



Report to Committee of the Whole

From: Andrea Loughlean, Manager of Emergency Management & Elgin-Middlesex Regional Fire School

Date: May 27, 2025

Subject: Radio Working Group Recommendations

Recommendation(s):

THAT the report titled “Radio Working Group Recommendations” from the Manager of Emergency Management & Elgin-Middlesex Regional Fire School dated May 27, 2025 be received and filed; and

THAT Council directs staff to develop an intermunicipal agreement with participating municipalities that sets the terms and conditions for a County-led arrangement for the procurement, ownership, maintenance and contract administration of a regional fire radio system.

Introduction:

On November 12, 2024, Chief Ray Ormerod (Central Elgin) and the Elgin County Fire Chiefs presented to Council regarding the state of the fire radio system. The presentation outlined the administrative challenges, aging infrastructure, and the need for strategic oversight in light of a projected system replacement.

On that date, County Council passed a resolution to form a Radio System Working Group tasked with reviewing the system and returning with recommendations for a more coordinated approach. This report presents the findings and recommendation resulting from that resolution and outlines the next steps for implementation.

The Elgin County fire radio system is a critical communication tool that enables coordinated emergency response across all lower-tier municipalities. At present, the administrative responsibilities for the system are fragmented—Central Elgin oversees the service contract, Aylmer maintains insurance coverage, and other municipalities manage additional components. This disjointed model presents inefficiencies in oversight, accountability, and future planning.

The Working Group’s recommendation is that Elgin County assume centralized administration of the fire radio system, in collaboration with the Radio System Working

Group, and initiate the necessary steps to lead procurement and long-term management.

Background and Discussion:

In 2022, an assessment of the Elgin County fire radio system indicated that a full system replacement would likely be required within five years. However, due to the deteriorating condition of certain components, a replacement is now anticipated sooner than expected, with an estimated cost of approximately \$2.3 million.

In the absence of a centralized administrator, the current approach has resulted in fragmented oversight. This has prompted the fire chiefs from Elgin's lower-tier municipalities to formally request that the County assume responsibility for both the procurement process and the long-term administration of the radio system.

The Radio System Working Group is comprised of the following County and municipal representatives:

- Blaine Parkin, CAO (Elgin County)
- Andrea Loughlean, Manager of Emergency Management & Elgin-Middlesex Regional Fire School (Elgin County)
- Nathan Dias, CAO (Malahide)
- Carey Herd, CAO (Central Elgin)
- Jeff McArthur, Fire Chief (Southwold/Dutton Dunwich/West Elgin)
- Jeff Spoor, Fire Chief (Malahide)
- Todd McKone, Fire Chief (Aylmer)
- Harry Baranik, Fire Chief (Bayham)
- Ray Ormerod, Fire Chief (Ret.) (Central Elgin)

The Working Group evaluated the administrative structure and recommends that Elgin County assume full responsibility for the fire radio system. The County's access to legal, procurement, and financial services positions it to efficiently manage the system and ensure consistency in administration. Given the system's degraded condition and fragmented oversight, a centralized administrative model is both timely and necessary.

The Radio System Working Group recommends that, in leading the effort, the County would:

- Coordinate vendor contracts;
- Oversee insurance and asset management;
- Lead the RFP process for system replacement;
- Administer ongoing operational oversight;
- Equitably bill participating municipalities through an agreed-upon cost-sharing model.

The County would enter into an intermunicipal agreement with participating municipalities to define responsibilities, funding, and governance.

Financial Implications:

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Legal staff time will be expended preparing an intermunicipal agreement but any such agreement will return to Council prior to execution. The intention is that capital expenditures, including the estimated \$2.3 million system replacement, as well as staff time and other soft costs will be cost- shared by participating municipalities. A detailed financial plan and project scope will be developed in consultation with local partners and brought to Council for approval before any commitments are made.

Advancement of the Strategic Plan:

The proposal aligns with the County's Strategic Plan Strategy 3: Service Excellence and Efficiency showing commitment to collaborative emergency service delivery and effective infrastructure management.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

The impact on local municipal partners includes reduced administrative burden through the elimination of fragmented responsibilities, as the County would oversee system contracts, insurance, and vendor management. Municipalities would benefit from improved coordination, consistent system oversight, and streamlined communication, while continuing to have a voice in operational decisions through collaborative mechanisms. Financially, municipalities would share costs equally, including contributions toward the anticipated \$2.3 million system replacement, formalized through inter-municipal agreements. Overall, this transition supports a more sustainable, efficient, and unified approach to fire service communications across Elgin County.

Communication Requirements:

Effective communication will require coordinated engagement with all local municipal partners to ensure transparency, alignment, and shared understanding of the proposed transition. This includes providing clear updates to CAOs, CEMCs, and Fire Chiefs regarding the County's role, anticipated timelines, cost-sharing implications, and the development of inter-municipal agreements. Ongoing communication through the Radio System Working Group will be essential to maintain collaboration, gather feedback, and ensure that municipal needs and concerns are addressed throughout the transition and procurement process. Should Council approve the recommendations in this report, that decision will be communicated to LMPs with the caution that the County is not yet committed to taking on these responsibilities and that should the radio system need replacement before finalization of a County-led arrangement, the LMPs will continue to be responsible for that replacement in the interim, under the existing system.

Conclusion:

The County's assumption of fire radio system administration will address long-standing inefficiencies and support a coordinated, sustainable communication system for

emergency services. Council's approval will enable staff to proceed with legal and administrative steps, in collaboration with the Radio System Working Group and the lower-tier municipalities, to implement a centralized model that supports both immediate operational needs and long-term system renewal.

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Approved for Submission

Andrea Loughlean
Manager of Emergency Management
& Elgin-Middlesex Regional Fire School

Blaine Parkin
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk