



## FIRE SERVICES REVIEW FOR CENTRAL YORK RURAL COMMUNITY



**DECEMBER 2025**

Prepared by



## INTRODUCTION

Central York Rural Community was created in 2023 with the amalgamation of the former Local Service Districts (LSDs) of Keswick Ridge and Bright and portions of the LSDs of Douglas, Queensbury, and Estey's Bridge. There are two volunteer fire departments operating in the Central York Rural Community, namely the departments of Keswick Valley (KVFD) and Keswick Ridge (KRFD).

Going forward, Central York Rural Community would like to understand how the fire services should be structured and managed to provide the residents of Central York Rural Community with the best possible service at an affordable cost. Ideally, this would mean a consistent level of service for all areas of the community. Also, Central York Rural Community would like to explore whether there are economies of scale associated with the sharing of resources between the two current operational areas.

A particular issue Central York Rural Community would like to examine is the current fire service boundaries and whether portions of Central York Rural Community currently serviced by fire departments outside of the municipality can instead be serviced by the two departments within Central York Rural Community.

Central York Rural Community recognizes that volunteer firefighters serve their community with a sense of pride and dedication, and the objective would be to maintain this pride and dedication in any future organizational structure.

For this project, Municipal Management Advisors (MMA) was asked to provide an objective third-party analysis of the current fire service in Central York Rural Community and make recommendations about the steps Central York Rural Community can make to retain a strong fire service in the future. The consultant was asked to make these recommendations based on an analysis of the current state and envisioning a future state. Some of the issues that addressed with this analysis are cost of service and annual budgets, organizational and reporting structures, personnel and equipment complement, service boundaries, and short-term and long-term investments required for facilities and equipment.

This report is based on a high-level review of the fire service in Central York Rural Community. It is **NOT** intended to be a fire station location study, a detailed asset

management plan, a detailed personnel remuneration study, or a detailed fire response plan. This project will address the issues Central York Rural Community should consider when managing the municipality's fire service in the future.

## SCOPE OF WORK/METHODOLOGY

The following steps were performed by the MMA as part of this project.

1. Requested and reviewed information already assembled by Central York Rural Community staff (and the fire departments) in relation to the fire service. In particular, MMA reviewed:
  - Known staffing levels
  - Remuneration for volunteers
  - Known reporting relationships
  - Known information on equipment and facilities (age, purchase cost, condition, etc.)
  - Budget information (capital and operating)
  - Response data (coverage area, number of calls, response times, etc.) available from the 911 call centre
  - Community satisfaction (anecdotal)
  - Each department's ability to meet their mandate
  - Issues, if any, as raised by the Office of the Fire Marshall
  - Known information on insurance premiums paid by property owners in the respective service areas
  - Fire prevention programs
  - Training records (summary)
  - Response protocols
  - Mutual aid agreements
  - Any identified major risks
  - Recruitment and retention issues
  - Any other issues

**Note that any information not already available through Central York Rural Community staff was identified and reviewed through the various site visits to the fire departments and through discussions with Central York staff and personnel of the fire departments.**

2. Discussed with the Fire Marshall to identify any issues relating to the two volunteer departments and any advice from the Office of the Fire Marshall going forward.
3. Visited both fire stations and interviewed the Chief and key officers in each department. The purpose of this step was to:
  - See first-hand the equipment and facilities
  - Review with the Chiefs and key officers the information already assembled and obtain any information missing from what has already been provided.
  - Obtain from the Chiefs and key officers their views on strategic issues, future plans, possibilities for sharing resources with the other departments, and any other issues they see relating to the fire services in Central York Rural Community in the future.

The Project Team visited the KVFD twice and the KRFD twice to gather information for the preparation of this report.

4. Documented the information from the site visits and discuss, internally, the key takeaways.
5. Researched remuneration data for the two departments compared with remuneration provided in other similar jurisdictions.
6. Discussed the key takeaways and any information assembled with staff of Central York Rural Community. The purpose of this meeting was for MMA to receive feedback about any other issues that are of concern or that require further investigation.
7. Followed up, as necessary, from the meeting with staff of Central York Rural Community. This included further research into any issues raised by Central York Rural Community officials.
8. Reviewed the existing fire service By-Law for Central York Rural Community for the purpose of recommending any changes. **Finalization of the draft for legal conformity is not a part of this project.**
9. Developed a draft report with recommendations.

10. Reviewed the draft report with Central York Rural Community staff officials.
11. Produced a final report, incorporating any suggestions from Central York Rural Community staff. This final report includes recommendations relating to:
  - Budgeting and remuneration
  - Oversight required by Central York Rural Community Council and staff
  - Existing service areas for both departments and whether there is a rationale for changes
  - Organizational and reporting issues
  - Consistency in service provision
  - Strategic issues relating to the fire service
  - Major issues relating to facilities and equipment and future capital expenditures
  - Public communications
  - The fire services By-Law

**Note:** MMA is making recommendations relating to the service areas in Central York Rural Community, including whether Keswick Valley Fire Department or Keswick Ridge Fire Department should assume responsibility for areas of Central York Rural Community currently serviced by outside fire departments. MMA is **not**, as part of this project, responsible for making the case for boundary changes with the Province of New Brunswick.

## OBSERVATIONS

The following observations were made based on reviewing information provided by Central York Rural Community, having discussions with the Provincial Fire Marshall, through site visits to the two fire departments (KVFD and KRFD) currently operating in Central York, and through detailed discussions with the Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs of KVFD and KRFD. One member of the MMA Project Team is a career firefighter, having served in various positions, including Chief, for the City of Fredericton. He paid particular attention to the operational capabilities of the volunteer departments.

To evaluate the current state of the fire departments in Central York, MMA looked at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). The SWOT Analysis also provides insight to recommendations for improvements. Typically, Strengths and Weaknesses tend to be “internal” issues, while “Opportunities and Threats tend to be “external”.

**Strengths:**

1. Overall. MMA was impressed with the operational capabilities of both KVFD and KRFD. The departments are both striving to improve but are currently providing a good level of service to the residents of Central York.
2. Facilities. Both KVFD and KRFD have well maintained fire halls. They have been recently renovated, appear to be in good shape, and both have large generators capable of providing emergency power during power outages. Like any facilities, there will need to be ongoing operational and maintenance expenses, but there does not appear to be any pressing major renovations required.

KVFD is working on the completion of their training centre, but this should not result in major expenses for the Municipality. KVFD indicated they would be pleased to see KRFD make use of the training facility, when it is completed. Both fire departments will continue to develop water sources such as “dry hydrants” and tanks but, again, these should not result in major expenditures for the Municipality.

Both KVFD and KRFD have gym facilities, which allow members to stay in good physical shape. Currently, a prescribed fitness for volunteers is not mandated.

3. Equipment. Both KVFD and KRFD have good equipment. The firefighting apparatus is well maintained, and is tested (pump capacity) and inspected annually.

The main apparatus required by a volunteer fire department in rural New Brunswick would be pumper/tankers and a rescue truck (for transporting personnel to an emergency scene and supporting personnel on scene). KVFD has a new pumper/tanker (E-10), one that is 9 years old (T-10), and a 25 year old pumper/tanker (T-11) that is still in very good shape. The older unit can be a spare for most calls, while all units may be used for a major fire. KVFD also has

a 2004 rescue unit. Overall, their larger apparatus is in good shape and well suited for the job.

KRFD has a 21 year old pumper/tanker (#781), and a 20 year old pumper/tanker with a 2000 gallon tank (#782). They also have a 2020 rescue unit. While their equipment is in good shape, they have some deficiencies, which will be discussed under “Weaknesses”.

4. Personnel. The Chiefs and Deputy Chiefs for both departments are competent and engaged. They are well trained and are strategically looking towards the future.

KVFD has a total of 44 volunteers, including officers and Level 1 or Level 2 firefighters. This total may seem excessive, but given the realities of attracting volunteers, perhaps it is better to have a more volunteers than are needed in case members are lost due to attrition. The incremental cost for an individual volunteer firefighter is relatively small, consisting of the annual stipend, insurance, and the turnout gear.

KRFD has a total of 36 volunteers but, of these, 10 are “on probation” (have yet to complete Level I), 7 are support members, and 1 is a junior member (less than 18 years old). This will also be a healthy volunteer complement, when all the volunteers achieve their certification.

There is a sense of pride in both departments, which is important in attracting and retaining volunteers. The officers report they have a good working relationship and receive good support from the Municipal CAO.

The Fire Services By-Law stipulates a volunteer must attend at least 60% of the training and 25% of the mandated responses to remain a full member.

5. Emergency Response. Both KVFD and KRFD provide a good level of response for their service areas. KVFD estimates a total response (travel to the fire hall and then to the emergency scene) to their most remote area would be approximately 17 minutes and KRFD estimates the response to the most remote area would be a total of 25 minutes. The response may be slower in daytime hours, Monday-Friday, if there is a lack of volunteers. This emergency response seems reasonable for a rural area.

6. Budget. The current budget appears to be reasonable to support the two volunteer fire departments in Central York. MMA is aware of new “rural communities” in New Brunswick with smaller populations that are served by three volunteer fire departments. That means they have a larger budget commitment for the fire service than Central York because they must support three fire departments instead of two. Their cost/capita would also be greater than that in Central York.
7. Mutual Aid. Both KVFD and KRFD receive mutual aid, when required, from the departments included in the Capital District Firefighters’ Association. This includes the City of Fredericton, which is a department with full-time (as opposed to volunteer) members. The Chiefs in Central York see mutual aid as a strength. KVFD and KRFD both supply mutual aid outside of Central York, when they requested to do so.
8. By-Law. Central York’s By-Law, a By-Law Respecting the Central York’s Fire Services, is current and complete, having been passed by Council June 27, 2023.
9. Volunteers. As noted, Central York is fortunate to have an adequate number of volunteer firefighters, although there may be a shortage in daytime hours from Monday to Friday. Central York treats volunteers well, providing a stipend that is commensurate with other volunteer departments in New Brunswick (note the volunteer firefighters are also eligible for a tax credit on their Income Tax). In addition, the two fire departments provide gyms at the fire halls for the use of their members and they also have banquets (for members and spouses) as a way to show appreciation to the volunteers.

### **Weaknesses:**

1. Equipment. While equipment is generally a strength in the Central York departments, there are some weaknesses.

KVFD has an offroad rescue unit, but it is too slow for a speedy response, and they would prefer to trade the existing unit for a faster “side by side” unit. This would enhance their offroad rescue and forest fire fighting capabilities.

KRFD has two pumper/tankers. However, one is quite old (2004) and the other (a 2005, with a 2000 gallon tank) has a standard transmission, which means not all the volunteers are able to drive it. KRFD may have a problem responding adequately if the 2004 truck is broken down.

Like KVFD, KRFD is not well equipped to do offroad rescue. They would be prepared to sell a large trailer (2016), which is currently underused, to purchase a side by side unit (similar to KVFD). Again, this would enhance their offroad rescue and forest fire fighting capabilities.

## 2. Radio System

- **Dead Spots**

Although the trunked radio system (TMR) generally works well in Central York and is reliable, there are “dead spots” in the Zealand area (covered by KVFD). This is also an area with poor cell phone coverage, which means communication in this area could be problematic and could affect emergency response. The TMR system is the responsibility of the Province (Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Radio Communications Branch – NBDTI RADCOM) so any system improvements would come from RADCOM or the Province. While the dead spots are a weakness, it should be noted the TMR System is a significant improvement over the radio systems that came before TMR.

- **Shared Talk Group**

KVFD is currently on the same talk channel as Millville Fire Department. This is a legacy from the period of time when KVFD and Millville FD were both part of North York Regional Fire Department. After Local Government Reform in 2023, Millville FD is now part of Nackawic-Millville Rural Municipality and KVFD is part of Central York. Volunteers from KVFD now hear all the talk from an emergency scene which does not involve them. The danger is that volunteers from KVFD could turn off their radios due to the irrelevant (to them) talk from Millville FD and then miss an important call for their own area.

3. Water Supply. Most rural fire departments have an issue with having enough water supply in all parts of their coverage areas. Without a piped water system, they must rely on “dry hydrants” (a connection to a natural body of water) or water storage tanks built in strategic locations as supplemental water supplies in cases of large fires. KVFD and KRFD have both developed supplemental supplies, but there are still areas where water supply could be a problem and they will need to continue to develop these supplies over time.
4. Administrative Workload. Prior to Local Government Reform, the fire departments in Central York were both administered by the Province. While the Chiefs were responsible for the emergency operations, the Province (through the Department of Environment and Local Government) assisted with administrative duties such as budgeting, purchasing, and other administration. These administrative duties must now be assumed by the Municipality. The concern would be if the Municipality is not able to provide the administrative support required. Volunteers have only so much time available. They typically would like to spend their volunteer time on training, response, and other operational issues, as opposed to administrative duties.

### **Opportunities:**

1. External Service Boundary Changes. A portion of Central York Rural Municipality (in the Northwest) is currently serviced by Millville Fire Department of Nackawic-Millville Rural Community. The cost of this service for 2025 is \$83,856. The area served by Millville Fire Department is close to KVFD Fire Hall and the Chief and Deputy Chief of KVFD believe this area could be better served by KVFD without increasing the budget for KVFD. MMA concurs with this assessment.

A portion of Central York Rural Community (in the West) is currently serviced by Fredericton Fire Department. The cost of this service for 2025 is \$146,796. The Chief and Deputy Chief of KRFD believe this area is most appropriately serviced by Fredericton Fire Department because Fredericton has “constant manning” and they have a station in close proximity to the portion of Central York that they serve. MMA concurs with this assessment.

Central York currently is paid a small amount by Nackawic-Millville (\$5519 in 2025) and Nashwaak (\$8178 in 2025) for providing fire service in their communities. These communities may decide to provide that service

themselves (instead of using the fire departments in Central York), although they probably cannot provide a better service than they now receive.

The Provincial Fire Marshall informed MMA that, if Central York would like to assume responsibility for any portion of Central York currently serviced by another fire department, that would be the decision of Central York.

2. Internal Boundary Changes. As part of this project, there was a meeting between the Chief/Deputy Chief of KVFD and the Chief/Deputy Chief/Assistant Deputy Chief of KRFD. There is a joint recommendation from the two departments that the boundaries between KVFD and KRFD be adjusted slightly based on which department could provide the faster response. A map showing this joint proposal is shown in Appendix A.
3. Further Collaboration Between KVFD and KRFD. Until Local Government Reform, KVFD was a part of North York and was closely tied to the Millville Fire Department. Now that KVFD and KRFD are both part of Central York, it would make sense that there be collaboration and a sharing of resources, wherever possible, between the two departments as a way to save money and enhance service. Collaboration may include:
  - **Joint training.** Currently, KVFD usually trains on Monday nights and KRFD usually trains on Wednesday nights. With a shared calendar and tracking system, members of one department could see what training was being offered by the other department and may choose to take in that training. Also, training that involves paying for a speaker or for accessing a special piece of equipment may be more affordable if the two departments shared the cost and shared the training time.

Training for the two departments could extend to joint de-briefings when one department has concluded a response to a major emergency.

- **Joint Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).** KVFD and KRFD have similar resources and should have similar emergency response procedures. Central York's By-Law A-8 (Section 28), a By-Law Respecting the Central York Fire Services, notes that the two departments will jointly prepare standard operating procedures, but this has yet to be done.

- **Joint Equipment Tenders.** Both KVFD and KRFD have similar mandates and similar equipment requirements. Efficiencies can be gained if both departments use similar tenders when purchasing equipment. Representatives from both departments could be on a committee to establish the best equipment specifications to meet the needs in Central York.
- **Consistency and collaboration in Fire Prevention and Public Education.** Currently, both KVFD and KRFD have programs for public education in the community. Cooperation between the two departments could include sharing educational material and joint presentations.
- **Consistency in Dispatch.** Currently, KVFD uses *eDispatches* for sending dispatch information to the volunteers, while KRFD uses *FireQ*. Ideally, both departments would use the same dispatch app, probably *Fire Q*. *Fire Q* has good functionality for various fire response procedures including responder tracking & accountability, mapping, incident management & reporting, and communication & messaging.
- **Consistency in an Inventory Tracking Platform.** KVFD currently uses *PSTrax* for equipment asset checks and other functions. This is an app that KRFD would also find to be useful. By using similar apps and similar procedures, it would be easier for Central York to provide administrative oversight to the two fire departments.

4. Long Term Plan for Equipment Replacement. KVFD and KRFD both have significant equipment assets. In particular, each department will probably eventually have three pumper/tankers and a large rescue vehicle (4 large vehicles each). Assuming a life cycle of 20 years for each of these large pieces of equipment, Central York should look at replacing a large vehicle every 2.5 years (2 pieces of large equipment every 5 years). Apart from the large apparatus, the departments will need to replace smaller equipment such as pickup trucks, offroad vehicles, Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), turnout gear, hoses nozzles, and miscellaneous small equipment. Having a long term equipment replacement plan will allow Central York to better manage fire expenses.

5. Station Fire Truck in Douglas. Central York may find it advantageous to keep one of the pumper/tankers of the KVFD at the garage owned by the Municipality near the current Municipal Office in Douglas. Several volunteers from KVFD live in this area and the response in the southern portion of the KVFD coverage area would be faster if these volunteers could respond from their homes. Also, in the event of a major fire during daytime hours (Monday-Friday), volunteers working in Fredericton that are able to leave their jobs for an emergency could access a pumper/tanker on the way out of the City, again making the response faster.
6. Trade Underutilized or Inadequate Equipment. KRFD has a large trailer (VIN 5WFBE222XGW062526) that is not an important part of their response plan. This trailer could be sold, freeing up space in the Fire Hall for other equipment. This may include a 4-seater side by side for forest fires and offroad rescue.

KVFD has a tracked offroad vehicle, which is not fast enough for a timely response to offroad issues. This could be replaced with a 4-seater side by side for forest fires and offroad rescue.
7. Additional pumper/tanker for KRFD. As noted previously, KRFD has an older (2004) pumper/tanker that is nearing replacement age. If this unit could be retained when the new unit is purchased, KRFD would have a spare response vehicle. This is particularly important because the 2005 Western Star used as a second pumper/tanker has a standard transmission and a limited number of volunteers can drive it.
8. Municipal Operations Manager. This relates to the issue of administrative capacity of the volunteer fire departments. If the Municipality decides at some point that the overall workload of the Municipality is such that more staff are required, it may make sense to have a Municipal Operations Manager, and one of this person's tasks would be to look after the administration and coordination of the fire departments.

### **Threats:**

1. Lack of Volunteers. Both KVFD and KRFD have an adequate number of volunteers at this time. However, many volunteer fire departments are finding it difficult to attract and retain volunteers. The alternative to volunteers is a paid fire department or a composite department (part volunteer and part paid). These alternatives are more costly and also can result in friction (or resentment) between the volunteers and paid members. Central York may wish to pursue various strategies to ensure an adequate number of volunteers.
2. Lack of Staffing Monday-Friday During Daytime Hours. Even during periods when there are an overall adequate number of volunteers, there may not be an adequate number that can respond in the daytime, Monday to Friday. It is already an issue and could be more of an issue in the future, depending on the number of volunteers that have to leave the community to work during the daytime. Central York may wish to pursue various strategies to ensure an adequate response during daytime hours.
3. Emerging Risks such as EV Fires. There are an increasing number of electric vehicles on the road today. EV fires are a particular concern for firefighters because of:
  - Potential for extreme heat when the battery is on fire
  - Significant amounts of water required in the response
  - Thermal runaway (one heated cell causes neighbouring cells to heat)
  - Toxic gases given off when the batteries are on fire
  - Electric hazards
4. Offroad Rescue and Offroad Fires. Central York has significant forested parcels of land and a number of trails used by snowmobiles and all terrain vehicles. Currently, their offroad capabilities are deficient because they do not have vehicles that can respond quickly enough.

5. Administrative Workload Exceeds Capacity. Like most rural fire departments, KVFD and KRFD rely on volunteers, both for firefighters, but also for the officers. These officers perform administrative tasks as well as training and emergency response tasks. If administrative tasks such as purchasing, record keeping, or administration become too great, it could detract from the overall response.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

MMA has the following recommendations for Central York Rural Municipality, based on the methodology followed on this project and further to the discussion under “Observations”. MMA recommends that:

1. Central York assume responsibility for providing fire services for the Northwest portion of Central York currently serviced by Millville Fire Department.
2. Central York notify Nackawic-Millville Rural Community and the Office of the Fire Marshall of the intention to assume responsibility for the Northwest portion of Central York currently serviced by the Millville Fire Department.
3. Central York continue to pay the City of Fredericton to provide fire services for Central York in the Western portion of Central York currently serviced by the Fredericton Fire Department. MMA further recommends this be reviewed periodically to determine whether paying Fredericton for this service is still the best option.
4. Central York notify the Provincial Fire Marshall of the intention to slightly adjust the service boundary between KVFD and KRFD, as shown on the sketch in Appendix A.
5. There be further collaboration between KVFD and KRFD on various issues including:
  - Joint training
  - Joint SOPs (as per By-Law A-8)

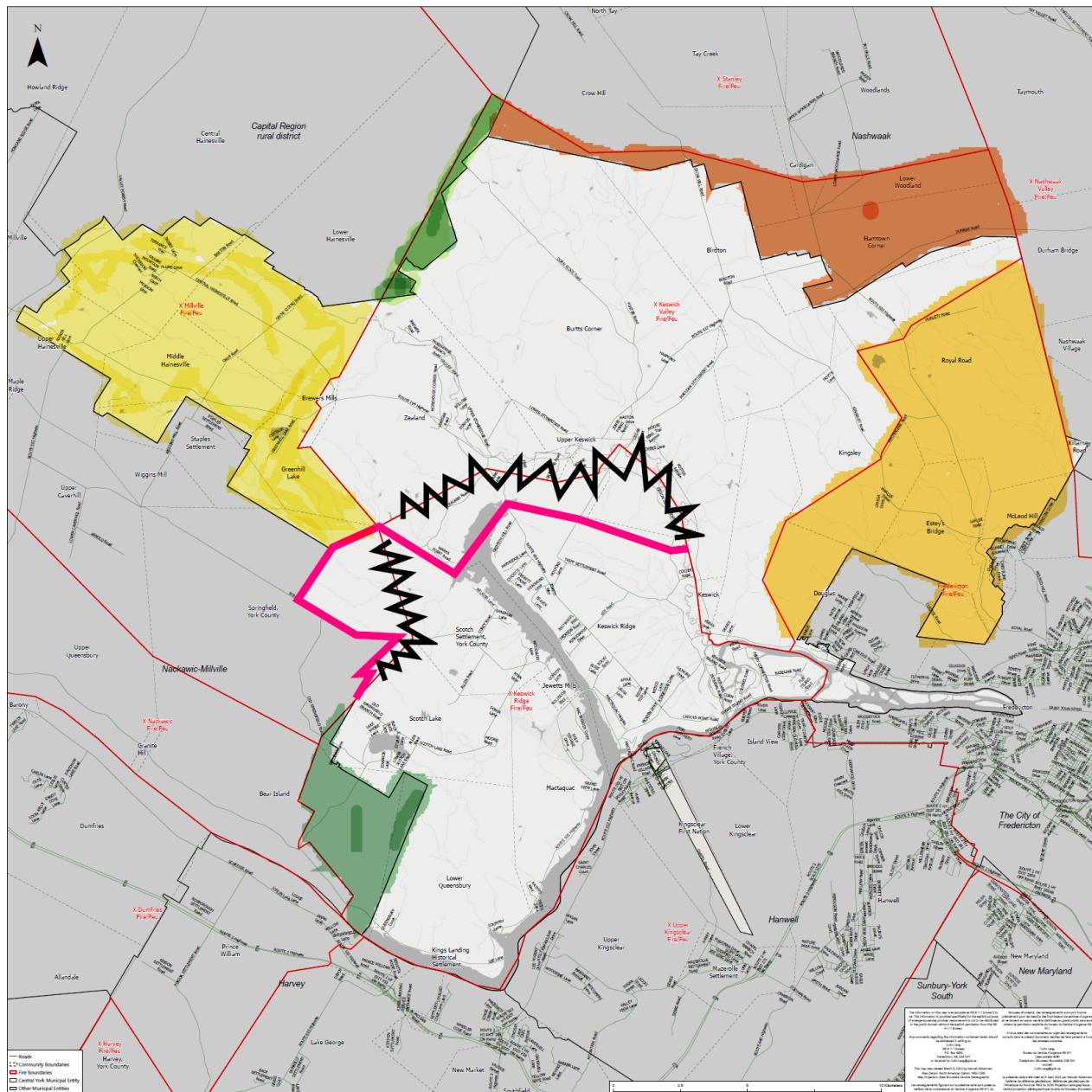
- Joint equipment tenders
- Consistency and collaboration in Public Education
- Consistency in dispatch
- Consistency in an inventory tracking platform

6. Central York prepare a Long Term Plan for Equipment Replacement. This plan should show the major equipment purchases anticipated over the next 20 years. Further, MMA recommends Central York establish a reserve fund for major fire apparatus and put money into the fund as budgets allow.
7. Central York standardize the equipment requirements for each department so that each department has essentially the same type and numbers of key response equipment.
8. Central York standardize the response capabilities for KVFD and KRFD so that budgets for each department should be similar, with the exception that a department with more volunteers would have a higher budget to pay volunteer stipends, turnout gear, insurance, etc.
9. Central York standardize the budgets for KVFD and KRFD such that, if the departments have essentially the same equipment and essentially the same number of volunteers, they would have essentially the same budget.
10. Central York develop a formal process for purchasing fire pumper/tankers and other major equipment. This process would include, for example, options for potentially purchasing used trucks or “demos”, as well as new trucks.
11. Central York consider keeping one pumper/tanker in a garage in Douglas (near the Municipal Office) as a way to improve response.
12. A list be made of equipment in KVFD and KRFD that the respective Chiefs believe is redundant or not very useful and this equipment be sold, with the proceeds being used to purchase more useful equipment.
13. Central York consider keeping the 21 year old pumper/tanker (# 781) for KRFD when this unit is up for replacement so that the department would then have a total of three pumper/tankers.

14. Central York review the administrative tasks associated with operating fire departments as the Municipality continues to grow and consider making fire department administration one of the responsibilities of a “Municipal Operations Manager”.
15. Central York does not amalgamate the command structures for KVFD and KRFD and that there continue to be Chiefs for each of the volunteer departments.
16. Capabilities, for both departments, for offroad rescue and response to offroad fires, be improved through acquiring “side by sides” for a faster response.
17. Central York continue to support the attraction and retention of volunteers through payment of a stipend, providing gym facilities, and by providing appreciation events such as banquets (as is currently done).
18. Both fire departments in Central York strive to retain a membership of 30 firefighters (including officers) with Level II certification.
19. Both fire departments encourage the use of “support members”, who are prepared to perform volunteer tasks such as cleaning, equipment maintenance, and obtaining supplies, although they are not prepared to do all front line tasks expected of a firefighter. These support members may be firefighters who wish to “retire” from being full members.
20. Central York continue to request from the Province a separate talk channel for KVFD, separate from Millville Fire Department and, until such time as a new talk group is provided, that KVFD consider joining the KRFD talk group.
21. Central York request that RADCOM address “dead spots” in the areas serviced by Central York fire departments.
22. Central York continue to make establishing water supplies, either “dry hydrants” or storage tanks, a priority.

# APPENDIX 1

## Map of Service Areas for Fire Departments



# APPENDIX 2

## Photos of Fire Departments

# KESWICK VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT



# KESWICK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

