



Municipality of the District of Argyle

Item: Consolidation of East and West Fire Departments

Date: July 24, 2025

Vision statement

Argyle is the community of choice to invest, live and play.

Mission statement

Argyle invests time & talent in growth opportunities in fishing, tourism, and renewable energy sectors.

Argyle provides affordable taxation while providing safe and healthy communities and strives to engage and inform our residents on decisions that affect them most.

Argyle provides high class, accessible recreational and cultural facilities and helps celebrate its unique heritage and culture and welcomes new residents to our region.

CAO's Recommendation:

That Council endorse the consolidation of East and West Pubnico Fire Departments and absorb the legal and accounting costs related to the fusion of both departments.

East and West Pubnico have already made the decision to merge; one fire department, two stations. This means that all calls for East or West Pubnico fire will go to both stations immediately, and in the end, there will be one non-profit organization, constitution, policy booklet, operating guidelines etc for both locations.

This move is a step forward in streamlining fire services for the region and would positively impact on the requirements for new trucks, insurance and other costs. It is my recommendation that the costs associated with the consolidation be paid by the municipality, so that the departments are not financially penalized for this advancement.

Suggested motion:

Move that Council endorse East and West Pubnico's decision to consolidate operations and be financially responsible for the legal and accounting costs related to the consolidation.

Background:

East and West Pubnico have been discussing merged operations for years now, and the fire service review work as led by our consultant solidified this intent. Both East and West are called upon when there's a fire in either location under the existing Mutual Aid Agreement. Both parties recognize the importance of response time in the case of an emergency, and how often they work together on every call.

Other factors in their decision include the proper organization of resources and volunteers. Both organizations have seen drops in volunteer numbers, especially during fishing season. Relying on both resources and volunteers would improve response time and appropriate responses for both areas. The departments are already on the same call channel for 911 calls.

The process to consolidate organizations can be a long process, and the municipality has intentions of being involved, as there would certainly be learning experiences coming from this event for future fire departments that may wish to do the same. Work has already commenced to determine the process here.

Risk factors to consider:

The coordination of calls, and the combination of training and skillsets of the 2 departments would increase the ability to respond to fire or medical first responder calls. As both stations will be appropriately equipped, there is no less response time expected. If anything, being on the same call at the same time would reduce the response time of the secondary station.

The decision to consolidate has been made at the department level, this is not a consolidation request on the part of the municipality, rather an accommodation to their request.

MGA considerations:

The responsibility of fire fighting rests ultimately with the municipality, according to Section 293.

A municipality may maintain and provide fire and emergency services by providing the service, assisting others to provide the service, working with others to provide the service or a combination of means.

Financial considerations:

See financial considerations in the pros and cons assessment below. The consolidation would cost MODA additional funds, and the annual savings would be incurred by each department. Since we are the funder, this indirectly benefits Argyle.

The capital budget includes \$150,000 towards fire equipment and gear. This is where the funding would come from for the consolidation.

Pros and Cons of suggested action:

Pros

- Currently, fire departments need to meet minimum standards on vehicles for residents to have a proper insurance premium reduction. Having 2 separate departments makes that obligation more difficult to achieve than one department.
- Vehicle selection and amount would be harmonized. In short, the department would require less 'extra' vehicles per station. Savings per vehicle would be considerable, excluding the replacement cost, savings could approach \$8,000 per vehicle per year. There may be other savings associated with less paperwork, combining efforts etc..
- Access to higher trained captains when combined operations.
- Consolidation of area means a consistent area rate, and an increased population paying the rate. The larger the population, the more people that share the financial burden. Each person should pay less.
- Better coordination of geographic coverage.

Cons

- Cost of amalgamation, while absorbed by Argyle under this recommendation, could amount to \$15,000 one time (estimated based on previous amalgamation work.)
- Coordination of operations between both organizations will have to be arranged by the departments. The West Pubnico department has rental and bar operations as well as a fire station. Proper governance and operations would have to be established.
- Geographic disagreements or traditional boundary arguments.