

Citizens Deserve Answers about Fire Protection Shortfalls in Oshawa

City trying to silence fire fighters on serious public safety issue



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OSHAWA – Oshawa fire fighters are calling on the city to publicly respond to a scientific analysis released earlier this year that shows fire protection shortfalls, because citizens deserve to be informed about matters that directly impact the safety of their families and their properties.

In a December 18th meeting with the Oshawa Professional Fire Fighters Association, city officials failed to seriously address the results of a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analysis the fire fighters released in October, before the meeting broke down and the fire fighters were asked to leave.

Instead of coming out with a meaningful response to the GIS analysis, it appears the city is trying to drop a cone of silence around the entire issue, says Peter Dyson, President of the Oshawa Professional Fire Fighters Association.

“We are trying to get answers about fire protection on behalf of the public, but the city is only trying to shut us down and bury this issue,” Dyson said, adding the association is being forced to consider legal action to even appear before council as a delegation to discuss the matter on behalf of the public.

“If the city disagrees with our GIS analysis and would like to refute its findings, that’s fine – show us the details. Otherwise, we expect, and the public expects, answers to some serious questions that have been raised about public safety in Oshawa,” Dyson said.

It’s now been over a year since a terrible tragedy highlighted fire department resource shortfalls in Oshawa. Yet the public has not been consulted on fire protection and the fire fighters’ association has been blocked at every turn trying to discuss it with the city.

The GIS analysis used computer mapping and actual fire department response data to chart street-by-street response capabilities throughout the city. It clearly showed that Oshawa’s current fire department deployment model fails to meet National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards for public safety, especially downtown where increased population density and other factors mean a higher risk from a fire safety standpoint.

Despite the increased need for fire protection resources downtown, the city removed a vehicle and personnel from Station 1 in early 2017 and relocated them elsewhere.

“We are extremely frustrated, and we remain concerned about public and fire fighter safety. But we will not allow the city to ignore our GIS analysis and its conclusions about the lack of adequate fire protection in Oshawa.”

The GIS report, which is available at www.oshawafirefighters.org, recommended that in order to work toward meeting the NFPA 1710 standard, the city should adopt a deployment model that provides an initial deployment 15 fire fighters to low-density structures instead of the current 13, consider five or six

fire fighters per vehicle in high-density and high-risk areas and add an additional suppression vehicle at Station 1 staffed with four multi-role fire fighters.

Dyson again emphasized that his members do their best with what they have every time the alarm sounds, but have urged the association to be vocal about fire protection shortfalls and their impact on the citizens they are sworn to serve.

In the meantime, fire fighters ask citizens to demand an official response to their GIS report from the city and continue to urge all Oshawa residents to ensure their own safety by having working smoke alarms on all levels and practicing other fire safety strategies such as escape planning.

CONTACT

**Peter Dyson, President
Oshawa Professional Fire Fighters Association
(905) 391-6234**