Emergency Services

This Emergency Services Sheet was developed for presentation to the Okanagan Falls Incorporation Study Committee at its meeting on November 21, 2023. The sheet was prepared using information available at the time of writing. Changes will be made if new information becomes available.

Information presented on the Okanagan Falls Incorporation is based on the following assumptions:

- *That the Okanagan Falls fire department becomes a municipal fire department, and continues to provide service to the current service area through contract*
- *All other RDOS emergency services would continue to be provided to Okanagan Falls municipality as a participant in a regional service*

THE PRESENT

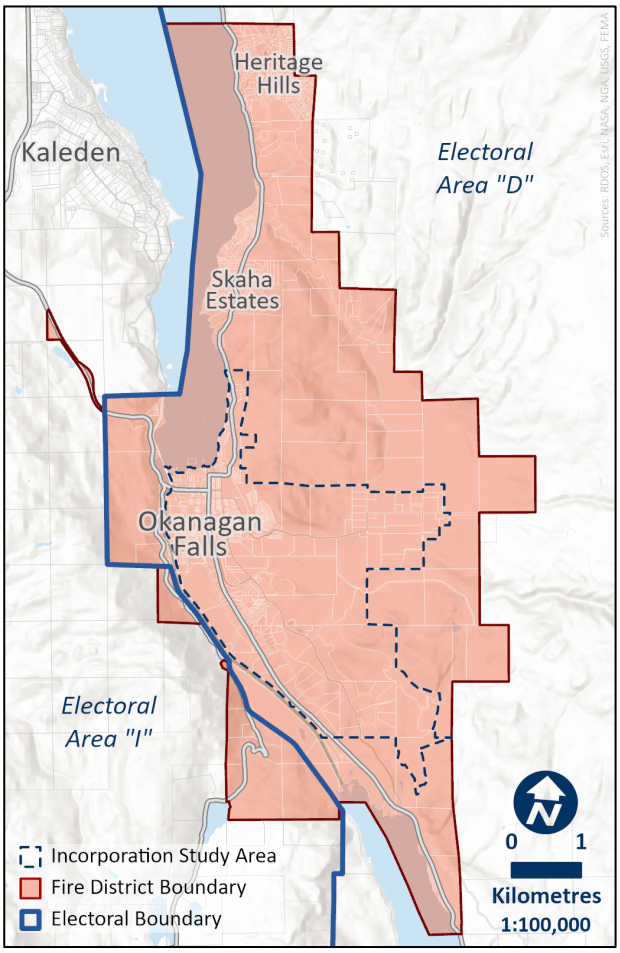
➤ What service is provided?

Fire Protection

The Okanagan Falls Volunteer Fire Department provides fire protection services to all of the Incorporation Study Area. The department's service area includes a large portion of Area "D" and 27 properties within Area "I" (Figure 1). The department is comprised of a paid-on-call fire chief, a deputy chief and 24 other paid on-call firefighters (26 total). The fire department is authorized to provide:

- fire protection services
- fire prevention (public education)

Figure 1: Okanagan Falls Fire Service Area



- auto extrication/road rescue services
- medical first responder services,
- rescue services (still water rescue, low angle rescue, marine rescue, ice rescue), and
- property fire inspections[1]

Responsibility for wildfires, as well as Crown lands, rests with the provincial the Wildfire Management Branch; these types of fires, however, are often initially responded and attended to by the Okanagan Falls

[1] This service was previously provided on contract. The department is not currently undertaking fire inspections, but has the training and is looking to resume this service.

Falls department. Within the Province of B.C. there are six fire centres, each of which is broken into zones. Okanagan Falls is within the Penticton zone.

Emergency Planning
The RDOS is the lead local government authority for emergency management throughout the Okanagan-Similkameen region, including Okanagan Falls and all of Area "D". The service features an emergency plan for the entire regional district, a Manager of Emergency Services, an Emergency Program Coordinator and, at present, one grant-funded FireSmart Coordinator and two Wildfire Mitigation Specialists. The service also includes an annual contribution agreement for Regional Search & Rescue.

When required by first responders, an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is opened by the Regional District to provide support during the emergency or disaster. An EOC is responsible for various duties such as issuing evacuation orders and state of local emergency, coordinating multiple agencies, providing media releases and managing and supporting evacuees.

911 Emergency Call System
The RDOS provides 911 emergency telephone service for the entire regional district, including the Penticton Indian Band. The Regional District of Central Okanagan currently administers the service to nine regional districts through EComm, a 911 service provider located in the Vancouver area. Fire dispatch service is provided by Kelowna on contract to all regional and municipal fire departments in RDOS, including Penticton, Oliver, Summerland, Osoyoos, and Princeton.

Victim Services
Victim services are provided locally by the RCMP, but are supported by the regional district through subsidies from the electoral areas. RCMP Victim Services offers assistance and resources to those in need.

➤ Who makes decisions?

The Okanagan Falls fire chief has operational authority over the fire department, and responsibility for complying with the BC firefighter training "Playbook". Decisions regarding the regional district volunteer fire services, including decisions related to to budget and capital expenditures, are made by the RDOS Board of Directors. The RDOS has a *Fire Department Operational Bylaw* that states that the Chief Administrative Officer oversees the operation of fire services for the District; however, the bylaw ensures that the RDOS consults with the fire departments on major decisions, such as training programs, operational guidelines and the hiring of new chiefs.

In 2018 the Fire Chiefs created the South Okanagan Similkameen Fire Chiefs' Association, a group that includes the chiefs and deputy chiefs of Naramata, Kaleden, Okanagan Falls, Willowbrook, Keremeos and Anarchist Mountain volunteer fire departments. The purpose of the society is to benefit volunteer members through the sharing training methods, equipment and information. The society also carries out the recruitment process for vacant fire chief positions.

The RDOS Board previously had a Fire Chief's Liaison Committee comprised of the directors from the areas that have the regional volunteer fire departments, but that Committee was dissolved in September of 2022.

Emergency Planning and 911
Decisions for emergency planning and 911, as region-wide services, are made by the full Board of Directors. Declarations of a state of emergency, under the *Emergency Program Act*, are made by an order from the RDOS Board Chair, or can be done by bylaw or reseolution from the RDOS Board.

Victim Services
Victim Services is provided to a smaller subset of electoral areas; decisions are made by the RCMP who provides the service. The service is structured solely to make a financial contribution to the RCMP's service.

Operational and policy decision-making for the individual emergency services are set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Service Decision-making

SERVICE	DECISION-MAKERS
OK Falls Fire Protection	Decisions made by RDOS Board, operational decisions by Fire Chief.
Emergency Planning	Decisions made by the full RDOS Board.
911 Emergency Call System	Decisions made by the full RDOS Board.
Victim Services	Decisions made by RCMP who provide the service. RDOS Board determines budget.

➢ Who delivers the service?

Fire Protection
As noted earlier, the Okanagan Falls VFD services the area shown in Figure 1, which encompasses the entire Incorporation Study Area, in addition to outlying communities. The VFD department is also a signatory to a mutual aid agreement that includes fire departments in Kaleden, Willowbrook, Oliver, Osoyoos, Penticton, Princeton, Summerland, the Hedley Improvement District, the Oliver Fire Protection District, and the Osoyoos Rural Fire Protection District whereby any one of them may, in situations where the resources of their own fire department are insufficient, request assistance from the others to bring the situation under control.

Emergency Planning
Emergency planning, coordination and preparedness initiatives are delivered on a region-wide basis to all electoral areas and municipalities by the RDOS, overseen by a Manager of Emergency Services who reports to the Manager of Community Services. The Manager is supported by an emergency program coordinator. As noted previously, the service currently features a FireSmart coordinator and two wildfire mitigation specialists who are temporarily funded through grant programs, for a total of 4.5 FTE. The efforts of the regional emergency planning team are most visible during emergencies; however, the preparedness initiatives and awareness campaigns are ongoing.

Within the boundaries of the RDOS there are four volunteer SAR teams: Keremeos, Oliver/Osoyoos, Penticton and Princeton. These four teams combine their efforts to provide mutual aid service throughout the region. Calls for service from Okanagan Falls are generally responded to by Penticton Search and Rescue. The RCMP is responsible for all SAR activity within their catchment areas. Municipal and provincial governments also contribute towards SAR operations within the Okanagan-Similkameen region.

911 Emergency Call System
As noted, operation of the E911 service is contracted to the RDCO in partnership with E-Comm — an emergency communication centre located in the Lower Mainland. 911 fire calls for the South Okanagan-Similkameen region are relayed to a secondary dispatch centre at the Kelowna fire hall. 911 medical first response calls are relayed from E-Comm to the Provincial BC Health Services Emergency Dispatch Operations Centre in Kamloops.

Victim Services
Victim Services is one of the programs provided by the RCMP's Community Policing Unit from the detachment in the City of Penticton.

➢ What is spent by RDOS on the service?

The 2023 budget for each of the emergency services is outlined in Figure 3. The Emergency Planning budget was significantly higher in 2023, but only due to grant-funded projects, including grant funding for 2.5 staff positions, an emergency program review, and heat preparedness funding. In future years the budget is generally in the range of $395,000, supported primarily by tax requisition. In addition to the service costs, there are also operating and capital reserve accounts created for future expenditures. Service-related reserve totals are included in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Service Operating Costs (2023)

SERVICE	COST[1]	TAX REQ
OK Falls Fire	$442,967	$442,967
Emergency Planning	$1,677,898	$351,922
911 Call System	$1,081,537	$1,058,107
Victim Services	$10,278	$9,400
Total	**$3,212,680**	**$1,862,396**

[1] *Cost and tax requisition figures are from RDOS 2023 budget for entire service area (not just OK Falls or Area D). Administration allocation is not included*

Figure 4: Service Reserves (2022)

SERVICE/RESERVE	TOTAL[1]
OK Falls Fire - Equipment	$944,509
OK Falls Fire - Building	$230,944
Emergency Planning - Operating	$101,912
911 Call System - Capital	$363,704
911 Call System - Operating	$275,739
Victim Services - Operating	$3,327

[1] *Reserve totals are as at the end of 2022*

Capital Items

Some of the services have capital needs in addition to the service operating costs. The majority of capital budget items are funded through capital reserves, with some funded through grants such as gas tax. Administration costs associated with the capital works are funded through operating reserves. Figure 5 presents the 2023 capital budgets related to the individual services, excluding the administration costs.

It is worth noting that Okanagan Falls Fire Protection service includes annual firefighting equipment (hoses, equipment, protective gear) averaging about $50,000 each year. Neither 911 nor Emergency Planning had any additional capital projects (beyond those noted in the Figure 5) planned prior to 2027.

Figure 5: Service Capital Costs (2023)

SERVICE	2023 CAPITAL ITEMS	COST
OK Falls Fire Protection	Fire hall construction, roof replacement, boat, SCBA packs, firefighter equipment and gear	$586,750
Emergency Planning	Hybrid SUV	$60,000
911 Emergency Call System	Telecommunications Study, Willowbrook tower upgrade, repeater	$272,000

➤ How are the costs recovered?

Fire Protection

The cost of the Okanagan Falls volunteer fire department is raised through property taxes requisitioned from the properties within the service area based on the assessed value of the property (land and improvements). The cost of auto extrication services outside of a fire department boundary is funded provincially using a task number assigned by Emergency Management BC. The costs of capital works are funded primarily through capital reserves into which operating funds are contributed each year, but also through grants when available.

Emergency Planning

The cost of emergency planning is shared by all jurisdictions (electoral areas and municipalities) in the region. Costs are typically raised through property taxes based on assessed value (land and improvements). Grants are relied on when available — currently grants are funding the FireSmart coordinator as well as the two wildfire mitigation positions (2.5 FTE).

911 Emergency Call System

Tax requisitions for E911 emergency telephone services are based on the assessed value of improvements only. The costs are shared by all the

region's jurisdictions (electoral areas, municipalities and the Penticton Indian Band).

Victim Services
The requisition for the victim services contribution is raised through property taxes within a defined service area that includes all of Electoral Area "D", including Okanagan Falls, along with Areas "E", "F" and "I".

➤ What is the cost to a typical residence?

The tax impact on areas within the OK Falls Incorporation Study Area of the RDOS volunteer fire department and RDOS emergency services is shown in Figure 6. The amount owing is based on a home valued at $500,000, of which 50% of the value is assumed to be land value, and 50% improvements.

Figure 6: Cost Impact on a Typical Residence (2023)

SERVICE	RES RATE	OWING[1]
OK Falls Fire	0.2447	$122.33
Emergency Planning	0.0082	$4.11
911 Call System[2]	0.0507	$12.68
Victim Services	0.0016	$0.80
	Total	**$139.92**

[1] *Impact is calculated on a home assessed at $500,000. Amount excludes 5.25% Surveyor of Taxes fee charged in unincorporated areas*

[2] *Taxes are levied on improvements only ($250,000 in assessed value)*

INCORPORATION

➤ What would a decision to incorporate mean for these services?

Incorporation may impact the fire services, but the emergency planning and 911 service would continue to be provided by the RDOS consistent with the current framework. Victim Services would be provided through a contract directly with the municipality. It is worth noting that other emergency services, such as ambulance, are provided by the province not the regional district. These other services are not referenced in this sheet of emergency services. Because it is a provincial service, incorporation will not affect the cost or level of ambulance service. Figure 7 summarizes changes to authority for service provision that would result from incorporation.

When an area incorporates, the existing fire protection service will often become a municipal service, particularly where the service area and the new municipal boundary are similar. There is no requirement, however, for the regional district's fire department to become a municipal fire department,

Figure 7: Service Authority After Incorporation

SERVICE	Current Authority	After Incorporation
Ok Falls Fire	RDOS	Municipality
Emergency Planning	RDOS	RDOS/ Municipality
911 Call System	RDOS	RDOS
Victim Services	RDOS	Municipality

and there are a few instances where municipalities are instead served by fire departments which continue to be funded through the regional district, and provided as regional district services. Keremeos is an example of a municipality that is served by an RDOS fire department; similarly, the City of Trail is served by a regional district volunteer fire department.

As a municipal service, the fire department would become the Okanagan Falls municipal department, with more direct oversight and decision-making from the municipal Council. Service could continue to be provided to the existing service area, including all the areas outside the incorporated municipality, through a service agreement (contract) with the RDOS. The Regional District would continue to have a service area

that covered the current properties (minus the municipal area). Tax revenues raised in the Regional District's service area would be paid to the new municipality. The RDOS has similar contracts in place with the City of Penticton and the Town of Princeton to provide fire protection to parts of Electoral Areas "D" and "F" (rural Penticton) and Electoral Area "H" (rural Princeton) on the respective outskirts of these municipalities. There would be little or no impact to those areas outside of an Okanagan Falls municipality in terms of services received.

Residents within the municipal boundaries would not necessarily see any difference in their fire service under a municipal model. The fire department would, however, be required by provincial legislation to provide fire inspection and investigation services. Municipal fire departments are obligated to provide these services under the *Fire Safety Act* — obligations that are not imposed on regional districts. The Okanagan Falls VFD (chief and deputy chief) currently has certification to undertake inspections and investigations, but does not currently undertake the work (the OK Falls Chief noted that he intends to resume inspection services). Extra responsibilities may increase the workload demands of the department and may compel the new municipality to increase the stipend for the Fire Chief position or consider a full-time chief in place of the existing POC Fire Chief position. Such a decision would increase the cost of the municipal fire service.

The new municipality could apply for grants for the department, and could arrange for funding and borrowing to upgrade fire department's facilities or purchase trucks or turnout gear. These decisions would be approved by the Council.

A newly incorporated municipality would continue to participate in and contribute to the RDOS regional services of emergency planning and 911 emergency call services. Although emergency planning would continue to be provided by the RDOS, municipalities are required under the *Emergency Program Act* to have their own emergency plan, and ability to manage disasters. As the local authority, the municipal Council (and as the head, the Mayor), can declare a local state of emergency within the municipality, and subsequently implement an emergency response. The regional emergency planning service assists municipalities with training/ exercise, planning, and support during events.

Victim services would continue to be provided by the RCMP; however, the municipality would be expected to make its own contributions directly to the service.

➤ How would decision-making change?

If an Okanagan Falls municipality were created, the RDOS would be replaced as the local government by the new municipal corporation; similarly, the RDOS's Board of Directors would be replaced as the local governing body by the new Municipal Council for the newly incorporated area.

The new Council would only have authority over the fire service if it became a municipal fire department (as is assumed in this *Service Sheet*). A regional department would continue to be governed by the RDOS Board. At present, only regional district fire Chiefs are part of the South Okanagan Similkameen Fire Chiefs' Association. The chief of a municipal department may therefore not be eligible to join the Association (that would be up to the Association to determine), however, the department would continue to share resources, training and provide mutual aid to RDOS fire departments.

➤ How would service delivery change?

As noted, Council would have the authority to establish an Okanagan Falls muniicpal fire department, or continue to contract the RDOS to provide the municipality with fire protection service. The municipality would have the authority to set up separate service delivery options or providers for services such as 911. Given, however, that 911 is provided at present both to rural areas and municipalities, it can be assumed that new municipality would continue to participate in the current contract arrangements.

➤ How would service costs change?

Maintaining the same level of emergency services and fire protection as currently provided, would not necessarily have a significant impact on the servicing costs. The change to a municipal fire department may bring some additional costs associated with providing fire inspections and investigations withn the municipality, but it may also provide some tools for the municipality to seek grants for specific objectives for its own department. An estimated increase in 0.5 FTE for the fire department has be assumed.

Additional costs of preparing a municipal emergency plan are assumed to be one-time costs, likely to be covered through grants, and are not reflected in the operational budget.

Figure 8 references the impacts incorporation would be estimated to have on the operation of emergency services that would be provided by a new municipality. Included in the Okanagan Falls Fire service is an additional $45,000 to increase the honorarium paid to the Chief to reflect time involved with inspections as well as some additional administration. It is assumed that the even though the new municipality may need to make a direct contribution to Victim Services, that the amount raised and provided from the community would not change.

Figure 8: Cost of Municipal Services and Taxes

SERVICE	RES RATE	OWING[1]
OK Falls Fire	0.2695	$134.75
Victim Services	0.0016	$0.80
	Total	**$135.55**

[1] *Impact is calculated on a home assessed at $500,000.*

Assuming the new municipality has an agreement to continue servicing the existing service area (i.e. including the unincorporated areas beyond the new municipal boundary), the existing OK Falls Fire Service reserve accounts (equipment and building) would transfer to the new municipality. The reserve accounts were established to fund equipment and buildings for the Okanagan Falls Fire Department, and to benefit the entire service area. The accounts would be dedicated for the same purposes, and to benefit the same service area, upon transfer to the new municipality.

SUMMARY OF TAX IMPACTS

Figure 9 presents the tax impact of the two scenarios – the current situation (RDOS) and incorporation (MUNICIPAL).

Figure 9: Tax Comparison of Regional District and Incorporation Scenarios

SERVICE	RDOS[1]	MUNICIPAL[1]
OK Falls Fire	$122.33	$134.75
Emergency Planning	$4.11	$4.11
911 Call System[2]	$12.68	$12.68
Victim Services	$0.80	$0.80
Total	**$139.92**	**$152.34**

[1] *Impact is calculated on a home assessed at $500,000.*

[2] *Taxes are levied on improvements only ($250,000 in assessed value)*