



Report to Council

Department: Community Services
Division: Fire and Rescue Services
Date: February 1, 2021
Prepared by: Richard Arnel, Fire Chief
Report Number: Fire and Rescue Services-2021-01
Subject: Digital Radio-Communication System Contract Extension
Number of Pages: 9

Recommendation(s)

That Fire and Rescue Services-2021-01 entitled Digital Radio-Communication System Contract Extension prepared by Richard Arnel dated February 1, 2021 be received, and

That Council **approve** extending the Digital Radio-Communication System Contract Extension (Appendix A) with Kelcom Co. Ltd. for an additional three (3) years.

Purpose

To obtain approval of council to enter into the Digital Radio-Communication System Contract Extension with Kelcom Radio Co. Ltd. for an additional three (3) years.

Background and Discussion

From 1962 through to the early 2000's most of the Essex County Fire Departments communicated on the VHF radio channel that was used for both pager activation and 2 way

radio communications. Multiple fire departments responding to emergencies at the same time created confusion, congestion and safety concerns on the single channel.

Following amalgamation of several county municipalities into the present seven (7) municipalities a Regional Radio System Advisory Committee was established to review options and costs for a multi-channel, interoperable radio system. While this study was occurring some departments implemented their own systems. In 2005 after presenting several regional radio system opportunities and associated costs, County Council consensus could not be reached. It was decided that each municipality would determine their own solution. Lakeshore, Tecumseh, Essex and Amherstburg all agreed to work together and implement a UHF system through Kelcom infrastructure that provided interoperability between the four (4) departments with separate channels to communicate. Kelcom also improved the paging system from a single tower site located in the Town of Essex to multiple sites providing both regional paging and network radio coverage.

That change required each of the four (4) municipalities to replace all their radio equipment and commit to a ten (10) year lease with Kelcom until February 2016. Kelcom invested in multiple tower sites and supporting infrastructure to establish a regional network communication system that guaranteed 100 percent street level radio coverage throughout Essex County.

The four (4) fire services paid a monthly fee per radio under the lease agreement that covered the infrastructure operational cost and included radio maintenance. In 2013 the system required upgrading to modernize the communication network. The following system enhancements at no additional cost were implemented;

- a) Change the existing analog system to a new digital encrypted network,
- b) Replace the existing analog radios and hardware with new digital equipment,
- c) GPS and inter-network text messaging services are available,
- d) Replacement of batteries.

In exchange for upgrading and refreshing the system components of the Kelcom agreement the existing lease rates at the time continued until the original February 2016 contract completion and then an additional three (3) year lease extension was initiated. In (2019) we extended the contracts with Kelcom for two (2) years and the four (4) departments agreed to collectively conduct a review and analysis of the current and future needs, standards, guidelines and policies of such communications systems, technologies and equipment, relative to the service provided and in the environment's encountered, for the purpose of risk management and enhancement.

The current lease agreement is scheduled to expire in February of 2021. The departments have had discussions regarding the reorganization of the zones and frequencies with the Kelcom system to enable and enhance the ability of Departments to;

- a) Request channel assignment changes to enable recording of operations at incidents,
- b) Consider in vehicle repeaters to resolve interference challenges in large buildings and underground parking,
- c) Improve Fire Fighter Safety including emergency button feature enablement on portable radios, and if activated would connect users in that talk group,
- d) Consider adding additional municipalities to the system,
- e) Further determine system requirements to enhance interoperability and future technology improvements.

The Fire Chiefs who participate together presently, along with potential new partners met recently and determined that more time is necessary to properly investigate other potential requirements and changes and associated costing. This review and proper financial analysis is necessary and cannot be completed before the expiry of the current lease (February 2021). This process has been delayed due to COVID-19 and planning on initiating the analysis when we are able to.

A discussion with Kelcom representatives has taken place to consider the above identified requirement changes and to investigate a possible contract lease agreement extension. Kelcom has responded back to the Chiefs and has confirmed all of the required changes identified can be accommodated. In addition Kelcom is willing to extend the current agreement conditions for an additional three (3) years to February 2024 and is working on user gear upgrades that would be needed and provide information back to the Chiefs.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact to our current operational budget as Kelcom is maintaining current fee schedule for the three (3) year contract extension.

Consultations

Bruce Montone, Fire Chief, Amherstburg

Wade Bondy, Director Fire Services and Fire Chief, Tecumseh

Don Williamson, Fire Chief, Lakeshore

Tim Schweyer, Kelcom Technical Division

Link to Strategic Priorities

- ☒ Manage, invest and plan for sustainable municipal infrastructure which meets current and future needs of the municipality and its citizens.
- ☐ Create a safe, friendly and inclusive community which encourages healthy, active living for people of all ages and abilities.
- ☐ Provide a fiscal stewardship and value for tax dollars to ensure long-term financial health to the municipality.
- ☐ Manage responsible and viable growth while preserving and enhancing the unique rural and small town character of the community.
- ☐ Improve the experiences of individuals, as both citizens and customers, in their interactions with the Town of Essex.
- ☐ Improve the Town's capacity to meet the ongoing and future service needs of its citizens while ensuring the corporation is resilient in the face of unanticipated changes or disruptions.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Digital Radio-Communication System Contract - Fire and Rescue Services-2021-01.docx
Attachments:	- Master Digital Radio System Contract Extension 2021-2024 Essex.pdf
Final Approval Date:	Jan 26, 2021

This report and all of its attachments were approved and signed as outlined below:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug Sweet".

Doug Sweet, Director, Community Services/Deputy CAO - Jan 20, 2021 - 8:37 AM

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Nepszy".

Chris Nepszy, Chief Administrative Officer - Jan 26, 2021 - 11:26 AM