



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Community Safety Committee
From: Geoff Lake
Deputy Fire Chief
Re: Cost Recovery For Inspection Program

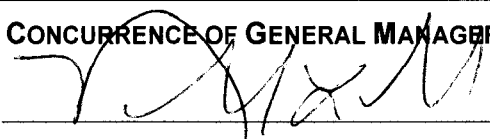
Date: Oct 11th, 2006

File:

Recommendation:

That a cost recovery model for re-inspections be developed for Council consideration as part of RFR's Fire Bylaw review.


Geoff Lake
Deputy Fire Chief

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CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER 		
REVIEWED BY TAG	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>DLW</i>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
REVIEWED BY CAO	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>DLW</i>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

ORIGIN

Referral:

That staff prepare a report on whether or not cost recovery for certain inspections by the Fire Department was possible and if so, address the pros and cons of why we should or should not charge

ANALYSIS

The Fire Services Act requires Council to provide for a regular system of inspection of hotels and public buildings in the municipality. The Fire Chief and persons authorized in writing by the Fire Chief are responsible for conducting the regular system of inspections.

The following identifies the inspection related activities currently conducted by RFR:

- Routine fire inspections by Fire Fighters (Company Fire Inspection program)
- Routine fire inspections by Fire Prevention Officers
- Re-inspection of documented fire hazards
- Other inspections include:
 - Complaints
 - Hazard or risk assessments
 - Construction
 - Business license
 - Aboveground and underground tank permits
 - Dangerous goods
 - Special Permits (e.g. Fire Works, Special events)
 - Burning Permits
 - Requested fire safety inspections
 - Requested comfort information for property purchase or financing
 - Fire protection systems (e.g. sprinkler, standpipe, stationary fire pumps, fire alarm, smoke control systems, emergency power and communication systems, fire department access, fire hydrants and fire fighting water supplies)
 - False alarm follow-up
 - Special industrial hazards (e.g. spray coating, dust production, flammable liquid storage operations, processing and high-piled storage)
 - Fire safety and evacuation scheme management

The fire inspection program allows RFR to:

- Promote and enforce the requirements of the Fire Services Act, BC Fire Code Regulations, and the Fire Prevention Bylaw.
- Promote and enforce fire protection system operational readiness.
- Ensure emergency egress routes are readily available
- Prompts a building owner to complete the required testing and servicing of emergency systems.
- Collect critical information for pre-fire incident planning for safe and effective response to an emergency.
- Educate the building owners and managers on the importance of fire safety and the hazards their individual buildings/occupancies are faced with.
- Identify non-approved changes/alterations and use of existing buildings that are performed without benefit of a building permit. Such changes may severely affect the occupant's ability to safely exit the structure in an emergency or the building's performance in a fire. The non-approved conditions are reported to the appropriate department or agency for follow-up.
- Reduce the likelihood of a building being used for illegal activities such as a marijuana grow-operation or an automotive chop shop.

The Community Charter, Section 194, allows Council, through adoption of a bylaw, to impose fees payable in respect of a municipal service or in exercising authority to regulate, prohibit or impose requirements.

Many cities and municipalities have recognized the excessive time involved with inspection activities, as well as emergency responses that are repetitive or are contrary to codes, standards or bylaws. Several jurisdictions have implemented methods of cost recovery through Municipal Ticketing for certain offences, inspection and reinspection fees or directly billing for time costs.

Imposing fees for certain inspections conducted by RFR have both favourable (pro) and unfavourable (con) factors:

Pros

- Cost recovery promotes an equitable approach to financing inspection services by fairly charging individuals or organizations that receive services or are the focus of the inspection programs.
- Cost recovery emphasizes the accountability of Fire Department inspection services to fee-payers for the delivery of services.
- Acts as deterrent for dangerous or illegal behavior.
- Provides incentive and encouragement for speedy compliance.
- Reinforces fire code requirements as key elements in a proactive fire prevention program.
- Flexibility to charge a flat or adjustable fee for:
 - inspection of a certain building use or occupancy type
 - inspection type conducted (e.g. initial or repeat)
 - inspection by the square footage.
- Reduces frustrating problems for reinspection, retesting, and rescheduling of appointments.

Cons

- public perception of “tax grab”. Inspection services need to be provided regardless of fee being charged (Fire Services Act – requirement for inspection)
- entry in premises may be more restricted if owners believe fee's will be charged
- amount of information to be maintained
- collection of fees will require additional staffing resources

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Financial impact will be the subject of a future report.

CONCLUSION

The Community Charter, Section 194, allows Council, through adoption of a bylaw, to impose fees payable in respect of a municipal service or in exercising authority to regulate, prohibit or impose requirements.

While any proposed fees will likely be unpopular with business owners and the general public, it may be more acceptable to charge fees for re-inspections i.e.: after failing the initial inspection and being required to comply with the existing legislation.

Recommendation:

That a cost recovery model for re-inspections be developed for Council consideration as part of RFR's Fire Bylaw review.

Bob Furlong
Chief Fire Prevention Officer