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"Rural Living At Its Best"

Automatic Aid Pilot Project: Background

1. What is the Automatic Aid Pilot Project?

The Automatic Aid Pilot Project is a two-year agreement between the City of Vernon and the District of Coldstream that provides an automatic response from a neighbouring fire department to certain significant fire incidents.

Under the pilot:

- In Vernon, a General Alarm fire will automatically trigger a response from Coldstream Fire Department.
- In designated areas of Coldstream, a Working (structure) Fire will automatically trigger a response from Vernon Fire Rescue Services.

The additional fire engine and crew are dispatched immediately after the local resources, ensuring that more personnel and equipment are en route immediately. Automatic Aid builds on or adds to currently dispatched resources.

2. Why are Vernon and Coldstream doing this?

The pilot is designed to strengthen emergency response by providing immediate access to additional firefighting resources during serious incidents.

The goals are to:

- Improve emergency response effectiveness.
- Enhance public and firefighter safety.
- Provide additional personnel and equipment earlier in an incident.
- Strengthen cooperation between neighbouring fire departments.
- Evaluate whether automatic aid can improve outcomes during significant emergencies.

3. What are the benefits to both communities?

The Automatic Aid Pilot Project is intended to provide residents of both Vernon and Coldstream with access to additional firefighting resources during significant emergencies.

By improving cooperation, increasing available resources, and strengthening emergency response capability, the pilot aims to enhance public safety while allowing both municipalities to maintain their independent fire departments and local service levels.

4. How is automatic aid different from mutual aid?

With **automatic aid**, additional resources are dispatched immediately when a qualifying incident is reported.

With **mutual aid**, assistance is requested only after firefighters arrive on scene and determine that additional resources are needed.

Automatic aid can reduce delays by ensuring additional personnel are responding while the incident is developing.

5. How does the pilot benefit Vernon residents?

For Vernon residents, the pilot provides:

More firefighters at major incidents

Coldstream resources will be dispatched automatically to General Alarm fires, helping ensure additional personnel are available early in the response.

Enhanced public safety

Having more firefighters can support critical fireground operations, including fire suppression, search activities, exposure protection, and incident management.

Continued local control

The Vernon Fire Department remains responsible for fire protection within Vernon. The pilot does not change governance, staffing, or operational control of the department.

6. How does the pilot benefit Coldstream residents?

For Coldstream residents in the designated response area, the pilot provides:

Access to additional firefighting resources

Vernon resources can respond to qualifying working fires, rather than waiting for a mutual aid request.

Greater emergency response capacity

Additional firefighters and equipment can support local crews during critical incidents.

Protection of homes and property

Earlier deployment of resources may help limit fire growth, reduce fire spread, and improve overall incident outcomes.

Continued local fire service

Coldstream Fire Department remains the primary fire service provider for the community. This agreement supplements existing services and does not replace them.

7. Will residents notice any change when calling 911?

No.

Residents will continue to call 911 in the same way they do today. Fire protection services, stations, and local fire departments remain unchanged.

8. Does this mean the communities are sharing or merging fire departments?

No.

Both municipalities will continue to operate independent fire departments with their own leadership, personnel, equipment, budgets, and governance. The pilot simply allows each department to automatically assist the other during specific qualifying incidents.

9. Will either community lose emergency coverage?

No.

Maintaining emergency response capability within each municipality remains the priority. If a department needs its resources for an emergency in its own community, it may decline or recall an automatic aid response.

10. Are firefighters trained to work together?

Yes.

Both departments use recognized firefighting practices, the Incident Command System (ICS), and coordinated emergency response procedures. Joint training and familiarization activities will support effective cooperation during responses.

11. Is this a permanent change?

No.

The agreement is a two-year pilot project beginning August 15, 2026. Both municipalities will evaluate its effectiveness before considering any long-term arrangement.

12. Will this increase taxes?

No tax increase is projected as a result of this pilot project.

Each municipality remains responsible for its own personnel, equipment, and operating costs for the initial response period.