



City Council Report

REPORT NUMBER 068-2026-Infrastructure & Operations-Thunder Bay Fire Rescue	
DATE PREPARED	January 30, 2026
	FILE
CITY COUNCIL MEETING DATE	April 7, 2026
SUBJECT	Emergency Management Program

RECOMMENDATION TO CITY COUNCIL

WITH RESPECT to Report 068-2026-Infrastructure & Operations-Thunder Bay Fire Rescue,

WE RECOMMEND THAT City Council approve draft By-law 087-2026, including the City of Thunder Bay Emergency Management Program, Emergency Management Plan and Strategy, as attached to this report;

AND THAT By-law 76/2021 (Emergency Plan By-law), as amended, be repealed;

AND THAT City Council enacts By-law 87-2026, being the new Emergency Management Program By-law.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Administration is seeking the enactment of the new Emergency Management Program By-law 087-2026 which will guide municipal emergency preparedness, response, and recovery activities. On March 24, 2026, the Quality of Life Standing Committee endorsed the Emergency Management Program, which is documented in the Emergency Management Strategy (EMS) and Emergency Response Plan (ERP).

The Emergency Management Strategy (EMS) provides a framework and direction guiding the ongoing work of the City of Thunder Bay Emergency Management Program. The Emergency Response Plan (ERP) establishes roles and responsibilities, decision-making processes, coordination mechanisms, and response principles to support effective municipal action during emergency events.

The Emergency Management Strategy embeds both climate resilience principles and a commitment to social equity acknowledging the increasing impacts of climate change on Northwestern Ontario and the amplification of these impacts on vulnerable populations. The

ERP has been comprehensively reviewed and updated to reflect current legislation, best practices in emergency management, lessons learned from recent large-scale and prolonged emergencies, including the COVID-19 Pandemic, and the move to embracing Ontario's Incident Management System (IMS) in the City's emergency response. The Plan is a living document and is intended to be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect evolving risks, organizational changes, and emerging best practices.

A key input into the ERP update was the City of Thunder Bay COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review, which assessed the City's preparedness, response, governance structure, and recovery considerations. While the review concluded that the City managed the overall pandemic response effectively, it identified opportunities to strengthen preparedness, coordination, training, and corporate resilience.

Adoption of the EMS and ERP will provide a modernized, scalable framework to guide emergency management activities and support the safety and resilience of the community.

The *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* requires municipal Councils to adopt an emergency management program and plan and appoint certain positions to act in an emergency. A draft of the by-law adopting the program, plan, and strategy are attached to this report.

DISCUSSION

The *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act* requires municipalities to develop, implement, and maintain an emergency management program and plan, and adopt both by by-law. In accordance with Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, the City of Thunder Bay has enacted By-law 76/2021 and By-law 81/2021. Ontario Regulation 380/04 describes emergency management standards for municipal emergency management programs.

Based on best practices in emergency management, and lessons learned from recent large-scale and prolonged emergencies, including the COVID-19 Pandemic, Administration has created an Emergency Management Strategy (EMS) and revised the existing Emergency Response Plan (ERP). Creating a separate EMS document has taken information about the City's emergency response framework, like membership of the Municipal Emergency Program Committee, public education, training and emergency exercises out of the Emergency Response Plan and allows the ERP to be a document that focuses on how to respond to an emergency. The Emergency Response Plan identifies emergency response goals and establishes roles and responsibilities for individuals and agencies which may become involved in a municipal emergency response. Both documents reflect the City's move to incorporate the province's Incident Management System (IMS) into emergency response to provide a standardized, scalable, coordinated response especially when requiring outside agency support. Supporting information that requires regular updates like contact lists, risk assessment, critical infrastructure identification, hazard-specific plans, and

operational procedures are associated documents that do not need Council approval but inform those responding to an emergency.

Emergency Response Vision

The Emergency Management Strategy and Emergency Response Plan support a coordinated, scalable, and risk-informed approach to emergency management that enables the City of Thunder Bay to respond effectively to a wide range of emergency scenarios while maintaining continuity of essential services.

The EMS and ERP support community resilience in the following key ways:

Governance and Decision-Making

- Clear roles, responsibilities, and escalation processes during emergency activations
- Defined authority and coordination structures to support timely and effective decision-making

Operational Coordination

- Alignment with the Incident Management System and Emergency Operations Centre functions
- Improved coordination across departments and with external partners

Preparedness and Capacity

- Emphasis on training, exercises, and continuous improvement
- Integration of hazard-specific plans and supporting procedures

Recovery and Resilience

- Consideration of recovery and mitigation as integral components of emergency management
- Institutionalization of lessons learned from past emergency events

Alignment with the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review

The Emergency Management Strategy and Emergency Response Plan have been developed to directly respond to the findings and recommendations identified in the City of Thunder Bay COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review completed in November of 2023.

While the Review concluded that the City managed the overall pandemic response effectively, it identified several areas where corporate emergency management capacity and resilience could be further strengthened to better support complex and prolonged emergencies.

In particular, the EMS and ERP address the following recommendations and areas for improvement identified in the Review:

Integration of Pandemic and Hazard-Specific Emergency Plans

The COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review recommended that pandemic response planning be formally integrated within the City's Emergency Response Plan to ensure clarity, consistency, and alignment during large-scale emergencies requiring activation of the Emergency Operations Centre.

- The current outdated Corporate Pandemic Plan will be revised based on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review and will be an associated document to the ERP to inform future pandemic response.
- Future subordinate plans will be developed and available as associated documents to the Emergency Response Plan to provide clear, hazard-specific direction consistent with current legislation, best practices, and lessons learned. For example, subordinate plans will be developed for evacuation, snow/ice storm, flooding, and wildfire emergencies.

Emergency Management and Incident Management System Training

The COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review identified the importance of ensuring that members of the Municipal Emergency Control Group (MECG), Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), and designated alternates receive role-appropriate emergency management and Incident Management System (IMS) training to support effective coordination during emergency activations

- IMS training plans have been initiated to fill gaps and will continue as a core component of the City's emergency preparedness program, with a specific focus on ensuring that all members of the MECG, EOC, and identified alternates are trained and proficient in their assigned roles and responsibilities.
- The Emergency Management Strategy reinforces the requirement for ongoing training and exercises aligned with emergency management and IMS principles. The City's internal capacity to deliver IMS training has been an important factor in strengthening staff preparedness, supporting consistency in instruction, and enabling timely and scalable training delivery across the Corporation.
- Continued emphasis on internal IMS training and exercises will support operational clarity, effective decision-making, and sustained readiness for both short-duration and prolonged emergency events.

Corporate Readiness and Coordination During Prolonged Emergencies

The Pandemic Response Review identified challenges associated with sustaining operations, coordination, and communication over extended emergency periods.

- The Emergency Management Strategy and Emergency Response Plan strengthen the City's framework for prolonged emergency activations by emphasizing continuity of operations, information sharing, and coordinated support across departments and external partners.
- The Emergency Management Strategy identifies duty time and rest time cycles for responders and EOC members to support their health, safety and ability to respond to the emergency.

Strengthening Emergency Management Planning Capacity

The COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review identified the need for enhanced, dedicated emergency planning capacity within the Corporation, recognizing the scope, duration, and complexity of modern emergency events. Specifically, the Review recommended the creation of a full-time Emergency Planner position to support the City's emergency management program and reduce reliance on part-time or collateral-duty resources.

- While the Emergency Response Plan strengthens governance, clarifies emergency management roles and responsibilities, and improves the overall planning structure, the addition of a dedicated Emergency Planner position has not yet been implemented. The need for this role remains recognized and validated based on operational experience, lessons learned from prolonged emergency activations, and the increasing demands placed on municipal emergency management functions.
- Implementation of this recommendation would require a financial commitment to add one (1) full-time equivalent position. Consideration of this resource requirement will be subject to future budget deliberations and Council approval.

Implementation

Implementation will be supported through:

- Development and maintenance of supporting associated documents and hazard-specific plans
- Training and exercises aligned with roles and responsibilities
- Ongoing review and continuous improvement based on exercises, real-world events, and evolving best practices

Adoption of the Program, Strategy and Plan will strengthen corporate readiness, improve coordination across departments and partner agencies, and help reflect lessons learned from the COVID-19 Pandemic and other emergency events in future response efforts.

CONSULTATION

The review and update of the Emergency Response Plan was informed by current emergency management legislation and best practices, internal operational experience, post-incident reviews, and external assessment through the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Review. The Review included staff surveys, focus groups, and public engagement, providing valuable insight into opportunities for improvement in emergency preparedness and response.

On March 24, 2026, the Quality of Life Standing Committee reviewed the Emergency Management Program in Report 025-2026-Infrastructure & Operations-Thunder Bay Fire Rescue and it was endorsed without further public comments. Some questions from members of Council were addressed via email and acknowledged at the Standing Committee meeting.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the adoption of the Emergency Management Strategy and Emergency Response Plan. Costs for improvements to the Emergency Operations Centre are included in the 2026 capital budget, but the Strategy and Plan are not contingent on the work being done. Any future resource requirements related to emergency response implementation, training, or program enhancements will be addressed through existing budgets or brought forward to City Council for consideration, as required.

BACKGROUND

A By-law 76/2021 to establish an Emergency Management Program and Emergency Plan was presented and approved by City Council on October 25th 2021.

By-law 81/2021 - An amendment to the By-law (Corporate Report - R 150/2021) was approved on November 8th by City Council which included the designation of the Emergency Information Officer and authorities of the Acting Mayor.

This revision of the ERP includes a Plan Maintenance and Revisions section that formalizes the requirement for ongoing review and updates.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A – Draft By-law 087-2026 (A By-law to establish an Emergency Management Program and Plan), including Schedules A and B.

REPORT PREPARED BY

Dave Tarini, Acting Fire Chief – Thunder Bay Fire Rescue

REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Kayla Dixon, Commissioner Infrastructure & Operations

March 31, 2026