



Backgrounder: The Next Step in Creating Diversity in Richmond Fire-Rescue

The RFR Assisted Hiring Proposal

- Richmond Fire Rescue (RFR) will be hiring a number of new recruits and is implementing innovative ways to increase diversity and promote inclusiveness in the department, as well as removing barriers for women and visible minorities.
- The department's high operational standards will not be compromised.
- As part of this process, Council has approved the submission of an application to the BC Human Rights Tribunal to allow an assisted hiring practice directed at female and visible minorities to augment the 2007 fire fighter recruitment.
- Applications will be accepted from all interested applicants.
- The proposed hiring plan must still be reviewed and approved by the Human Rights Tribunal before it can be implemented.

No compromise in standards

- All candidates, regardless of gender or background, will have to meet rigorous, nationally accepted standards in order to become Richmond fire fighters.
- In fact, the City has introduced new psychological and physical testing for fire fighter candidates that is more comprehensive than ever before.
- **Psychological testing introduced**
 - Once the applicants are selected, they will complete two psychological tests, administered by third-party organizations, to determine their suitability to the fire service.
 - These tests evaluate aspects such as interpersonal attributes and fire competencies, which are then weighted and scored.
- **Candidate Physical Ability Test**
 - The City will be using the Candidate Physical Ability Test (CPAT) to test candidates on their physical ability.
 - This is a nationally-accredited standard that is in use in many fire departments across North America.

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- This test has been specifically designed to measure strength, endurance and other actual physical aptitudes needed to perform the critical and essential tasks of firefighting.
 - CPAT provides a proven, accredited system of evaluating candidates - which has not been used by Richmond Fire-Rescue in the past. It ensures that all successful candidates will be capable of maintaining Richmond's high operational standards for fire rescue services.
- **Next Steps after Psychological and Physical Testing**
 - Candidates to obtain medical clearance.
 - Upon successful medical clearance, formal interview(s) and selection will occur.
 - Female and visible minority candidates who require it will then complete the 12-week training at an accredited Fire Academy (the Justice Institute of BC).

Recruitment strategy

- Hiring preference will be given to qualified woman and visible minorities. However it is anticipated that not all available positions will be filled through this manner. For that reason, applications will be accepted from all candidates, regardless of gender or ethnicity, to fill the remaining positions.
- An extensive advertising and community outreach campaign is planned to attract female and visible minorities. Community outreach programs will be further developed over time in order to ensure a more diverse pool of applicants is available on an ongoing basis.

Removing Barriers for women and visible minorities to enter fire-fighting

- The approval from the Human Rights Tribunal would allow the City to proceed to actively recruit female and visible minorities and assist those selected to obtain fire fighter entry level requirements.
- One of the major obstacles is the low number of qualified female candidates graduating from fire academies and colleges across North America.
- The City continues to petition the provincial government and fire academies to train more female and visible minorities as fire fighters.
- Given the lack of female and visible minority graduates, RFR will develop and implement **an** outreach strategy in order to effectively reach this targeted group and communicate that fire-rescue is a viable, appealing and available career for them.
- If candidates are deemed suitable after the psychological test, they will be given time (i.e. approx. 8 weeks) and access to pre-testing training sessions, to prepare for the accredited physical CPAT testing. These pre-testing training sessions, better described as "boot camps" will be offered by City of Richmond fitness staff, at the expense of the candidate, to ensure they are fully prepared for the CPAT testing.
- If women and visible minority candidates are identified, pass the psychological and physical requirements, and fulfil other prerequisites, the City will provide assistance to complete required 12-week fire fighting training. Candidates will be paid minimum wage while completing their training and receive a loan to be repaid at a later date to cover the cost of their training.

Current RFR statistics on women and visible minorities

- The City is committed to building a fire department that is more reflective of the community makeup – without compromising on the department's high operational standards.
- RFR is not unlike other Canadian fire departments in ethnic and gender diversity. Although the department has attempted to recruit females and visible minorities over the last few years, the exiting workforce is comprised mainly of Caucasian males.
- RFR currently has a total of 206 staff who are members of the International Association of Fire Fighters of which two are females and nine are visible minorities.
- By comparison the general makeup of the community is approximately 50% female and about 60% of the populace are visible minorities.
- The status quo is not acceptable. It will take innovative approaches to change this, given the current lack of qualified female and visible minority applicants.

Changing workplace culture

- The City recognizes the need for change at Richmond Fire Rescue and believes that the way to fix the issues of the past is to ensure that there's a structure in place to prevent these issues from recurring in the future.
- The City has taken a number of steps to move Richmond Fire Rescue forward in creating a positive work environment for all fire fighters and increasing the gender and overall diversity within the department, while maintaining high operational standards in providing fire rescue services.
- A full independent review of workplace issues was conducted in 2006 by Sue Paish, a lawyer and expert on workplace issues and a grievance arbitration on harassment issues was conducted by Vince Ready. The City has accepted recommendations on these issues from both Ms. Paish and Mr. Ready. This has already led to improved training for senior management and staff; changes to workplace conduct policies and procedures; review and adoption of new hiring and recruitment practices and improvements to workplace conditions.
- Harassment or discrimination of any kind is absolutely unacceptable. We will investigate complaints thoroughly and will implement rigorous disciplinary action if such behaviour occurs or has occurred.