



REPORT

Council

Meeting Date: July 9, 2024

FROM: Parks and Open Space Department

DATE: June 25, 2024

SUBJECT: **Oakville Marine Search and Rescue Vessel Replacement - Update**

LOCATION: N/A

WARD: Town-wide Page 1

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That Council provide staff direction on the options for funding OSMR as outlined in the report from the Parks and Open Space and Finance departments dated June 25, 2024, entitled Oakville Marine Search and Rescue Vessel Replacement – Update.

KEY FACTS:

The following are key points for consideration with respect to this report:

- A new TOWARF Search and Rescue (“SAR”) vessel is being constructed with delivery scheduled for early July 2024. The new vessel, at a cost of \$909,958 (including HST), is replacing a vessel that was purchased in 2000 which is at end-of-life.
- This report provides a recommendation that the TOWARF levy fee incorporate funding the acquisition of the new vessel, as well as whole life cycle costs, which includes vessel repairs at key milestones and eventual replacement of the vessel. It is expected the new vessel will have a minimum 40-year life span. The current TOWARF vessel and the new vessel are Town assets.
- TOWARF recently changed their name to *Oakville Marine Search and Rescue* (“OMSR”) to reflect their role more accurately.
- A review of the last 10 years of taskings from OMSR illustrates that, while they are fully funded by the Oakville recreational boating community, they

provide more assistance to Oakville residents and other non-Oakville individuals than to Oakville boaters.

- Since the pandemic there has been a surge in people using the water for swimming, canoeing, kayaking, paddleboarding, and dinghies. Through infrastructure renewal and harbour improvements, the Town continues to provide as much access to Lake Ontario as practical for residents.
- Through this report, staff are reporting back to Council regarding the purchase of the new OMSR vessel.

BACKGROUND:

TOWARF (Town of Oakville Water Air Rescue Force), now OMSR (Oakville Marine Search and Rescue), was established under By-law 1962-127 with the mandate to protect persons using the water areas within Oakville, to perform rescue works and to encourage education of the public in water safety. Primarily TOWARF accomplishes this mandate with a vessel and over 100 volunteers divided into crews; patrolling the waters and waterfront of Oakville and to ensure the safety of persons using small watercraft.

In 1979 OMSR became an auxiliary unit of C.M.R.A (Canadian Marine Rescue Auxiliary). Today OMSR is a Unit of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CGGA) providing Search and Rescue (SAR) as directed by the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Trenton. When *tasked* by JRCC to perform a marine search and rescue operation on Lake Ontario they are paid by the hour by JRCC. These funds are used by OMSR as part of their operating budget with any annual surplus forwarded to the Town for contribution to the vessel replacement reserve.

The current OMSR vessel is a 27 ft. Stanley work boat, purchased in 2000 for \$109,000 and has reached its end-of-life. At that time, the boat was fully funded from the OMSR Vessel Reserve. The Vessel Reserve was funded through annual budget surplus funds in the OMSR budget primarily related to JRCC taskings as well as an annual contribution of \$5,000 from the town Harbours budget.

As background for Council, OMSR operates annually from late April to early October from Oakville harbour patrolling the waters and waterfront of Oakville to ensure the safety of persons using small watercraft. There are 106 volunteers that are led by a Commander. OMSR is also a search and rescue unit of the CGGA through the JRCC in Trenton Ontario. When OMSR is tasked with a search and rescue mission by JRCC their fuel cost and insurance is paid by the CGGA. The types of missions or *taskings* include:

- Swimmers (PIW Person's in Water).

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- Personal Water Craft (PWC) (canoes, kayaks, paddle-boards, sailing dinghies, and jet skis).
 - Other large vessels launched from public boat ramps in Oakville and Bronte harbour.
 - Vessels transiting through Oakville waters.
 - Vessels temporarily moored locally, including those visiting from other harbours/clubs.
 - Taskings outside of Oakville waters not involving a vessel with a seasonal mooring slip in Oakville.
 - Taskings related to an unidentified vessel or person in the water (PIW) where the search is called off by JRCC and nothing is found.

In preparation of this report, staff requested OMSR undertake a review of taskings over the past 10-year period. Included with this report is a detailed breakdown of taskings for the period 2018-2023. The data for the period 2013-2017 was determined to be not sufficiently complete to be included in the 10-year summary of taskings “by type” (please see Appendix A). Over the last 6-7 years the number of taskings assigned to OMSR has increased significantly from earlier in the 10-year period. During the height of the pandemic, OMSR received a record number of taskings due to the increase in recreational boating, use of waterfront parks for swimming, personal watercraft, and use of public boat ramps.

The new OMSR vessel is a purpose-built HIKE 34 ft. Search and Rescue (SAR) vessel that is replacing a 27 ft. work boat. The necessity to purchase a new vessel presented the opportunity to significantly improve crew safety and SAR capability. The key attributes and advantages regarding crew safety and SAR capability are noted below.

Crew Safety

The Hike 34 is designed for SAR operations with 4 dedicated and secure workstations. All stations have full functionality to perform communications, navigation and visual searching through onboard cameras and thermal imaging. This is in contrast to the current vessel, which requires crew to change workstations to perform different functions and the seating is not secure.

The new vessel’s hull and interior are designed to operate in difficult sea conditions at speed and while maintaining crew safety.

With a larger vessel of this design, stability is improved which is important while working on deck and exposed to the elements.

The length of time on the water during missions has increased with many searches lasting multiple days, pausing only for crew changes every 8 to 12 hours. The

physical demands on the crew are reduced with a larger vessel lessening fatigue and ensuring the crew are more alert — reducing the risk of accidents and increasing overall crew effectiveness.

Improved SAR Capability

- Speed

The Hike 34 is approximately 45% faster than the current vessel and, with its improved design, can maintain higher speeds in rougher waters. In the search for a Person in the Water (PIW) the time required to arrive on scene is often a critical determinant to the outcome of a mission. During most of the boating season, Lake Ontario is considered a cold-water environment and carries with it a very high risk of hypothermia. A PIW at the start of the local boating season will likely lose consciousness in 15 to 30 minutes and, without a personal flotation device, will drown within minutes following that initial time interval.

- Electronics

The new vessel is equipped with significantly more advanced electronics for SAR operations as compared with the current vessel including thermal imaging, additional high-resolution cameras, navigation, sonar and radar. All these improvements together will greatly enhance the SAR unit's ability to locate a PIW or vessel in distress.

- Size

The size of the vessels that OSMR is assisting have increased dramatically over the past 20 years. Whereas 20 years ago a 30-to-35-foot pleasure boat may have been nearer the top of the range, it is not unusual now to encounter vessels in the 40-to-55-foot range that require towing to a safe harbour. The increased size and power of the Hike 34 is better able to handle the towing demands of larger vessels. As mentioned above, the size of the new vessel also allows for an increased effective speed and more stable working platform.

- Range

The increased range of the new vessel is an important improvement whether the mission is local or outside of the normal patrol area. Increased range provides the ability to conduct a search for a longer period of time without the need to refuel. When crew changes are required, greater range provides flexibility in where the change occurs, shortening the time spent off-search as it is much less likely that a refueling station is also needed.

COMMENT/OPTIONS:

The new OMSR vessel was awarded to Hike Metal Products through RFP-44-2022 at a cost of \$909,958 (including HST). In accordance with Council direction received at the February 2023 Council Meeting, the new vessel is to be funded partially from the OMSR Vessel Reserve and from an increase to the OMSR levy that each boater, both town and Club, contribute as a portion of their annual mooring slip fee. The increased OMSR fee will fund the purchase of the new vessel, as well as necessary repairs at key milestones over the life of the vessel and the eventual replacement of the vessel (estimated at minimum 40 years), in keeping with sound asset management principles.

Financing

OMSR receives an annual operating grant of \$32,500 from the Town. This amount is primarily generated from a fee to boaters (OMSR Levy) which is included on mooring slip contracts for Town boaters in Oakville and Bronte harbours. Additionally, the various boat clubs also collect a OMSR levy from each of their members with mooring slips. The OMSR levy fee per slip in 2024 is \$26.00 + HST. There are approximately 1,000 mooring slips contracts that contribute to the OMSR operating grant. The remainder of the budget is funded from boat launch ramp fees in Oakville and Bronte harbours. The town's Harbours budget also contributes \$5,000 per year to the OMSR Vessel Reserve.

With the acquisition of the new OMSR SAR vessel, the annual OMSR levy requires review to ensure that the fee collected is reflective of the costs of the program. In accordance with asset management principles and the direction provided by Council at the February 2023 meeting, staff have been directed to incorporate into the fee the cost of the new vessel, major repairs/replacement of key vessel components at various times during the life of the vessel, and the eventual replacement of the vessel at its end-of-life (estimated at minimum 40 years).

In accordance with the February 2023 Council direction, Finance staff have considered the above costs into a financial model over the 40-year period of the boat's expected life. Based on the model, the annual additional cost for the OMSR boat is \$29,000. As a result, with the full cost charged to the boaters, the OMSR Levy would be required to be increased to \$55 per boat (an increase of approximately \$29 per boat), beginning in 2025. This revised fee would be included in the 2025 Rates and Fees as part of the town's 2025 budget process. The financial model does include interest outflow on the funds borrowed from the capital reserve to partially fund the purchase and incorporates an approximate annual inflow of \$20,000 OMSR contribution from the funds they receive through CGGA Taskings. Should this amount change, staff would adjust the model and the fee accordingly.

The levy of \$55 per boater will be significant for the Oakville recreational boating community. For the boaters it is not simply the quantum of the increase, it's the OMSR increase among *other* fee increases. Mooring fees are increased annually by inflation, the Infrastructure Levy is increased each year, Winter Storage rates are increased, as are a multitude of other rates and fees for various services. Staff are concerned that adding another \$29.00 per boater per year may put Oakville at a competitive disadvantage compared to other lakefront communities and marinas. There are vacancies in both Oakville and Bronte harbour this year and the cost of recreational boating is one of the reasons. When the town loses a mooring slip customer, it also loses a roster of other fees (storage, launch, haul, mast stepping/unstepping, blocking, etc.) that produces revenue for the Harbours budget. While our harbours and waterfront are premier destinations, further higher pricing could place our Harbours at a competitive disadvantage. A full Sixteen Mile Creek harbour looking south of the Lakeshore bridge is an iconic and frequently used marketing and economic development tool that portrays Oakville as a premier destination waterfront community.

OMSR Taskings and Contribution to Community Safety

Upon review of the details of the taskings provided by OMSR, it is clear that OMSR provides SAR services beyond recreational boaters with a seasonal mooring slip in town or Club slips in Oakville and Bronte harbours. In fact, the number of taskings assigned favours Oakville residents and others who are using Lake Ontario within Oakville for swimming, kayaking, canoeing, and paddleboarding. Since the pandemic, more and more residents and non-residents are using the lake for other activities besides boating. In reviewing the OMSR taskings, OMSR responds to approximately 55% non-Oakville/Bronte recreational boaters (non-Oakville related) and approximately 45% Oakville/Bronte recreational boaters and local lake users.

OMSR taskings are increasing towards non-boater assistance and safety rather than solely boaters. Oakville prides itself on being a waterfront community and access to the water is important for Oakville residents. This is demonstrated by projects such as adding steps to the water in Lake Ontario shoreline rehabilitations, a new public dock for canoes/kayaks and paddleboards added to the Busby Park launch ramp renewal, a doubling of the width of recent new public launch boat ramps in Oakville and Bronte harbour, and stairs added at South Shell Park for improved beach access. Since the pandemic, Oakville residents, in abundance, are using the town's harbours, waterfront parks and partaking in on-water activities. The most recent citizen survey illustrates Oakville residents' satisfaction, appreciation, and importance they place on harbours, waterfront parks, and green spaces.

Options for OMSR Operation and Vessel Funding

In an effort to balance these various considerations, staff have prepared two options for Council to consider in addressing the need to fund the current and future replacement of the OSMR vessel and any associated refurbishments.

Option 1 – Full cost of boat on the slip fee.

Staff be directed to attribute all costs associated with the purchase and future funding of the new OSMR Hike 34 ft SAR to the recreational mooring customers in town and Club docks in accordance with the direction to staff at the February 23, 2023 Council Meeting. This would result in the full \$29,000 annual cost being added to the slip fee, resulting in a new fee of approximately \$55 per slip.

Option 2 – Partial cost of TOWARF on the slip fee

Based on the statistics from OMSR taskings, OMSR is serving the role of community safety (not just boater safety) and therefore a fixed percentage of tax funding support could be contributed towards the entire TOWARF budget of \$61,500 (\$29,000 for the boat and \$32,500 for the ongoing operations) with the remaining balance being assigned to Oakville recreational boaters (both town and Club slip holders).

A recommended cost split (between tax funding and boater fees) has not been specifically calculated by staff but would be identified through the 2025 Budget Committee process if Council wishes to pursue this option and direct staff on a percentage split to utilize.

CONSIDERATIONS:

(A) PUBLIC

The boating community will be impacted by the decision of Council attributing the costs of the new Hike 34 ft. SAR vessel. It is recommended any increase in boater fees related to OMSR be deferred to the 2025 Budget Process to provide public notification of the potential increase(s).

(B) FINANCIAL

The annual OMSR budget of approximately \$32,500 is primarily funded by recreational boaters with mooring slips in Oakville and Bronte harbours. This report highlights the total annual cost of the new Hike 34 ft. SAR vessel (\$29,000) and provides Council with options to pay for this purchase and its

lifecycle costs. Options include allocating all or a percentage of the cost of the vessel to the Oakville and Bronte recreational mooring slip holders on town and Club docks, with any unallocated portion being funded by the tax levy.

(C) IMPACT ON OTHER DEPARTMENTS & USERS

This report has been prepared by the Parks and Open Space and Finance departments.

(D) COUNCIL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This report address Council Strategic Priority of Accountable Government

(E) CLIMATE CHANGE/ACTION

N/A

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Summary of Oakville Marine Search and Rescue Tasking’s 2018-2023

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