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Toronto Community Housing Corporation

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August 20, 2014

Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly, Chair
And Members of the Executive Committee
10th floor, West Tower
City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Deputy Mayor Kelly and Members of the Executive Committee:

RE: EX44.10 – A Consolidated Toronto Emergency Medical Service and Toronto Fire Service Communications Centre

I am writing to you today on behalf of Local 79 to express our strong opposition to a consolidated communications centre for Toronto Emergency Services (TEMS) and Toronto Fire Services (TFS). Emergency dispatch is working very well and is reaping the benefits of years of technological investment, training, and the hard work of highly skilled TEMS and TFS dispatchers. There is no reason to create disruptions and incur unnecessary costs by pursuing consolidation.

Indeed, Recommendation 15 in the Executive Summary of the Pomax report explicitly states: **"Do not move to a full operational consolidation of the TFS and TEMS communication centres but evaluate sharing technology platforms when upgrading emergency services communications technology."**

Why the change in direction from the report's very clear recommendation?

The Staff Report and Recommendations before you are contrary to Pomax's comprehensive review of emergency services, which Council accepted in July 2013. In particular, the current Staff Report says that, "Although the review did not recommend that the City pursue a consolidated communications centre for TEMS and TFS due to a range of legislative and labour relations barriers, the City Manager and Deputy City Managers did not agree that these barriers were insurmountable and recommended additional due diligence be undertaken to explore this option further."

Local 79 believes that it would be more accurate to say that the Pomax report does not identify barriers; it identifies costs. The Pomax report actually says, "the benefits of consolidating the currently separate fire and emergency medical service centres can be achieved without consolidation. In fact, consolidating the centres will precipitate the negative effects of labour relations issues, and the possibility of opening up communications centre funding negotiations with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care."

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One condition of consolidation would be a guarantee that the Province would continue providing 100% funding for the EMS portion of the proposed dispatch centre. However, as the Pomax report notes, this would likely entail opening up negotiations with the Province and that these negotiations might require concessions elsewhere. The Pomax report also found that EMS dispatch needs between 3 and 8 additional Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) to meet their dispatch targets. If these FTEs are added by consolidating TFS and TEMS rather than by gaining funding increases from the Province, then the City would effectively subsidize a provincially-funded program. Finally, the Staff Report does not acknowledge the additional management difficulties inherent in operating a communications centre that meets both provincial EMS requirements and city fire standards and the administrative costs involved in tracking appropriate charge-backs to the Province.

Local 79 is proud that Toronto's Central Ambulance Communications Centre (CACC) is one of only 138 ambulance dispatch centres in the world with a 'Centre of Excellence' Accreditation from the International Academies of Emergency Dispatch. Local 79 members are highly trained, highly qualified, and offer a distinct and valuable service.

It is not clear how the cross-training that would be needed to maintain this standard could be achieved. The Staff Report acknowledges the need for comprehensive cross-training, but ignores the Pomax report, which notes that emergency dispatch "is a difficult job for many reasons, and only a minority of the population have the aptitude for it and even fewer can learn all the skill sets required to call take and dispatch for two or three types of emergency services." In fact, a report investigating amalgamation of emergency services in Edmonton found that most mergers fail because of "occupational non-compatibility." At the very least, the high degree of occupational difficulty entailed by dispatching for two types of emergency services will impose financial costs from higher rates of turnover, and higher training costs. In addition, Local 79 is concerned about the lack of clarity in terms of whether Local 79's right to continue representing staff in the consolidated centre would be respected.

The TEMS and TFS dispatch centres are organizationally separate but are functioning exceptionally well. There is no need to incur the costs and disruptions entailed by the recommendations the City Manager proposes in this Staff Report.

Yours truly,



Tim Maguire
President

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