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Coming up at 2 pm, it's a council workshop meeting about Paramedic Services.



City Council Preview – What's on the Agenda for the June 1 Meeting?

June starts with a city council meeting, another workshop/orientation meeting, and the subject this time is a very important and timely topic indeed. You've probably been following the news i...

<https://guelphpolitico.ca/2023/05/26/city-council-preview-whats-on-the-agenda-for-the-j...>

Tweeter's Note: I'm covering this one from home and watching online.

Mayor Guthrie calls the meeting to order.

If the council looks bigger, it's because we're being joined by members of county council.



Special Guest Stars:

Warden Andy Lennox

County CAO Scott Wilson

Greg Davidson, Mayor of Mapleton

Chris White, Mayor of Guelph/Eramosa

Michael Dehn, Mayor of Erin

County Cllrs Doug Green, Mary Lloyd, Diane Ballantyne, Matthew Bulmer, David Anderson, James Seeley

Colleen Clack-Bush, DCAO of Public Services will lead the presentation.

Clack-Bush says that they've been working towards this for months and thanks the mayor's and the warden's office for co-ordinating things. The goal is to make sure everyone is working from the same set of information.

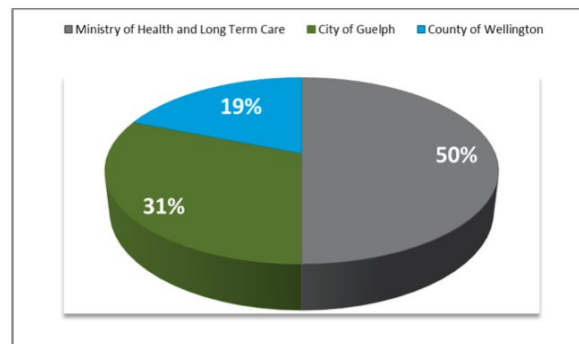
Today, the goal is to both celebrate the accomplishments of the service *and* discuss the challenges coming. This presentation should take about 40 minutes.

With that, Stephen Dewar, GM of Guelph Wellington Paramedic Services and Paramedic Chief takes over the presentation.

Prior to 2000 paramedic services were provided to the municipalities directly, often contracted out to third parties, and in the case of Guelph that was Royal City Ambulances. Now, paramedic services run by municipalities under scrutiny of the Ministry of Health.

Who pays?

Service Cost Sharing (2022)



GWPS was initially absorbed under Guelph Fire in 2009, most paramedic stations remain leased spaces that are not wholly adequate to the needs. Stay tuned for more info about that...

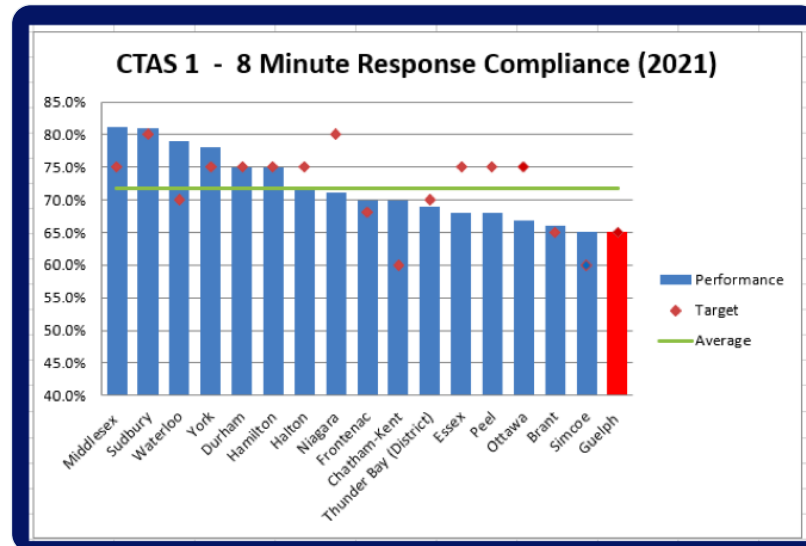
There was a consultants report in 2016 that laid out the expectation that the call volume would increase by 46% over the next decade, and had recommendations to answer the need with increased staffing incrementally, thus allowing GWPS to measure impact.

The predictions in the report were "very accurate" Dewar said, and that's despite the unpredictable event of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a plan to build new paramedic stations across the region, but those plans went out the window after the 2018 provincial election when the ONgov wanted to look at re-organizing paramedic services. Those plans also went out the window with COVID.

GWPS got confirmation in February that ONgov is not going to pick up where they left off, and will instead focus on improving technology.

We have trouble meeting our targets because Wellington County is such a big place and Guelph is not centrally located within. Despite that, Dewar says that GWPS staff are top notch.



Dewar notes that paramedic staff augmented healthcare in various capacities during the pandemic. Many members had to sleep and live apart from their family at the height of the pandemic to mitigate possible infection.

Paramedics in COVID-19



GWPS deputy chief Leanne Swantko discusses the paramedicine program, a successful initiative that started from a provincial grant and has been fairly successful.



Community paramedicine program

The program aims to support individuals to access collaborative resources to reduce dependency on 911 and possible transports to the local hospital.

<https://guelph.ca/living/emergency-services/ambulance-service/community-paramedici...>

Now, offload delays. This is one of two major issues facing the service. Transfer is supposed to happen within 30 minutes of a rival, but sometimes that's hours of waiting, and thus that pushes response time higher, or results in a Code Red, no ambulances available.

Dewar notes that Guelph General is in the top 10% of hospitals reporting delays in Ontario. Paramedics are well trained to provide care on scene, but their skills more or less end at the hospital door when patients need additional care.

The ONgov has provided funding to hire staff specifically to handle offload delays, but it seems like the hospital wasn't able to hire someone in time before the funding expired. Hospital CEO Walton said it was mission critical to find a solution.

Walton takes the mic now. He took over seven weeks ago and knows the challenges and dealing with offload delays is the first challenge. He says it's a system issue, complex, and wants residents to know that they are a priority.

The second issue is about those paramedic stations, 7 in the County and 3 in Guelph. With the exception of the Clair Road Emergency Station, none of the facilities are purpose built. The City owns two buildings and the County owns one. The rest are leases.

This article sums up the concerns in a council report on May 12.



'Deplorable condition': Report finds most Guelph, Wellington paramedi...

"So you could be coming back to the base, needing to shower because you have blood all over you, and there's a stag and doe in a rented room and

<https://www.guelphmercury.com/news/deplorable-condition-report-finds-most-guelph-w...>

Dewar is now reviewing some of the issues with the individual stations. In some cases there's a lack of space for showers or personal needs, or not enough office space (paramedics have to do reports too). Also, when it comes to some locations...



This is Guelph's "newest" station, leased from a private owner and heavily renovated, but still with the issues including a ramp to access to the garage. Does provide easy access to downtown though.

Guelph – Gordon Street



This one in the industrial west end is also a leased building from a private owner. It's not exactly central and it's location right near the Waterloo Region border often makes them some of the closest ambulances in that area.

Guelph – Elmira Road



Dewar assures that that despite the facility challenges, residents are getting excellent care.

Issues with the stations in one handy graph, and not even Clair Road is immune from issues.

Paramedic Station Needs Assessment

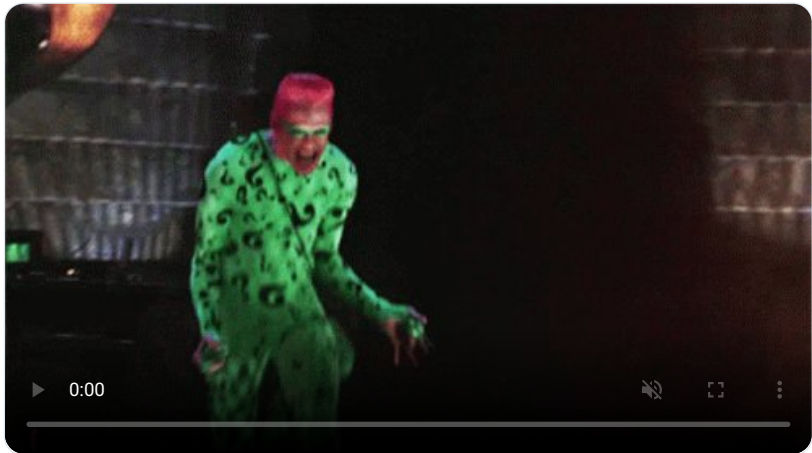
Station	Location	Space	Report Room	Bath rooms	Wellness Space	Decon Area	Storage	Garage Space	Backup Power
355 Elmira Road Guelph									
285 Queen Street E. Fergus									
Clair Road Emergency Services Centre									
202 Industrial Drive Mount Forest									
110 Smith Street Arthur									
122 Robertson Street Harrison									
16 Main Street Drayton									
30 John Street Drayton									
5141 Wellington Rd 27 Rockwood									
2 Station Street Hillsburgh									
34 Gordon Street Guelph									

Neutral
 Not preferred
 Suitable

Clack-Bush says that one of the most important thing needed in these facilities is private spaces, places that paramedics can go to decompress, have a quiet conversation with a supervisor, et al. These issues are not unique to G/W, but they do need to be addressed.

Clack-Bush thanks GWPS for all the hard work in the last few years. She notes that this is a joint session so no motions can be made, but they are asking for both council's help with advocacy. <https://pub-guelph.escrimemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=36734>

Now is the time for questions.



Cllr Caton asks about an audit for the facility spaces. Dewar says the lease payments are in the operating budget, MoH pays the rent, but they do not contribute capital costs though they do cover depreciation.

Clack-Bush adds that there may be options where the County builds the building and the City can lease it as the service provider. [#FunwithAccounting](#).

Cllr Goller asks if there's an ask coming with the 2024-27 budget. Clack-Bush says yes, there have been conversation and they're looking at moving forward now that they know there's no pending fiddling from the ONGov.

Goller asks about how this fits in with other city plans about facility assessment. Clack-Bush says she has to get back to council on that because they're looking at building leases versus owning own buildings.

Cllr O'Rourke asks if City needs to hire more paramedics? Clack-Bush says they have been keeping pace with master plan, and in some case are moving faster. Hiring more paramedics doesn't solve the systemic issues, got to work with GGH to figure that out.

Also, ambulances are dispatched provincially (?) so the end result is that hiring more GWPS staff could result in their being sent elsewhere, or it could result in more ambulances waiting in line on Delhi Street. Dewar says they could never staff enough in surge time.

Walton adds that the old models of care are challenging, and even in the hospital they're looking at what additional duties staff can do. Alternative models of care, efficiencies in the hospital, and efficiencies in transfers are going to yield solutions.

Walton adds that "if you build it, they will come." He was in Oakville when they moved to a new hospital three times the size, and it was full in a week.

CAO Stewart says that councils need to keep in mind that there's a role for the Ministry of Health as well, and they have to play it. They need to proceed from the idea that offload delays are unacceptable and take action.

O'Rourke asks about funding mechanism to recognise paramedic programs that take pressure off the hospital. Dewar says community medicine program is still temp thanks to ONgov grant, they're hopeful that it will be made permanent.

Cllr Seeley asks if the City is looking at dealing with the Guelph stations separate from the County? Clack-Bush says they've not had conversations with the County about the City facilities, the only one they're looking at presently is Elmira and they're considering options.

Cllr Allt asks if we're becoming victims of downloading with the new paramedic services? Clack-Bush says the province funds community paramedicine 100%, so that's a good example of taking pressure off the hospital with ONgov support.

Allt asks Walton if the hospital is 100% staffed and is that effecting the offload. Walton says the latter part of the pandemic showed wear on HR, the retirement and attrition of docs, nurses and managers. Currently, hospital has 15% vacancy rate (5-6% pre-COVID).

Walton says that this is not peculiar to G/W and represents a global challenge because there's a lot of demand for people with medical and medical service skills.

Walton says there's enough to provide consistent quality care in hospital but the emergency department is "on a razor's edge" and one sick call from disruption. Also, scheduled surgeries do not always run smoothly either.

Allt asks Dewar about attraction & retention of staff vis-a-vis facilities. Dewar says PT recruitment is a challenge right now, but that's uncommon. Does believe facilities have a dissuading effect.

Cllr Been asks if these facilities are salvageable? Dewar says not easily. They have looked at fire halls and noted competing needs, which is why it's hard to combine facilities. Paramedic purpose built stations are different.

Cllr Lloyd asks if there are off-loading issues at the County hospitals. Dewar says they're less frequent, do sometimes see delays at Groves occasionally, but no where near that of GGH.

Cllr Bulmer asks about creating a breakdown in needs and response times to help sell the need to build new facilities. Dewar says the challenge is that there's no centralisation of data for all areas in Ontario, but it's not a challenge that can't be overcome.

Bulmer asks if there's any interest in having City join land ambulance and social services committees to facilitate better co-operation. Clack-Bush says they will look at opportunities, but they are seeing a more collaborative approach. (Paramedics covered in Public Services at GCC)

Warden Linton asks about the role councils can play to get this assistance. Stewart says they've started with some initial discussions, now they can look to AMO or the area MPPs. Both council's can re-endorse the master plan and present a united front.

CAO Wilson agrees with this counterpart from the City, the other Scott.

Cllr Duncan asks about reaching out to Waterloo, Halton and Peel about contingency plans for de-amalgamation of regions. Clack-Bush says she hasn't heard anything yet, but she is taking part in a meeting next week that will tackle that.

Duncan asks about medical assist calls still being done by Fire Departments in the county, he's heard it's the same as 4 years ago even after staff increase for GWPS. Dewar says he's advocated to the ONgov about that, offload delays are having an impact on volunteer services too.

Cllr Anderson asks if there's opportunity to expand the paramedicine program. Dewar says that it's a piece but there are a lot of pieces. Swantko adds that there is a role, but the role is to fill the gaps until more permanent solutions can be found.

Guthrie thanks paramedics on behalf of the City, the County and the people in both. He hopes that the message gets out that they deserve better and is thrilled to hear the positive comments about moving forward. Need to move quick, be bold, and recognise urgency.

The meeting is adjourned.



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