

BYLAW 20958 - FIRE RESCUE SERVICES BYLAW AMENDMENT NO. 11

Recommendation

That Community and Public Services Committee recommend to City Council:

That Bylaw 20958 be given the appropriate readings.

Purpose

To amend Bylaw 15309 Fire Rescue Services Bylaw to:

- Replace the definition of “false alarm” with “Unwanted Alarm” to better align Edmonton Fire Rescue Services with the National Fire Protection Association guidelines that define the types of alarms that do not pose a fire threat.
- Remove the fee schedule from the bylaw to centralize decisions that impact the budget to the four-year Operating Budget and supplementary operating budget adjustments.

The amending bylaw is provided as Attachment 1, and the redline bylaw as Attachment 2.

Readings

Bylaw 20958 is ready for three readings. A majority vote of City Council on all three readings is required for passage. If Council wishes to give three readings during a single meeting, then prior to moving third reading, Council must unanimously agree “That Bylaw 20958 be considered for third reading.”

Advertising and Signing

This Bylaw does not require advertising and the Bylaw can be signed and thereby passed following third reading.

REPORT

Unwanted Alarms

Edmonton Fire Rescue Services regularly evaluates its emergency response services for opportunities to reduce risk to the community and for the effectiveness of emergency response on events. Through this evaluation, it was observed that there has been a 57 per cent increase in ‘alarm calls’ since 2019. These are calls that are triggered by fire detection systems, both residential and commercial, or by bystanders who have called 911 because they hear an unidentified alarm. A significant proportion of these calls do not pose a fire threat, do not require an emergency response and could be prevented. For example, in 2023 there were 13,364 alarm call responses and 1,502 of these calls, or 11 per cent, required support from emergency services as seen in Attachment 3.

Bylaw 20958 Fire Rescue Services Bylaw Amendment No. 11 proposes to amend Bylaw 15309 Fire Rescue Services Bylaw by replacing the definition of ‘False Alarm’ with ‘Unwanted Alarm.’ This shift reflects a closer alignment to the terminology used by the National Fire Protection Association 72: National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code to address alarm calls triggered by faulty fire detection systems, human error and other situations that go beyond the current definition of ‘False Alarm’ and do not pose a fire threat.

| Existing - False Alarm | Proposed - Unwanted Alarm |
|---|--|
| <p>“false alarm” means (i) an alarm from a fire safety monitoring device that is not caused by heat, smoke or fire; or (ii) a request for fire rescue services where no actual danger or possible danger to safety, health and welfare of people, property or the environment exists.</p> | <p>“Unwanted Alarm” means the activation of a Fire Alarm System at any type of property, regardless of how caused, as a result of which a fire rescue services response is provided where no actual danger or possible danger to the safety, health and welfare of people, property or the environment exists.</p> |

Similar to the approach employed by the Community Standards and Neighbourhoods branch, Edmonton Fire Rescue Services uses an escalating process of the 4Es (engage, educate, encourage and enforce) to achieve a reduction in ‘Unwanted Alarms’.

- **Engage:** High users of the service will be proactively contacted to establish awareness and provide a contact for questions and what they can do to reduce their unwanted alarms.
- **Educate:** Comprehensive information will be available on edmonton.ca and a communications campaign will launch in Q1 2025 to raise awareness. Frontline firefighters will be provided with a physical handout resource to distribute during unwanted alarm responses. This handout will include information about the fee schedule and the implications of unwanted alarms on the fire service.
- **Encourage:** After an ‘unwanted alarm’ call, EFRS will follow up with alarm system owners or businesses to assess the cause of the unwanted alarms and offer recommendations to

BYLAW 20958 - FIRE RESCUE SERVICES BYLAW AMENDMENT NO. 11

prevent future occurrences. This practice provides an opportunity for direct engagement and education with the responsible party.

- **Enforce:** EFRS will enforce the bylaw with an invoice for service after the second occurrence. As a courtesy to residents and business owners, a fee is not levied on the first unwanted alarm within a consecutive twelve month period. In addition, an appeals process will be established to provide property owners the opportunity to have their fees reversed where the unwanted alarm is beyond their control.

As a result of shifting from 'false' to 'unwanted' alarm, EFRS is proposing several key updates in the bylaw to support this change:

- Adding an Alarm Business definition: This definition means any company whose core business is related to the sales, installation, maintenance and monitoring of Fire Alarm Systems. This was a necessary addition with the recent expansion of residential and commercial Alarm Businesses which were not directly identified as impacting emergency response in the last update of the Bylaw.
- Adding a notification of work requirement: To reduce the instances of unwanted alarms caused due to a property owner or an alarm business installing, servicing, repairing, or undertaking maintenance of their alarm system, the amended Bylaw requires the property owner to proactively contact the City and inform them of work.
- Updating the Unwanted Alarm fee: The previous false alarm fee was only applicable to alarms related to malfunctioning installations or devices and did not capture accidental or malicious activations. Bylaw 20958 will clarify that the delegate of the City Manager may apply a fee where there is evidence that the alarm was caused by the negligence of, or intentionally by, the property owner. An example of this situation is an unwanted alarm resulting from fire alarm system testing or maintenance. This cause of unwanted fire alarms can be minimized or even eliminated altogether by suitable management arrangements to proactively contact the City as described above.
- Introduction of an appeals process: Recognizing that some unwanted alarms are beyond the control of property owners, and that fees are a mechanism for education, Administration will introduce an appeals process. This will allow property owners to request a waiver of unwanted alarm fees if they believe they were wrongly charged the fee based on criteria outlined in the bylaw itself. This process promotes fairness and trust between Edmonton Fire Rescue Services and the community, allowing for fees to be waived where there is sufficient evidence it is in the public interest.

'Unwanted Alarm' calls impact response performance from EFRS and create complacent public behaviour towards potential emergencies. Reducing the number of unwanted alarms will continue to decrease call volumes and focus frontline fire service on the calls where emergency response makes the most impact. This decrease will reduce wear on fire trucks and help to manage fuel volumes. More importantly, it will be another step in managing the mental and physical health of frontline personnel that have been challenged with increasing workloads in recent years.

BYLAW 20958 - FIRE RESCUE SERVICES BYLAW AMENDMENT NO. 11

Fee Schedule Adjustments

If approved, Bylaw 20958 also removes the fee schedule from the Bylaw 15309. The amendment removes the requirement to incorporate fees, fines and permits into the bylaw before they are decided upon as part of the four year operating budget and supplemental operating budget adjustment Council decision-making processes. The setting of fees will be delegated to the City Manager and available as usual on edmonton.ca for Edmontonians. Council will be able to provide alternative direction on the fees as they see fit during the budget process. This streamlining reflects the approach used by other services including transit, recreation centers, development permits and safety codes.

This report, bylaw and related attachments are not adding any new fee types. The main changes are that fees are moving from a bylaw to a fee schedule and that fees are being changed based on inflation and other economic conditions. Edmonton Fire Rescue Services has in long standing charged fees for services, fines and permits related to:

- Fire inspections for the installation or removal of flammable fuel tanks, new business license approval and special events floor plan review and inspection, among other related services.
- Permits for the transportation of hazardous material, fireworks and pyrotechnics and permits for special event fire pits, among other related services.
- Fire rescue response to emergency events and hazardous material incidents, among other related services.
- Requests for the service of a member to provide witness interviews, providing copies of fire investigation reports, and duplication of hardcopy photographs, among other related services.

The types of fees charged to residents for fire rescue response was reviewed in 2020 based on discussions with Council. While the amendment to the Bylaw delegates the authority to the City Manager to add new fees, Administration commits to informing Council in advance of operationalizing these fees.

The fees were last increased in 2020 for inflation and no longer adequately cover the costs of service delivery. Administration will provide a recommended fee schedule update as part of the Fall 2024 Supplementary Operating Budget Adjustment. The proposed fee changes will reflect inflation-indexed rate increases from 2021 to 2025 with the exception of consumer and display fireworks permits, which will remain at their 2020 values based on previous commitments made by Administration to remove barriers to firework use for community events.

The updated fee schedule that will be presented at the 2024 Fall Supplementary Operating Budget Adjustment is available in Attachment 4. No new fee categories have been added. Fees will be updated regularly based on the true cost of service and remain in line with the current economic realities faced by Edmonton Fire Rescue Services. This includes accounting for inflation, changes in service costs and other economic conditions that impact the City of Edmonton's ability to deliver services effectively.

BYLAW 20958 - FIRE RESCUE SERVICES BYLAW AMENDMENT NO. 11

Recovering costs for motor vehicle collisions on provincial land

EFRS is currently exploring the possibility of billing for motor vehicle collision responses on provincial highways outside of City of Edmonton jurisdiction, such as the Anthony Henday, a practice that is already used by other municipalities. While this is a new concept for Edmonton, it could represent a future opportunity to offset costs associated with deploying resources to provincial highways using the existing fee types in the schedule.

Community Insight

Related to the unwanted alarms and revised fee approach, Administration presented this information to NAIOP - the Commercial Real Estate Development Association. This provided an opportunity for building awareness, listening and establishing connections. NAIOP's feedback will be considered in the approach for communicating and implementing these changes. Leading up to the January 1, 2025 bylaw effective date (if approved), Administration will continue to engage other business associations to support the transition.

Related to the unwanted alarms, comprehensive information will be available on edmonton.ca and frontline firefighters will be provided with a physical handout resource to distribute during an unwanted alarm response. This handout will include information about the fee schedule and the implications of unwanted alarms on the fire service. After an 'unwanted' call, EFRS will also follow up with alarm system owners or businesses to assess the cause of unwanted alarms and offer recommendations to prevent future occurrences.

Attachments

1. Bylaw 20958 Fire Rescue Services Bylaw Amendment No. 11
2. Bylaw 15309 REDLINE
3. EFRS Alarm Calls (2019-2023)
4. Edmonton Fire Rescue Services Updated Fee Schedule

Others Reviewing the Report

- M. Plouffe, Chief People Officer and City Solicitor