

Recommendation:

That the Fire Chief-2024-04 report, dated April 16, 2024, regarding Fire Department Paging be received and that Council authorizes the Clerk to sign the Bell Paging Agreement as it is circulated through the participating municipalities.

Overview:

Peterborough County fire departments have used pagers as the primary emergency notification system for volunteer firefighters for decades. Voice paging was originally used, but that was upgraded to the alphanumeric paging system for better coverage and privacy protection.

Our current paging system is owned and operated by TAS Page, who also provided paging services for a variety of other users, such as transportation services, realtors, and medical personnel. Since the expansion of smart phones and apps, the demand for paging services has dwindled down to primarily fire departments; as a result, we have seen a significant increase in cost and TAS Page's future business model does not include paging.

At a meeting of the Peterborough County Fire Chiefs Association (PCFCA) on November 30, 2021, a committee was created to explore options for future paging coverage. The committee was made up of three members whose primary roles were to explore paging options while ensuring compatibility with the fire dispatch center. The members of the committee were the Fire Chief of Douro-Dummer, the Fire Chief of Trent Lakes and Deputy Chief from the City of Peterborough, who's primary role was to ensure systems were compatible with fire dispatch. Each municipality has had representation through their fire chief and/or deputy fire chief at meetings, presentations and via email correspondence. The committee also presented their findings and recommendation to the CAOs within Peterborough County.

The committee discussed the following 6 options and the associated challenges/benefits:

1. Continue with existing infrastructure
2. Kronos Simulcast system (handled by Kenwood/Bearcom)
3. Swissphone DiCal system
4. Two tone voice analog paging
5. Two tone voice digital paging
6. No paging - rely on the Who's Responding App

The County Fire Chiefs had presentations from Kenwood, Bell and Swissphone, and discussions with the current paging provider. Key points and considerations that came out of these meetings included:

- Paging notification and radio communication should be on separate systems, so that if you lose one, you don't lose both.
- Towers should be CSA approved to withstand storms.

- Redundancy of the paging system must be created - if one location is damaged, we need to have reliable redundancies in place to ensure continuous, seamless paging. We also need to consider what redundancies are in place for dispatch center interruptions.
- Company profiles should be thoroughly examined to ensure the right fit. Many service providers are smaller companies, have been bought out by larger companies or close their business. This leaves a risk of discontinued services (like what we are facing now). Any providers selected for the project should have experience with paging systems; including building, set up and long-term service support.
- Monitoring of the system, with a reliable notification and response system, must take place 24/7/365.
- Service agreements, including preventative maintenance must be included, as well as details regarding response time to loss of services 24/7/365.
- Immediate availability of spare, replacement equipment should be included in any proposal.
- Tower sites should have secured, back-up power options, such as a generator.
- The Who's Responding App is not marketed as a primary notification system.

Based on the proposed options and feedback, both from Fire Departments and CAOs, the PCFCA Paging Review Committee recommended to pursue the Swissphone DiCal/Bell system proposal, owned by Bell.

The Swissphone DiCal system provides a high quality, advanced paging solution that fulfills the need to have a disaster-resistant emergency notification system. This is achieved with dispatch CAD integration, a back-up system at dispatch, at the alternate dispatch center, plus a tablet that can run paging notifications in the event of a CAD or critical network failure. Ring technology is used from tower site locations and continuous monitoring of the system to ensure seamless operations. Paging infrastructure is not shared with emergency radio infrastructure.

The Swissphone DiCal has been dominant in European countries and is widely used in the United States, with adoption also occurring within Ontario. Recently the Swissphone DiCal/Bell system was the solution of choice for the two major cities in Ontario. The committee did engage with those two cities to discuss these projects. Because Bell is a Public Safety Network with long-term stability, they are the service provider of choice. Bell has the capacity to provide 24/7/365 monitoring with reasonable technician support timelines. All of Bell's towers are CSA approved, have battery backup, and meet NFPA standards. Of the seven Bell sites that were included in the Swissphone DiCal design for Peterborough County, 5 have an automatic back-up generator and 2 have generator ready hook-ups.

Conclusion:

Peterborough County Fire Departments needs a new paging system. After extensive research, meetings, and presentations, we believe the Bell owned Swissphone DiCal system is the best option to provide reliable emergency paging for fire departments.

Financial Impact:

Historically, we have benefited with a low-cost solution for the use of paging due to other agencies sharing that cost of the infrastructure required. Now that most of those agencies have opted out of paging, our niche requirements will be costlier.

The 2024 budget included the anticipated cost for paging as a partial year due to the timeline to build the new system. The attached agreement is for a seven-year term and the cost is fixed for that period. The cost for each municipality is approximately \$62,000 per year.

Report Approval Details

Document Title:	Fire Paging System.docx
Attachments:	
Final Approval Date:	Apr 9, 2024

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

Martina Chait-Hartwig