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FOIPOP Review

Approved to Release

Date March 22/2011

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Halifax Regional Council
March 8, 2011
In Camera

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Original Signed
Wayne Anstey, Acting Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: March 4, 2011

SUBJECT: Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency Candidate Eligibility List

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Senior Management of HRFE has taken the decision to expire the 2007 candidate eligibility list. The following outlines the process that was undertaken leading to this decision. In addition, the various options that have been considered as a solution to the situation that HRFE faces with respect to the candidate eligibility list for the position of Fire fighter are overviewed.

BACKGROUND

As a result of a decision made in January 2011, candidates were advised that the current eligibility list is to expire on Saturday, December 31, 2011. There are 94 names on the list, down from 148 at its creation. It is anticipated that a further 20 candidates will be hired in 2011.

There have been questions about why the list is being expired and the fairness of the process. HRFE's past practice has been to establish a two year eligibility list with the ability to extend or expire the list based on budgetary and operational requirements. Candidates were advised they were not guaranteed employment; however, communication of the expiration of the 2007 eligibility did not happen at the time. When the list was established, HRFE believed the list would be exhausted, as every other eligibility list had been to date.

The decision to expire the 2007 eligibility list as of Saturday, December 31, 2011 was made by HRFE Management after full consideration of all the options. The pros and cons were considered along with the impact to the candidates. This information was then communicated to the current candidates at an information session held on Wednesday, January 19, 2011.

Rationale for HRFE Management Decision:

Although the decision to expire the list was made, various alternatives were considered prior to taking this decision. Each of these options is referenced below, and includes the rationale as to why they were not considered a viable option.

However, the basis for the decision to expire the list lies primarily in the administrative requirement to do so in order to initiate a new process. In order to ensure fairness, transparency and consideration for those candidates who have gone through the recruitment process to date, it was determined that the list would expire as of December 31, 2011 and a new recruitment process would be initiated.

This does not mean the individuals who have made considerable investment in time and money will not be given due consideration in the next recruitment. As communicated in the information meeting of January 19, 2011, these candidates will be given consideration going forward which, again, will be determined through the process review.

The rationale for this lies not only in the need to meet operational requirements for the HRM Fire Service on recruitment, but to acknowledge several unique considerations. These include:

- Vacancies have not occurred at the rate originally anticipated. In consideration of the current statistics, the 2007 eligibility list, if maintained, would continue to be in place for approximately four more years.
- Consistent with best practices it does not make sense to have an eligibility list in place for an indeterminate period of time. Maintaining the 2007 eligibility list will result in it being in place for approximately eight (8) years from time of creation. It was never HRFE's intent to keep this list in place for an indeterminate period of time and candidates are now aware that the 2007 list will expire at the end of this current year. Maintaining the current list will impact HRFE's recruitment and service delivery efforts as follows:
 - (a) **Volunteer Recruitment and Retention.** Volunteer fire fighters are valued within HRFE. Maintaining the 2007 eligibility list will have a detrimental impact on HRFE's ability to further attract and retain dedicated volunteer fire fighters. This could result in a loss of HRFE's capacity to serve the community through volunteer service as they may see no viable career track which is a key factor in their decision to volunteer. Of the 94 candidates on the current list, 55 are volunteers.
 - (b) **Volunteer to Career Opportunities.** The volunteer recruits have received HRFE training and job exposure because of their service. We believe this experience should provide these candidates with an advantage in the recruitment process, thus recognizing their commitment to HRFE and increasing their opportunity for success in the competition. These volunteers, in order to be valued, need a reasonable and timely sense of when a career opportunity might arise. Expiration of any eligibility list provides a clear sense of when future career opportunities might arise.

(c) **General Public Career Opportunities.** Maintaining the current list will diminish the general population's access to the fire service as a viable career option for a significant period of time. There is an appetite in the community to recruit again and maintaining the current list will prevent any further recruitment from the general public. This could result in losing an entire cohort of youth as potential applicants, many of whom regard HRFE as preferred employer.

(d) **Employment Equity Commitment.** Maintaining the list is inconsistent with HRFE's dedication to hiring candidates from the under-represented communities. This could potentially result in the loss of diverse applicants and impair HRFE's ability to meet its commitment to being representative of the community it serves. HRFE has, to date, demonstrated this commitment by increasing representation from the under-represented groups since 1996. There are only six (6) candidates remaining on the 2007 Eligibility list from the under-represented groups.

(e) **Bona Fide Occupational Requirements.** The 2007 eligibility list is comprised of candidates who met the requirements for the position of firefighter at the time of testing. Going forward, these candidates would still be subject to evolving recruitment criteria (bona fide occupational requirements) and thus will create further upset should they fail as a result of passing years and change in their capacity.

DISCUSSION

As a result, HRFE have taken a decision to expire the 2007 eligibility list. This decision ensures that:

- HRFE maintains a fair and consistent recruitment process
- The list will have been valid for an appropriate amount of time enabling volunteer recruitment to be maintained & the general population will have an opportunity to apply to the fire service
- HRFE's employment equity principles are appropriately considered
- The list is reflective of the projected number of anticipated career positions
- A new eligibility list attracts new volunteer fire fighters
- Will consider the Ombudsman's observations in the following areas:
 - Candidate pool
 - Interview workshops
 - Cost transparency
 - Sequence of screening tools
 - Candidate standing on the list

The predominant issue with the expiration of the list is that the current candidates will be required to compete in a new process. However, it is the position of the fire service that a new process is imperative for meeting operational needs and a commitment for consideration of these candidates has been made.

The decision to expire the list has been made, however; various options and alternatives were considered prior to taking this decision. Each of these options is referenced below and upon careful consideration, none of these options were deemed viable.

Alternative 1: Maintain the 2007 eligibility list

Maintaining the list would see 74 candidates remaining. However, it is anticipated that it would take up to four (4) years to hire this group. Since the list was created in 2007 there remains a need to ensure all candidates would still meet hiring requirements and individuals, including volunteers, will be prevented from competing in the recruitment process for an extended period of time. HRFE believes this will cause greater concern than expiring the list, and potentially increase in citizen complaints. In addition, a high percentage of volunteers indicated upon intake that they intended to pursue a career as a firefighter. HRFE's ability to retain these volunteers will be almost impossible, thereby, impacts the ability to sustain a volunteer force.

Alternative 2: Maintain the 2007 eligibility list and complete a designated recruitment to create a subsequent hire list

This approach would increase representation from the under-represented groups and demonstrates HRFE's commitment to employment equity. However; it would cause fairness and consistency concerns with respect to the implementation of the recruitment process as follows:

- Adding additional diverse candidates to the existing eligibility list would further extend the timeframe the list is in place, preventing applications from the general public
- Would impact the expectations of the current candidates on the list
- Diverse candidates may be viewed as receiving preferred treatment

Expiring the list enables a fair approach and removes the risks associated with maintaining and extending the duration of the current list. A general recruitment process that includes community outreach will satisfy our commitment to employment equity.

Alternative 3: Maintain the 2007 eligibility list and go to general recruitment

This would see all individuals retaining a spot on the list. However, the list would become even longer, enhancing the issues outlined with the current list. It would also call into question the fairness of the recruitment process and a disparity between the candidates from the old and what will be a new process.

Alternative 4: Retain existing volunteer candidates, expire general candidates and go to another general recruitment

This alternative would meet the need to support the volunteer base, a group that the fire service has invested in substantially, however; general recruit candidates would be disadvantaged.

Alternative 5: Give candidates two years notice of the expiration of the list versus one year

Eligibility lists are normally active for two years. Candidates are aware that they are not guaranteed a position and that decisions to hire are based on operational requirements. This gives an extra year for those on the list to become gainfully employed.

However, the issues associated with keeping the list would remain until the end of 2012 and would also prevent a new recruitment process for an additional year. This alternative also extends the concerns of those who will continue to face expiration at the end of the two year timeframe and exacerbates the issues we currently face.

HRFE Decision: Expire the 2007 eligibility list effective Saturday, December 31, 2011. Initiate a new recruitment process which includes considerations for current candidates, volunteer recruitment and retention and up to date requirements.

This process will be developed and finalized by the end of October 2011.

In summary, based on operational requirements, it was determined that expiring the list as of Saturday, December 31, 2011 was consistent with best practices (including a clear expiration date) and therefore HRFE Management believes this to be the right decision.

Legal Opinion Redacted

Next Steps:

Between March and October 2011, HRFE will continue to develop and finalize a recruitment process that reflects fairness, consistency, transparency and best practices. A new process will be developed by October 2011, further information on the implementation of the process will be provided at that time, however, certain principles will be respected in the development of that process, including:

- Consideration for the current eligibility list candidates
- Volunteer attraction and retention
- Operational and financial well being of HRM and its citizens
- Employment Equity Policy (1997)

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

HRFE's inability to recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters would have a serious effect on service delivery capabilities. The opportunity to pursue a career as a firefighter is a key factor in many candidates' decision to volunteer with HRFE. Maintaining the existing list will mean it will have been in place for a duration upward of eight (8) years, preventing new volunteer candidates from consideration until the current list is exhausted. In the absence of a viable career track, we risk losing a substantial resource in our volunteer service, thus requiring a large influx

of career firefighters to meet our operational requirements. The replacement cost of the volunteer fire fighting force has been estimated at a minimum of 55 million dollars annually.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Project and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Project and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The fire service will continue to discuss the development of this process with their stakeholder groups including the volunteer members and general recruitment candidates.

ATTACHMENTS

HRFE 2007 Recruitment Guide

If the report is released to the public, a copy can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Stephen Thurber, Deputy Chief Director, 490-5542

Report Approved by: Original Signed
William Mosher, Chief Director, 490-4239

The Firefighter's Job

Educates the public in Fire & Life Safety

- Provides peer and public instruction/education through frequent contact with community members during station tours, routine pre-fire life safety and building inspections, community events, and school presentations.

Participates in Training

- Is involved in a continuous learning process, and concerned with increasing personal knowledge of firefighting and the Fire Service.

Responds to emergency and non-emergency situations

- Drives and operates highly specialized vehicles under emergency conditions.
- Works at high levels of exertion under conditions of smoke and water, in fire-ravaged buildings.
- Extinguishes fires, handles hazardous material, provides emergency medical care to victims.
- Responds to non-emergency requests for service.
- Responds to motor vehicle collisions.

Maintains the vehicles, equipment and stations

- Maintains all equipment such as ladders, hose, rope, breathing apparatus, extinguishers, personal protective equipment, all associated rescue equipment and vehicles; maintains cleanliness and performs routine maintenance in the fire station.

Employment Equity Employer

HRM is an Employment Equity Employer, and considers appropriate representation in the Municipality's workforce during any recruitment campaigns. Therefore, applications from Aboriginal people, visible minorities, women and other designated groups are encouraged.

HRFES recruits every 2 to 3 years. When a recruitment is announced, advertisements are placed in the local newspaper and on our website. Applications are not accepted outside the recruitment process.

Salary & Benefits

HRFES offers a comprehensive benefit package, including life, accidental death, health, dental insurance and pension benefits. We also offer many opportunities for career development and promotion.

The current salary for probationary firefighter (Firefighter 4) is \$31,278.50. Advancement from Firefighter 4 to Firefighter 1 is subject to the successful attainment of each level. Currently a Firefighter 1 earns an annual salary of \$62,557.00.

For more information on becoming a firefighter contact:

Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Service
Alderney Gate, 3rd Floor
40 Alderney Drive, Dartmouth

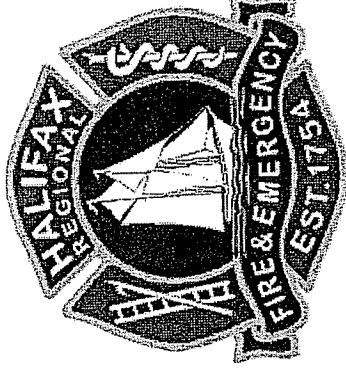
902-490-5530

Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 1749, Halifax, NS B3J 3A5

website: www.halifax.ca/fire

Updated May 2007

Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Service



*It's Not Just A Career, It's
A Lifestyle*

Recruitment Guide 2007

www.halifax.ca/fire

Firefighting as a Career

Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Service (HRFES) is dedicated to the highest degree of professionalism. Employment as a Firefighter is a challenging and rewarding career, which offers women and men the opportunity to help others while working as a member of a highly skilled professional team. HRFES is dedicated to enhancing and preserving the quality of life, property and environment, through education, leadership, partnership and effective response to emergencies.

Join Our Team

Our members must ensure ethical behavior and accountability are part of their nature. They must also maintain personal values that align with HRFES's values of **trust, dedication, integrity, caring and diversity**.

Please be aware that Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency Service receives hundreds of applications. Candidates must successfully complete a stringent recruitment process that may take over 2 years.

This brochure provides a general overview of the current qualifications and requirements for firefighters. These guidelines are subject to change.

About Halifax Regional Municipality

Halifax Regional Municipality covers approximately 5,577 square kilometers. HRFES has a total staff complement of 479 career personnel and 800 volunteers, operating out of 60 Fire Stations.

What you will need to apply to be a Firefighter

- Good life-style choices and decisions
- Be a non-smoker and maintain non-smoker status
- High level of physical fitness
- Technical aptitude
- Current Nova Scotia Class 5 motor vehicle operator's license or equivalent

Qualifications

- Proof of Grade 12 or equivalent
- Proof of age, 18 years or older
- Legally entitled to work in Canada
- Personal fit with the organization and position requirements
- Ability to understand and communicate clearly in English (oral and written)
- Normal unaided hearing - hearing thresholds no greater than 30 decibels in each ear at 500 Hz, 1000 Hz and 2000 Hz and no significant loss in higher frequencies
- 20/30 corrected vision with color and peripheral vision appropriate for the position of firefighter
- Driving abstract demonstrating responsible and safe driving behavior
- A Criminal Records check, with no conviction for a criminal offense for which a pardon has not been granted

Certifications that must be completed before hire:

- Proof of Current Standard First Aid and CPR-C certificates
- Proof of current certification of the NFPA 1001, Firefighter Level I from IFSAC or Pro Board approved agency.

The Selection Procedure

To be considered for employment, candidates must successfully complete the following:

Phase 1

- Application Screening
- Aptitude Testing
- Integrity Interview
- Job-related tests such as the CPAT (Candidate Physical Abilities Test), blacked out mask and ladder climb tests

Phase 2

- Polygraph Test
- Board Interview

Phase 3

- Submission of all remaining documentation, with the exception of the Firefighter Level 1 Certification
- Educational, Personal, and Professional Reference Checks
- Medical Testing
- Criminal Record Check
- Attendance at an accredited Fire School (if required)

Photo Identification is required during all phases of the selection process

Costs

Candidates are responsible for all costs and fees associated with the application process. Details of these costs will be available when the next general recruitment is announced.

*Methods of Payment: Certified Cheque
or
Money Order*