept. communications for development planning.			✓
Identify suitable sites for dry hydrants and support their installation.			✓

Succession Planning

Ensure human resources and processes are in place to maintain continuity during times of transition.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Administrator job description and timeline for retirement.		✓	
Strive for increased Board diversity.		✓	
Advancement and training of Officers.	✓		



Facilities

Support the health, well-being and morale of our members by striving for continuous improvement.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Improve OH & S. Examples: decontamination procedures and facilities.			✓
More covered secure parking for apparatus & storage (Hall 1 and/or Hall 2)			✓
Training Building substantially completed within 2 years (by end of 2026).			✓
Land acquisition – Land adjacent to Hall 1 and/or Hall 2.		✓	
Future Hall 3 site near Bamberton and Malahat FN land secured.		✓	

Major Equipment Replacement

Plan to carefully maintain all equipment to the end of its service life and allow adequate time and funding for replacement and/or upgrade.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Rescue 73: End of service 2028.			✓
Ladder 81: End of service 2029.			✓
Engine 74: End of service 2030.			✓
Tender 76: End of service 2030.			✓
Hall 1 Generator 2025.			✓



Staffing

Continue to build a mature, professional organization that will attract and retain members with the goal of providing first class service to our citizens.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Expanded Paid On-call, over the next five years (2029).		✓	
24-hour coverage with paid on-call within 10 years (2034).		✓	
Target POC hourly rate to local “living wage”. (\$25.71/hr Cow Valley 2024).		✓	
Annual Performance Reviews for employees, officers and full department.			✓
Recruitment and Retention: Create, maintain and support a separate committee to address these key issues.			✓

Fire Prevention

Engage the community while promoting and improving safety for all.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Pre-planning for all “complex buildings” (commercial, institutional, multi-family) Currently at approx. 30%. Target of 100% within 5 years.	✓		
Education: Community events, open house.	✓		
Review call patterns and tailor outreach (and training) appropriately.	✓		
Letters Patent should be updated to include power to issue and enforce orders. To be done when the Letters Patent are next revisited for boundary changes.		✓	



Wildfire Preparedness

Be prepared for wildfires in our community that will become more likely as climate change models predict hotter and dryer summers.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Identify all high-risk wildfire interface areas (HRVA High Risk Vulnerability Analysis).	✓		
Deployment planning. Develop written policy/guideline for out of area wildfire deployment.	✓		
Create an emergency public info site, to include wildfire and other emergency preparedness updates, measures and actions. (as a page on MBFD website).	✓		
Support and partner with CVRD re: Fire Smart Communities.	✓		
Evacuation/Emergency Department Operations Plan.	✓		

First Nations

Build on existing mutually supportive relationship.			
Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Develop an acknowledgement statement in collaboration with Malahat FN.		✓	
Engagement and consultation; Pursue active participation and partnership with Malahat First Nation.			✓
Invite Malahat First Nation to sit at the Board Table in a consultative role.		✓	



Funding

Implement an agile funding model that allows rapid response when necessary to meet Department and community needs.

Action item and responsible party (Chief and Officers, Board of Trustees, Shared)	Chief & Officers	Board	Shared
Build and maintain reserve funds to reduce the need for borrowing bylaws for major equipment purchases, land acquisition and facilities expansion/upgrades		✓	
Ensure that to the greatest degree possible, the costs of a future Hall #3 are borne by the tax base created by the Bamberton/Malahat First Nation build-outs.		✓	



Growth Projections

A 2022 CVRD report sets population growth projections for Mill Bay and Cobble Hill at an estimated less than 1% per year.

BC Assessment states that in 2023 our protection area included 3,379 residential dwellings. 2021 Canada Census data estimates 2.22 persons per residential dwelling which would suggest a population of approximately 7,500. A 1% population increase would result in 75 more people per year, with a corresponding increase of 34 new dwellings per year. This seems like a gross underestimate based on the developments currently proposed for Mill Bay and Cobble Hill, which are CVRD areas A and C. (ALL of area A and area C are NOT inside the MBFD District and a small portion of area B is) Chart below shows CVRD growth projections to 2050

Electoral Area	Total Population					
	2021	2022	2024	2027	2032	2050
A	4,955	4,998	5,068	5,228	5,486	6,524
B	8,990	9,074	9,250	9,530	10,042	12,099
C	5,050	5,082	5,148	5,254	5,446	6,222
D	3,530	3,552	3,597	3,670	3,802	4,333
E	4,260	4,280	4,323	4,390	4,513	5,008
F	1,790	1,827	1,905	2,028	2,253	3,159
G	2,435	2,452	2,488	2,544	2,648	3,065
H	2,610	2,634	2,685	2,765	2,912	3,502
I	1,415	1,454	1,535	1,664	1,899	2,847
Total	35,035	35,354	36,016	37,072	39,000	46,759

Electoral Area	Total Dwellings					
	2021	2022	2024	2027	2032	2050
A	2,166	2,184	2,223	2,284	2,396	2,847
B	3,891	3,928	4,004	4,125	4,346	5,237
C	2,283	2,297	2,325	2,371	2,454	2,788
D	1,585	1,594	1,614	1,646	1,703	1,933
E	1,713	1,722	1,740	1,770	1,823	2,039
F	904	920	954	1,008	1,106	1,502
G	1,374	1,381	1,397	1,422	1,467	1,647
H	1,238	1,249	1,270	1,305	1,369	1,796
I	1,172	1,189	1,224	1,280	1,383	1,796
Total	16,326	16,464	16,752	17,210	18,048	21,416

Anticipated Development

Following is a listing of planned developments and developers projected build-out timelines. All projections assume economic conditions remain favorable.

Stonebridge Properties:

This project includes the old Pioneer Square property and many hectares of surrounding land between Frances Kelsey School and the McDonalds/Tim Hortons complex in Mill Bay.



Plans include approximately 400 units, including a mixture of single and multi-family housing. They plan to begin construction this Fall (2024) on the Barry Road section of their land, some of these developments will be six stories. Phase 2 will be the Pioneer Square/commercial lands.

They are planning a 15-year build-out of these phases and expect to be 2/3 done in 10 years. The Stonebridge lands will include a 100,000 square foot, 2 story commercial/retail space. They will provide a 1,000,000-litre water reservoir.

Gallier Road and Hutchinson Road developments in Cobble Hill.

Gallier Road development: Is planned to be 35 single family and duplex lots, with a five-year build-out time frame.

Hutchinson Road development:

Near Cobble Hill Village is still in the approval stage and is expected to be 19-32 lots. Highways Department approval is the limiting factor in both Cobble Hill developments.

Sangha development on Butterfield.

The first phase will be 48 lots and is expected to begin in 2025 with completion 2028/29. The second phase will be 70 lots and is planned for 2029 to 2033. These lots are to be single family.

Mill Springs final phase.

129 single family homes to be built out over the next five years.

Ocean Terrace.

Currently up for sale. This property requires an approximately \$3 million dollar highway interchange before construction can begin. Plans for this property have included up to 400 dwellings. There are no current timelines for this development, and it seems unlikely that any new housing will be built there in the next five years.

Malahat First Nation.

The Malahat First Nation is planning extensive commercial, industrial and residential development over the next 5 to 10 years. This includes several hundred housing units in apartment/condo buildings as well as detached residential housing. There is currently several



thousand square feet of commercial space under construction with plans to expand this by many times. Current plans include the building of a 60,000 sq. ft battery assembly and manufacturing plant.

Specifically, Malahat Nations proposed development plans include the following:

- A one million litre reservoir
- Cardlock gas pumps. Operational now
- Public boat launch. Built now, but not operational
- 30,000 sq. ft. warehouse with office space. (Near completion)
- Two 190-unit, 6 story condo units. Construction to begin in 2026
- 60,000 sq. ft. lithium battery manufacturing and assembly plant
- Build-out of industrial lands over several years with unspecified projects
- Six sound stages/movie studios by 2029
- A 300-slip marina by 2029
- New, relocated ferry terminal by 2029
- Gymnasium by 2027
- Three story admin building by 2027
- 30 New First Nations houses
- Street village and shopping mall by 2039
- Hotel by 2039

Call Volume Trends

The following tables and charts show some randomly selected years going back to 2008, which is as far as the current tracking system allows. Data sets are for full calendar years.

It should be noted that the “Covid Years” which include part of 2020 and all of 2021 and part of 2022 have skewed the data, making detailed analysis and conclusions on trends, difficult and tenuous at best for the past 5 years.

The most marked increase in call volumes is Medical/First Responder calls which have gone from approximately 1/2 of the total in 2008 to more than 2/3 of the total in 2024. This trend may be reflective of our aging population and the increased desire and ability for people to “age in place” and stay at home during their senior years.



MILL BAY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN 2024

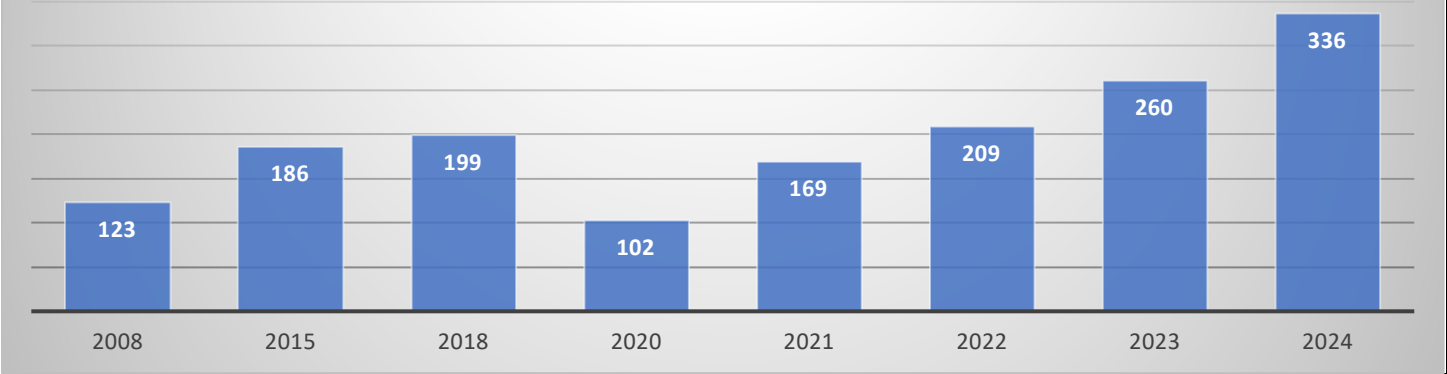
Call Type	2008	2015	2018	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Alarms Activated	11	21	20	14	39	36	34	43
Boat Fire	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Brush/Grass Fire	4	4	4	3	2	6	6	10
Chief Page/Duty Officer	15	19	16	20	22	23	31	24
Chimney Fire	3	3	4	2	6	1	4	1
Hazmat Incident	0	0	4	2	3	1	1	1
Hydro Lines Down/On Fire	6	6	18	15	20	15	13	9
Medical Aid First Responder	123	186	199	102	169	209	260	336
Mutual Aid	0	8	9	0	8	15	10	3
MVI	39	43	40	34	39	34	55	36
Natural Gas Leak	2	3	0	4	4	3	3	0
Plane Incident	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Public Assist	0	4	18	9	4	7	4	6
Rescue	1	0	0	2	4	2	3	1
Structure Fire	15	2	12	4	14	14	3	4
Unknown/Nuisance Fire	13	1	14	8	3	5	2	1
Vehicle Fire	4	5	8	6	8	3	6	3
TOTALS	238	305	367	225	346	374	435	478

Projected Call Increase (15% for the past 2 years)

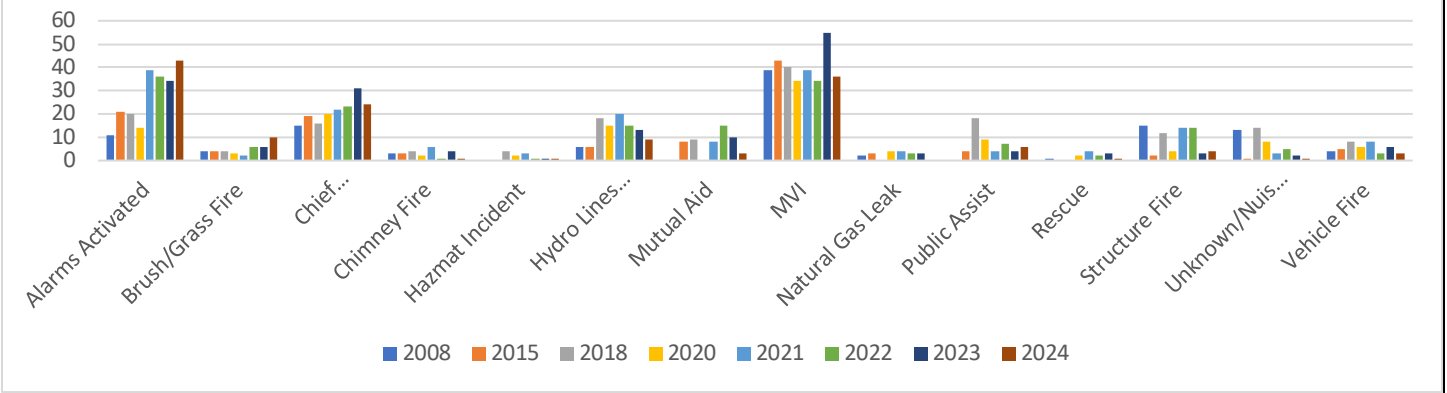
Year	At 15%	At 10%	At 15% first 5 years then 10%
2025	567	542	567
2026	652	596	652
2027	750	656	750
2028	862	721	862
2029	991	793	991
2030	1140	873	1990
2031	1311	960	1199
2032	1508	1056	1319
2033	1734	1161	1450
2034	1995	1278	1596



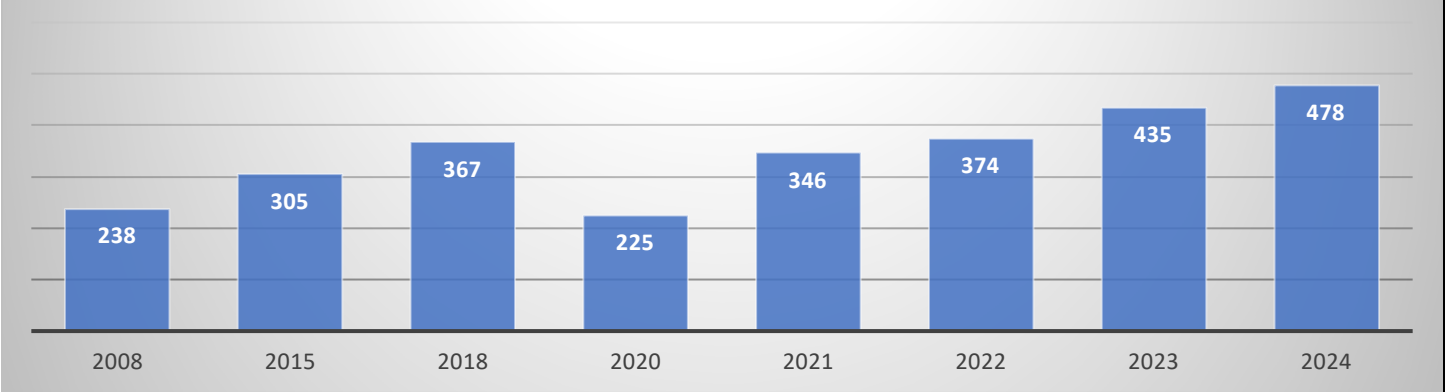
Medical Aid First Responder



Other Call Types



Yearly Comparison



5 YEAR VISION

- 40 Firefighter members (including up to five full time career equivalents).
 - True Paid On-Call – paying a living hourly wage.
- Land secured and plans for expanded facilities at Hall 1 and/or Hall 2.
 - Land secured for a future Hall 3 at Bamberton.
 - Additional secure storage at Hall 1 and/or Hall 2.

10 YEAR VISION

- 40 Firefighter members (including up to eight full time career equivalents).
- 24-hour staffing with Paid On-Call/Career members with night shifts.
 - Expanded auxiliary.
- Expanded Hall 1 facilities (parking/storage/accommodation).
 - Marine fire fighting response capabilities.
- Budget/planning in progress for Hall 3 near Bamberton.



Conclusions

The Mill Bay Fire Department is a well managed and well-resourced organization that meets and exceeds the needs and expectations of its citizens and taxpayers. In the South Cowichan, the MBFD is a leader in terms of hiring career staff and providing remuneration and benefits to its career and Volunteer/Paid On-Call members.

The size, scale, number and timing of developments planned within our Protection District suggest that the recent growth estimates provided by the CVRD may fall well short of the actual increase in population that our department will be serving. This potential for rapid growth is a key driver for our long-term plans that may include expanded career membership and enhancements to our current Paid On-Call staffing model.

The organization has faced numerous challenges over the years, but has always managed to adapt, while learning and growing from the experience. Currently, the biggest challenge is the recruitment and retention of Volunteer/Paid On-Call members. Many of the goals and future plans of the department depend on increasing recruitment, but even more importantly retaining the members in which considerable time and money has been invested in training them to the point that they are true emergency response “assets”. If this cannot be achieved and the district continues to grow quickly, other Fire Department models, all likely significantly more expensive will have to be considered.

Approval and Authority

This plan has been submitted by the Board of Trustees of the Mill Bay Fire Protection District and approved by the Board Chair and Fire Chief on January 28, 2025.



David Lestock-Kay
Board of Trustees Chair
Mill Bay Fire Protection District



Chris McInerney
Fire Chief
Mill Bay Fire Department

