



## **Detailed Summary of 2025 FSANS Review**

On April 4, 2025, the Fire Services Association of Nova Scotia (FSANS) issued a Request for Proposals for conducting a governance review of fire prevention and associated services in Nova Scotia. The selected consultant, Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI), conducted in-person workshops across Nova Scotia from July 22 to July 26 and online sessions from August 6 to August 8. As part of this consultation, the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM) and the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia (AMANS) wrote a joint submission to provide insights on challenges and opportunities from the perspective of municipal government. NSFM submitted this joint report to the Department of Emergency Management and FSANS.

On September 18, TSI produced a report entitled “Governance Model and Implementation Roadmap: Fire Services Governance Study”. **TSI’s report to FSANS, herein referred to as the FSANS review, includes 40 recommendations.**

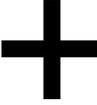
### **Overview of Key FSANS Review Findings**

The recent FSANS review has proposed several significant changes, some of which are readily agreeable and others that require further information to assess. There is considerable alignment between the FSANS review and the NSFM/AMANS joint submission. At the same time, there are some divergent requirements that require further explanation and consultation.

The NSFM/AMANS joint submission and FSANS Review can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

The following summary identifies both agreeable points (indicated with a “+”), and areas of concern (indicated with a “?”) in the FSANS review based on the NSFM/AMANS joint submission and input from the membership. This summary is meant to support ongoing membership engagement in preparation for the consultation mandated by the *Fire Safety and Services Act* (Bill 158, October 1, 2025).

### **Provincial Oversight and Standards**

	The lack of provincial standards for training, equipment management, and other important aspects of fire prevention was addressed in the FSANS review. Provincial standards would provide a firm regulatory basis for local governance and resource allocation. The FSANS review recommends that, where possible, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Professional Qualification Standards could be adopted provincially. Consultation with municipalities in the development of these standards is a vital part of making sure these standards are feasible and responsive to pressing needs.
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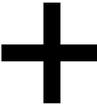
	<p>The FSANS review recommends the creation of a new provincial Fire Commissioner. This position is referred to throughout the recommendations of the FSANS review, and it is unclear why a new position is being created rather than updating the responsibilities of the existing Fire Marshall.</p> <p>While both position titles are used across Canada (typically one or the other), these significant provincial positions play a pivotal role in fire prevention oversight, and more information on the rationale for this new position is required.</p>
	<p>The FSANS review recommends that the Province of Nova Scotia align the governance of fire departments, emergency management, and the Nova Scotia Office of Fire Marshal under the newly created Department of Emergency Management. Past reviews have called for the consolidation of a unified provincial entity, and there is certainly reason to see why the Department of Emergency Management would be the appropriate home department for this entity.</p> <p>However, with the current approach to fire prevention governance, programs, and training being spread across the Department of Municipal Affairs, the Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration, and the Department of Natural Resources, more information about how this migration and consolidation will take place is required.</p>

### Hiring a Fire Chief

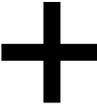
	<p>Another significant recommendation is that each municipality hire a municipal Fire Chief. Each municipality hiring a Fire Chief is one of many recommendations, which seems to indicate that the <i>Rural Fire District Act</i> will be repealed. Though this idea may currently work in some municipalities, it is unlikely to be a feasible or desirable change for many; as a case in point, Halifax Regional Municipality and the Cape Breton Regional Municipality are used as examples of where this model works fairly well.</p> <p>There are dozens of other municipalities for which this position would not be the most effective or affordable governance model. A rethinking of the dated <i>Rural Fire District Act</i> and the consolidation of the legislative framework for fire services is necessary and welcomed. However, as indicated in the NSFM/AMANS joint submission, the alternatives can not rely on urban models. With standards and reporting responsibilities in place, various models for creating fire prevention districts could be effective.</p> <p>There is a possibility that the increasingly common position of municipal Fire Services Coordinator could provide some of the functions attributed to the Fire Chief in the FSANS review (i.e.: making recommendations to the Council of the municipality with respect to fire protection service levels and is accountable to the Council of the municipality for the delivery of the approved levels of service).</p>
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Role of Council

	<p>To keep municipal councils sufficiently informed on the service capacity and calls for service in their local area, the FSANS review recommends that councils receive annual reports, with standardized points of information, from fire departments within their jurisdiction. This change will help municipal councils improve their understanding of what services are available and what additional resources are needed. Institutionalizing a regular dialogue between councils and fire departments will help address concerns that municipal councils are unaware of the needs of fire department and what services they provide.</p>
	<p>There are concerning signs of impending downloads on municipalities among the changes recommended in the FSANS review. Language like “The Council of the municipality shall be responsible for [...] ensuring that the fire department has the necessary resources to deliver the approved levels of service” and “the Province of Nova Scotia should establish the requirement for each municipality to produce and maintain a community risk assessment to inform the establishment of fire protection service levels” gives reason for concern. As noted below, FSANS recommended that additional resources and cost recovery processes should be considered for municipalities to fulfill these new responsibilities.</p>

Additional Resources for Municipalities

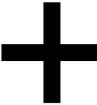
	<p>The FSANS review recommends exploring opportunities to increase resources for municipal councils and fire departments and introduce new cost recovery processes.</p> <p>In the interest of an effective and sustainable approach to fire prevention governance, it is important that all new responsibilities be paired with additional resources based on a comprehensive costing of these responsibilities. Application-based grants may be an effective way to distribute resources for some fire prevention services, but predictable and ongoing work must be supported by predictable and ongoing funding resources.</p> <p>Opportunities for renewing resource availability recommended in the FSANS review include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that all provincial capital asset grant processes made available to Nova Scotia fire departments include the provision of the necessary operating funds to maintain the capital asset in a state of good repair.</li> <li>• Ensuring that fire department levy rates for resource lands and Crown lands are updated to reflect the modern costs of providing fire protection services and the associated needs of fire departments.</li> <li>• Enabling a cost recovery process for fire departments that respond to emergency incidents on Provincial highways and Crown lands.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enabling a cost-recovery process for fire departments that provide medical first-response services, in support of Nova Scotia Emergency Health Services (EHS).</li><li>• Making grant funding available to local departments and regions to assist with producing reports for long-term equipment, facility, and apparatus lifecycle management.</li><li>• Making grant funding available to municipalities, to produce community risk assessments, hazard and risk identification assessments, and feasibility studies relating to the potential for the regionalization and/or consolidation of fire departments, including the potential for shared service delivery models.</li><li>• The review also recommends bulk purchasing in partnership with provincial government in the form of standardized and cost-effective fire department vehicle, equipment, and liability insurance coverage and rates, rather than each fire department to managing these issues individually.</li><li>• Support and resources are also recommended to be secured through enhanced collaboration between fire departments and the Department of Natural Resources' wildland firefighting services, and the Nova Scotia Guard during times of emergency.</li></ul>
	<p>The FSANS review recommendation that the provincial government work with municipalities to develop adequate and sustainable funding models for fire departments, with the goal of reducing their reliance on supplementary public fundraising efforts is a positive outcome.</p> <p>However, further information of what resource will be made available and if they will include a Fire Services Modernization Transfer, as proposed in the NSFM-AMANS join-submission, is required before this recommendation can be assessed.</p>
	<p>The FSANS review recommended considering standardization of tax and levy rates, but this may not be agreeable to all municipalities and their residents.</p>



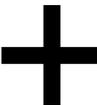
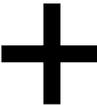
Fire Department Duties

	<p>The FSANS review recommends that paid, volunteer, and composite fire departments be given equal recognition as partners in the effort to prevent fire in Nova Scotia and that fire prevention services should also be defined. The definition recommended in the FSANS review includes prevention, investigation, and education regarding fire and unsafe levels of carbon monoxide as well as general rescue services.</p>
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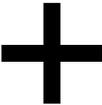
Volunteer Fire Departments

	<p>It is apparent throughout the FSANS review that volunteer fire departments are expected to continue to provide important services across the province. The FSANS review recommends that the provincial government commission “a comprehensive report that quantifies the economic value” of fire prevention services, including services being provided by volunteer fire departments.</p> <p>More information on how a comprehensive report on economic value will be conducted is necessary to assess this recommendation. What is clear at this point is that substantial areas on Nova Scotia rely on services provided by volunteer fire departments, and changes should not be decided without engagement with municipalities representing these areas.</p>
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Human Resources and Fire Fighter Safety

	<p>To address current recruitment challenges, the FSANS review recommends that the provincial government engage in provincewide recruitment and marketing strategies to encourage Nova Scotia residents to become and continue to serve as volunteer firefighters. To aid retention efforts, the FSANS review recommends consideration of tax credits, allowances, and honorariums pegged to years of service awarded to firefighters upon retirement, as well as cost-subsidized access to fitness facilities for volunteer firefighters.</p>
	<p>The FSANS review makes a number of recommendations intended to increase firefighter health and safety, recruitment, compensation, and retention. Recommendations related to firefighter health and safety call for the proactive provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and decontamination resources, proactive occupational cancer screening, proactive provision and promotion of mental health resources, and proactive post-traumatic stress supports.</p>



	<p>To ensure appropriate compensation of volunteer firefighters, the FSANS review recommends standardized volunteer firefighter compensation structures across the province with the suggested options of enhanced provincial tax credits, municipal property tax credits, and a standardized paid on-call model/honorarium. The review also recommends finding ways to encourage employers to permit their employees who are also volunteer firefighters to leave work and respond to emergency calls without risking the loss of wages.</p>
	<p>The FSANS review also recommends desirable reforms in the provision of training to help firefighters reach professional qualification and service delivery standards. Along with creating a new Fire Training School, the review recommends maximizing training accessibility with a regionalized network of training facilities, mobile training systems, and online training opportunities. The FSANS review also recommends a specific drivers certification program that will make it easier for firefighters to obtain a license to operate apparatus and fleet vehicles.</p>

Dispatch

	<p>Reforms to the dispatch system need to be carefully considered. As stated in the NSF/M/AMANS joint submission, regionalized or centralized dispatch system could accomplish improvements across the province, if the systems, training, and human resources necessary for quick response times and clear communication are in place.</p> <p>The FSANS review recommends compliance with the national <i>Standard for Emergency Services Communications</i> standard <i>NFPA 1225</i> and a consolidated, province-wide dispatch and communications system “that meets all the needs of all fire departments across the province”, and that adequate redundancies be in place in the event of system outages. It is good to see that the needs of fire departments and the need for redundancies are acknowledged.</p> <p>Further information on how this centralized system will function and ensure the same quality of dispatch services as a localized one is necessary to assess this recommendation. It is possible that fulfilling the national standards on a localized or regional level will provide the best quality of dispatch services possible.</p>
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### **Summary of 2025 FSANS Review: Recap**

In summary, Agreeable recommendations include:

- The need for service capacity and training standards
- Annual reports to council and putting council more in control
- Equal recognition of volunteer fire fighters
- Creative ideas on how to increase resources beyond simply raising taxes/levies, including bulk purchasing
- Increased supports for fire fighter health and well-being, recruitment, retention, and compensation
- Regional and mobile approaches to training/increasing training accessibility

Points of concern include:

- More information needed on how migration of the Office of the Fire Marshall to the Department of Emergency Management will work
- Creation of a new Fire Commissioner, working under or in place of the Fire Marshall
- Requirement for all municipal councils to hire a fire chief who will oversee all fire departments in that jurisdiction
- Repeal of *Rural Fire District Act* without explanation of how the alternative will work to designate catchment areas for volunteer fire departments
- More information needed on how the comprehensive report that quantifies the economic value of fire prevention services, including services being provided by volunteer fire departments, will be conducted
- Signs of downloaded responsibilities on council to ensure fire departments are reaching standards without equally clear signs of the increased resources being granted to support this work
- A centralized dispatch system without demonstration that response times can be improved with such a system; local and regional dispatch systems have a role to play.

Building on these agreeable points and discussing the points of concern will unlock progress toward the next chapter of fire prevention services in Nova Scotia. A clear and collaborative change management and communication plan developed with municipalities is important in order to accomplish and sustain success.