

WEEK 13- Candidate Q&A – Fire Services

By **Dan Gray** - July 5, 2022 @ 11:05 am



Firefighters assist in hanging flags for the city, Monday May 15, 2022 (Dan Gray/SaultOnline.com)

Our site is going into week thirteen of our question-and-answer feature in which SaultOnline poses a question from the community to those running for both Mayor and Councillor.

This week we asked a question posed by members of the community which we learned after the fact referenced reports not easily obtainable by some of those running for council, including the "Dylon report" which was mistakenly misspelled at the time of e-mail.



Their answers address this concern and we will be working with them to make sure they are brought up to speed on the reports asked.

We appreciate their honesty in their responses and this should not be held against them in any way.

We are only asking those listed in [the City of Sault Ste. Marie website](#) who are running for the respective positions of Mayor and Council these questions.

As always the question is put forward early in the week and a deadline of Friday at noon is given for responses to be submitted. The responses are listed in the order in which they

were received.

This week's question from community members revolved around Sault Fire Services.

1. Do you support the existing Fire Master Plan conducted in 2017 which suggests closing 4 hall and one hall and replacing it with a new fire hall (millions of dollars) near the location of Bruce and Gladstone? Yes or no and explain please.

2. The Dylan Report recommended there should be 4 firefighters per truck in the community, currently that level of staffing is not maintained, Firefighters are deployed usually as 4 in station 1, 4 in station 2, 3 at station 3 and 3 at station 4. 1 in the radio room and the Platoon Chief is out of station 1 but is provided his own command vehicle.

Would you support bringing those staffing levels back up to what is recommended in the Dylan Report?

3. With the amount of Activity on our water, would you support purchasing a year-round boat which would serve the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie and those passing through.

4. Would you support a re-evaluation of the need for a brand new Rescue Truck as the current rescue truck has not been on a call in over 21 months?

As always the answers are placed in a first answered, first presented format.

Do the answers here match yours? Let us know in the comment section.

Mayoral Candidates –

Tobin Kern-

It is essential that we consider the climate emergency when deciding upon investments, which may not have been adequately examined when plans were made in the past. A New build, like a new firehall, usually comes with a big carbon footprint, so less carbon-intensive alternatives must be explored, like refurbishment. Also, such projects usually come with significant capital investment, which likely would not be the best use of resources right now, considering other pressing priorities. As such, I cannot endorse the 2017 Fire Master Plan in its entirety.

In reference to the Dylan report, I support the current staffing strategies employed by Fire Services, and support their expertise to make such decisions. If Fire Services were concerned about the safety of firefighters, it would definitely be worth revisiting the issue, as staff health and safety are paramount.

From my perspective, purchasing a year-round boat out of rate-payer dollars would mostly be a service in support of people of means, and would not be the most equitable way to invest scarce resources. I would, however, endorse a city-supported fundraising initiative, and perhaps an increase in marina fees and gas prices to raise funds for such a purchase. Public safety is paramount, but I would suggest people with the means to purchase watercraft should do more to foot the bill.

Poor investments need to be revisited, and if a past investment is underperforming, it's worth looking at. I would support a re-evaluation of the need for the new rescue truck, that would include input from fire services, to ensure the investment is still seen as being relevant and sound.

Matthew Shoemaker-

I do support the fire master plan from 2017 and the need for the consolidation of 2 fire halls into a single fire hall. This would allow for 4-person trucks and other efficiencies. However, I am not convinced the location should be at Bruce and Gladstone, and I believe a new fire hall is lower on the priority list than a new police station.

I support 4-person trucks but believe this should be done by going to a three fire hall system.

I believe marine rescue should be done by the coast guard or others. I do not believe this should be a function of our fire services.

I was not aware our Rescue Truck hasn't been used in 21 months. I don't know enough about what functions it serves to comment on whether it is needed or not, but any asset that goes unused for nearly 2 years should have a hard look done of it to determine if that's a necessary asset to replace once it reaches end of life.

Ozzie Grandinetti

I do not support the existing Fire Master Plan from 2017 suggesting it close #4 and #1 hall to make one hall at Bruce and Gladstone as I feel this is a waste of taxpayer money as it will reduce response time. By having 2 fire halls the response time to an emergency will be quicker from the nearest location rather than a centralized location. I am not familiar with the current staffing levels and the demand on the firefighters at the current levels enough to comment on whether or not they need to staff up to the levels recommended in the Dylan Report that was drafted 5 years ago and is now dated.

I would be supportive of looking into the cost and need for a boat to serve citizens and visitors, and looking at the resources that other entities (Sault Search and Rescue) have before purchasing. I also think they shouldn't have sold the one that they had in the first place. If we haven't used the current Rescue Truck in over 21 months, then we should be evaluating the need for the existing one and would re-evaluate the need for a new one as it is a waste of money investing in a new one.

Donna Hilsinger- No Response Submitted

Ward 1 –

William McPhee-

1. I personally think the number and placement of fire halls in the Sault are such that fires can be quickly responded to. So I don't think doing that would be of benefit, however I have not read that particular report in full and as such this is just my opinion and not based on the report.
2. I would speak with the Fire Chief and get his opinion on the staffing levels. I would ask if he thought current levels were good or not and if he saw that adding more staff would be of benefit.
3. I think it would be of benefit to at least look into the purchase of a year round boat or a hovercraft. There definitely is a lot of activity on area water ways year round.
4. If the current rescue truck has not been on a call in over 21 months I would want to know why? Is it that there is no need for it or is there a problem with the truck. If there are mechanical issues with the truck then I think a re-evaluation of a replacement is justified. It would not necessarily have to be a brand new truck, I think the possibility of a good used one should be considered as well based not only on cost of the vehicle but how much is it needed within the city. If it is only needed once or twice a year then a good used one would be a better option.

Sandra Hollingsworth – No Response Submitted

Brent Derochie –

1. Do you support the existing Fire Master Plan conducted in 2017 which suggests closing 4 hall and one hall and replacing it with a new fire hall (millions of dollars) near the location of Bruce and Gladstone? Yes or no and explain please.

I do support the Fire Master Plan that Dillon Consulting completed. I support option 3 of the plan which would bring staffing levels back up to the necessary numbers and would have 3 stations. Through consultations with community stakeholders, it is apparent that this is a much-needed plan that should be implement.

The cost analysis has been completed, yet an updated cost analysis should take place to ensure that over the past five years, there has not been a significant increase in cost. Even though it would cost a few million dollars, a new fire station would allow the fire department to service more of the Sault in a more efficient way.

A new fire station would allow our fire department to be a regional and provincial leader in fire management and would also allow them to bring more opportunities for the department to the Sault.

2. The Dylan Report recommended there should be 4 firefighters per truck in the community, currently that level of staffing is not maintained, Firefighters are deployed

usually as 4 in station 1, 4 in station 2, 3 at station 3 and 3 at station 4. 1 in the radio room and the Platoon Chief is out of station 1 but is provided his own command vehicle.

Would you support bringing those staffing levels back up to what is recommended in the Dylan Report?

The 3rd option that the Dillon Report recommended is what I would support as it would always establish the necessary staffing levels. The current number of staff is not adequate to sustain a proper functioning, highly efficient, and up to recommended code department. Having the additional staff would allow faster response times, quicker operations while at the scene, and would also allow more coverage of the community when needed. Having more staff on would allow the three stations recommended to function at a level that they require and would also allow each truck to be manned by the required four staff at a scene. If there were numerous fires at one given time, there would be significant difficulty in managing numerous fires at once.

Having four fire stations, yet bringing staffing requirements up to the recommended minimum would require significantly more hiring, which in turn would cost more money. So having three stations instead would enable the department to have the necessary staff, yet not have to significantly allocate more funding to salaries to hire more staff. Finally, this proposal would not require a significant more amount of money in the interim, and in the long run, would reduce costs for the fire department.

3. With the amount of activity on our water, would you support purchasing a year-round boat which would serve the citizens of Sault Ste. Marie and those passing through.

I would support the purchase of a year-round boat. Currently, the fire department requires the services of another institution's boat; usually it is the OPP's boat or search and rescue's boat. Thus, there is a significant need for the department to have their own boat.

Through discussions with stakeholders, it has been clearly articulated that the fire department would be actively using the boat, and it would be an immense benefit to the department in their service to our community.

The staff have the training needed already, have the equipment, so they just require a boat. Having a boat would enable the department to support water rescue and would allow them to operate independently as they need.

Thus, I believe that this would be a good expenditure for the departmental efficiencies and improving services to our community and ward.

4. Would you support a re-evaluation of the need for a brand-new Rescue Truck as the current rescue truck has not been on a call in over 21 months?

Even though the current rescue truck has not been utilized in over 21 months, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requires a rescue truck to be available to a fire department.

The department has stated that the truck is currently not sufficient to deal with operational requirements and thus a new truck is required. It is important for our department to operate at operational standards, and it would be important for our department to have access to a rescue truck.

The new truck has already been allocated the funds, and it would not be useful for council

to re-evaluate a purchase that has already happened.

Evaluating purchasing procedures going forward I would support, but re-evaluating expenditures to determine whether they should have the money is only going to cost taxpayers more and would back up the docket council needs to study and debate.

Ward 2 –

Lisa Vezeau-Allen- No Response Submitted

Luke Dufour – No Response Submitted

Ward 3 –

Kurtis McDermid-

Sault Ste. Marie made national news when former Fire Chief Mike Figliola's time with us was punctuated with fraud charges and breach of trust allegations. This was the end of a hard time for our Fire Services in which boats were deemed unsafe with no expert or mechanical consultation, staffing was cut below recommended standards and in which ice water and water rescue in a city on the great lakes was deemed "outside our jurisdiction." We are still recovering from this and a lesson needs to be learned.

When it comes to emergency services council and city staff, fire chiefs included, must yield to the expertise and the standards of governing bodies in the field.

I am the son of a firefighter who served Sault Ste. Marie for 33+ years ultimately as a captain. My father came home safe after every shift, he made the news for pulling people from fires, also almost lost his life in the line of duty and performed and trained others with ice water rescue and more. I would expect that the work he did and the work that current and future firefighters do is propped up with experts, governing standards and practices and well researched material not the opinions of a council. Just as council does not set standards such as minimum building code it should not be setting the standards for emergency services but rather implementing and enforcing the standards put in place.

Decisions over funding, services levels, logistics such as location of halls and best practices for emergency services should be set by the proper governing bodies.

The wording of the question using "(millions of dollars)" is a question primed and leading for specific answers in terms of affordability rather than necessity. The real question is, how are we going to make it work? Or where will we find the money? Or a number of other questions. If the experts say we need to move the firehall and if those standards of practice say it is optimal then that is what we need to do. We need to find a way to do it because I do not want to be the one responsible for a subpar standard of emergency services and ignoring the opinions of experts. I want to be one of the ones who finds a way to make it work but the requirements of our emergency services must be met. It will be our job to tender bids, deal with the former location and implement the plan if it deems this necessary. This is the same as considering the Police Services Building.

The questions also mention "The Dylan Report." As far as I can find there is no "Dylan Report." Our city brought in Steve Thurlow from Dillon Consulting Ltd as part of developing this plan which may be what this is in reference to. Forgive me if I am mistaken regarding this report but the agendas and supplementary materials are not readily available back as far as 2017/2018 in the city website and with 3-4 days to answer these questions I was not able to get those council agendas requested, downloaded and reviewed. Without this "Dylan Report" in front of me I cannot speak to the specifics in the questions though my sentiment regarding experts and standards does relate.

All other aspects of this series of questions regarding the rescue truck, staffing levels and so on all fall under my answer above. We have seen what a mess can be made when a council and a fire chief go against industry standards and practices. We cannot allow that to happen again. No more moving backwards and no more sacrificing in the name of short term budgetary concerns. Our city needs to grow our tax base and bring in revenue, not debate whether or not our budget is more important than our emergency services meeting appropriate standards.

Angela Caputo– No response submitted

Ward 4 –

Marchy Bruni – No response submitted.

Ward 5 –

Matt Scott- No Response Submitted

Martin Poirier-

1. I have not been able to find the Fire Master Plan online, notably on the City's website, and in the time allowed to answer this, I will not try.

I saw that the plan was adopted unanimously by the Council at the time it was presented, which makes me think it was not controversial.

Buildings depreciate. Replacing them, especially for essential services, are inevitable capital expenses.

To replace stations 4 and 1 with a new one somewhere in between where they are located can certainly make sense.

2. I did not find the Dylan Report either, and I lack full knowledge of the issues here. Council added an extra firefighter per shift in 2018 in light of the fire department's risk assessment.

This is something best answered with in depth knowledge of the issue, something which I lack as of now.

3. Again, I lack knowledge of this issue. I read that our Council received recommendations from Dillon Consulting Ltd. To withdraw from providing marine rescues, but I do not know

why, nor what it implies.

From the little I know on the subject, the river is under federal jurisdiction. Therefore, I would have assumed that the Canadian Coast Guard, the CBSA and RCMP would be the agencies conducting operations on the waters.

4. I do not know of this issue.

I would first read the existing evaluation if it was done before supporting a re-evaluation. But yes, to evaluate the issue would be the first step.

Corey Gardi – No response submitted

Dave Mornix – No response submitted

The Bi-Weekly scorecard which would normally denote this section has been discontinued, however an overall score will be added to the final write-up each candidate gets near the end of the Q&A sessions in late September.

Do you have a question you would like to be asked of your candidates in the weeks leading up to the election?

Let SaultOnline know and our staff will do their best to get answers for not just you, but the community as a whole.

Thank you for choosing us as your source of news in Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.

Dan Gray

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to

bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

