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Export date: Fri Oct 30 1:02:29 2026 / +0000 GMT

Town resolves to terminate participation in fire board

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Town of Shelburne has formally begun the process of pulling out of the Shelburne and District Fire Board.

Council passed a resolution to formally terminate its participation in the Shelburne and District Fire Board during a meeting on Jan. 26. This decision has been in the works for some time, having been discussed in previous meetings last year.

Council recognizes, however, that there will be challenges associated with this transition. These include, but are not limited to, financial obligations, asset valuation, redistribution, and any applicable payment arrangements, which the town will seek to resolve before the transition takes effect, so that emergency services remain uninterrupted.

Deputy Mayor Shane Hall stressed that this wasn't an abrupt move, and Shelburne will continue to work towards making the transition as smooth as possible for the next year.

?I just want to make certain that it's clear that while we'll support the motion this evening, we still need to take every reasonable step to come to the resolution,? Hall said. ?This is ultimately the direction that we'd like to go, but there's other steps that need to be taken.?

The fire board currently runs local fire services for Shelburne and four neighbouring townships. Under an agreement signed in 2019 among the participating municipalities, any member can withdraw by giving written notice, with the withdrawal taking effect at the start of the next year.

This move follows council's earlier decisions to support dissolving the fire board and to re-establish a municipally controlled fire department, in part because Shelburne contributes the majority of the fire service's operating costs but has the same representation on the board as much smaller partners.

The town also says it is open to negotiating and cooperating with neighbouring municipalities to continue providing fire protection, prevention, and inspection services on a fee-for-service basis once it has its own department in place following the transition.

Mayor Wade Mills said that discussions will continue with other municipalities to come to a mutually beneficial solution.

?I can confirm those discussions are continuing and that the intent, I think, is embedded right in the resolution,? he said. ?We're confirming our willingness to negotiate, and that is still our preferred outcome. This formally starts the clock so that we're not losing any time, and we are providing the notice within the prescribed period that the agreement dictates.?

For the next year, the Shelburne and District Fire Department will continue to operate as normal, as the transition is worked out, but soon a new fire department under municipal control will be serving Shelburne and the surrounding area.