

Shelburne council approves dissolution of fire board, moves to fee-for-service model

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Shelburne Town Council is taking further steps to re-establish a fire department under the management of the municipality.

During their meeting on Monday (June 2), Shelburne Town Council unanimously passed a motion supporting the dissolution of the Shelburne and District Fire Board and re-establishing a fire department as part of the Town of Shelburne by the second quarter of 2026. The motion also looks to contract fire services to the surrounding municipalities based on a fee-for-service model.

"When you look at the current status the fire service doesn't change, what's changing is the management perspective," said Deputy Mayor Shane Hall, who is chair of the local Fire Board. "When we look at some of the things that are coming in the future, the legislation and requirements for these firefighters is only going to be increasing so it's certain that we need to get our heads wrapped around the fact that the management structure needs to change to match."

The Shelburne & District Fire Department, located at 114 O'Flynn Street, serves the communities of Amaranth, Melancthon, Mono, Mulmur and Shelburne. The department consists of one full-time fire chief, one volunteer deputy fire chief and 28 volunteer firefighters.

In its existing structure, the Shelburne & District Fire Department is operated by the Shelburne District Fire Board, which consists of two representatives from each of the five municipalities, and provides emergency services to the Town of Shelburne and surrounding communities.

"The arrangement that was conceived in 1991 and is captured in this agreement made a lot of sense in 1991 and it served our five communities well over a number of years," said Mayor Wade Mills, who sits on the Fire Board. "Something doesn't necessarily have to be completely broke to recognize that there's a better way of doing it. We're not saying that this system is failing flatly, but there definitely is a better way of doing it and what we're proposing here tonight provides a pretty clear framework for a better path forward."

According to the report, the Town of Shelburne funds roughly 57 per cent of the operating and capital costs of the Shelburne & District Fire Department as of the 2025 budget for a total of \$903,535.35.

"Our relative share of the annual cost is increasing year-by-year as the town grows—we're close to 60 per cent now. Despite that fact we have two votes on the board, the same as the other four municipal partners. So, whether you're paying 60 per cent of the bill or 8 per cent of the bill, you have the same number of votes. From a structural point of view that's something which just isn't working any longer," said Mills.

In September of 2024, the County of Dufferin completed a Multi-Jurisdictional Fire Prevention and Protection Modernization Plan. Within it, four recommendations were approved by County Council.

The four options recommended for the Shelburne & District Fire Department (SDFD), included:

1. A single fire department operated by the County of Dufferin
2. A single fire department operated by the Town of Orangeville

3. Governance of the various fire departments revert to municipal council with a contract for service model

4. ?Status quo? with some enhanced administrative supports

Town of Shelburne staff recommended that Council choose option 3 and offer a fee-per-call service model for the surrounding municipalities. The report also notes the option of a one-time capital buy-out for the four municipalities, which would see the Town of Shelburne buy-out the capital, fleet and building expansion of the fire services.

While the Town of Shelburne looks to take over management of the local fire services, the report notes a plan to create an advisory committee with the surrounding communities, that are contracting fire services.

The suggested structure of the advisory group would consist of the mayors from each municipality purchasing services, who meet on a quarterly basis with the fire chief, the Town of Shelburne's chief administrative officer (CAO) and administrative staff.

?It would be based on a collaboration, consultation and regular engagement to ensure there's an understanding of the breadth of issues in the operations of the administration as well as the capital. It would not be simply a unilateral imposed outcome,? said Denyse Morrissey, CAO of Shelburne.

?We need not compare a potential future Shelburne model to an Orangeville model, a Caledon model or to any other model that's currently in existence. We have the ability at this place in time to sort of be the masters of our own destiny and work with our other four municipal partners to make sure we shape something going forward that everybody's happy with,? said Mills. ?In my mind, this advisory group will be a meaningful tool in terms of providing input on the part of the other four municipal partners.?

As part of the passed motion, the Town of Shelburne has requested the fire board suspend all spending related to the expansion or construction of a new fire hall, which is estimated at a future cost of \$15 million.

The Town of Shelburne has requested a response from each municipality by July 23, regarding the proposed 2026 one-time buy-out approach and the proposed fee for service costs for 2026 and 2027 under the contract fire service model.