

# REPORT



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Date: March 25, 2025

Report to: Planning and Development Committee

Report from: Colette Tanner, 911 Coordinator

Subject: what3words application

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**Recommendation:**

**THAT the Planning Committee recommend to County Council that the staff report reviewing how emergency services use what3words for 9-1-1 calls dated March 25, 2025, BE RECEIVED; and**

**AND THAT the report be circulated to the members of the Hastings Quinte E9-1-1 subcommittee.**

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**Financial Impact:**

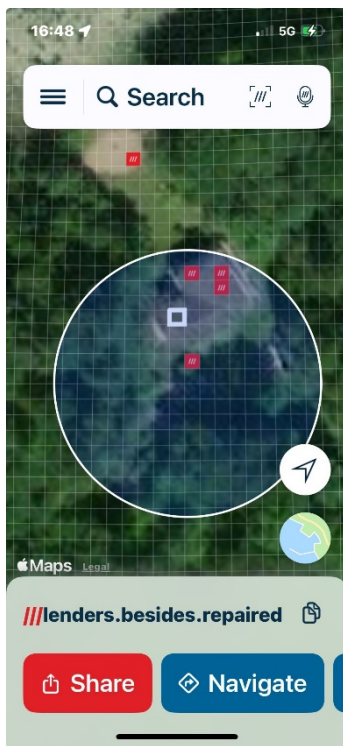
Does recommendation have a budgetary impact?	No
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**Analysis:**

Emergency services worldwide have adopted *what3words* to improve response times and location accuracy for 9-1-1 callers. By providing a precise three-word location, callers can be found more quickly, even in areas without a traditional address system. This is particularly useful for our northern municipalities with remote locations, parks, hunt camps, trails, hydro rights-of-ways, logging roads, lakes, rivers and island calls.

*what3words* is a free app found using your APP Store icon on your wireless devices (Apple & Android). If your device is incompatible, you won't be able to use the app, but you can still access *what3words* via "what3words.com" on your web browser. To download using the App Store simply enter "what3words" using "search" and click the "get" button on the screen. Open the app and tap the arrow icon (iOS) or compass (Android) for your current location.

*what3words* divides the world into 3m × 3m squares, assigning each square a unique three-word identifier. When a 9-1-1 caller provides their *what3words* address, dispatchers can accurately pinpoint their location and send emergency responders.

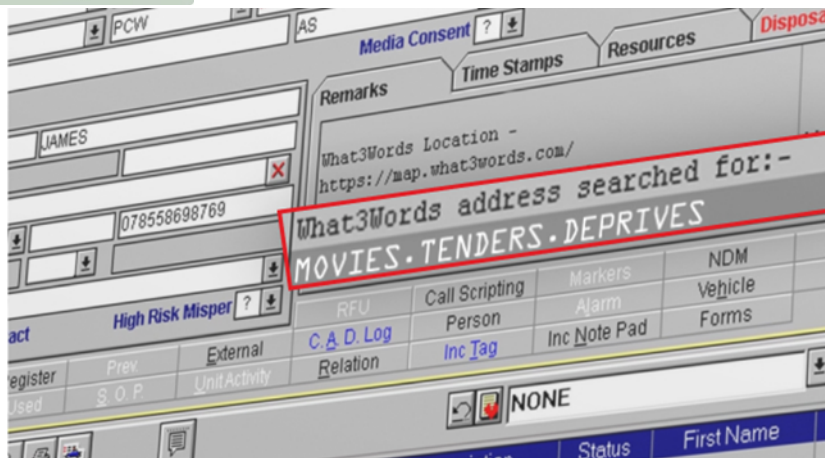


Many emergency services in Canada, including most of the Hastings Quinte 9-1-1 partner agencies, have integrated *what3words* into their systems. The 3 emergency dispatch centres covering Hastings County's 14 member municipalities have *what3words* available should they receive a call.

The process typically works as follows:

1. A 911 caller opens their *what3words* app and is immediately pinpointed on the app's mapping and sees the 3 words on the screen.
2. The caller indicates they have the *what3words* location.
3. Dispatchers enter the words into their system.
4. Emergency responders are directed to the precise location.

If they don't have the app downloaded, our Emergency Communications Staff can send the **'Find Me'** link directly to the caller's cell phone.



#### Benefits for 9-1-1 Callers and Emergency Responders:

- **Faster Response Times:** This reduces the time spent identifying a caller's location using questioning techniques or the "rebid" function that searches for the longitude and latitude location of the wireless device connected to 9-1-1.
- **Increased Accuracy:** More precise than addressing or intersections, helping responders reach the exact spot, not "in the area".
- **Works Offline:** The *what3words* app does not require a data/internet connection, which is useful in remote areas. To reach emergency services, you will require cell coverage, Wi-Fi calling or enabled Emergency SOS [Connect to a satellite with your iPhone - Apple Support \(CA\)](#) or [Get help during an emergency with your Android phone - Android Help](#) on their mobile device to make a satellite texting session to 9-1-1.
- **Reduces Miscommunication:** Eliminates errors caused by vague descriptions or confusion identifying the correct municipality.
- **Can reduce the need to include a third-party translation service** because the app is available in multiple languages.

While some challenges and considerations include public awareness because not all callers know about *what3word*, awareness is growing as the app is used for many

different functions outside of an emergency, to communicate a location with people, machines, or devices for deliveries, meetings, social events.

Our partner agencies (OPP, St. Catharines Fire, Kingston CACC) have messaging on social media and videos on YouTube to educate the public and their members. The County began reporting on *what3words* back in 2021 in annual staff reports, at public speaking events, and at meetings with municipalities as recently as last summer. All dispatch agencies are familiar with *what3words*, and those not currently using, are in the process of working with their IT and vendors for solutions to provide this service.

Potential for human error exists if the words are misread or mispronounced, leading to incorrect locations; however, emergency communication staff are trained to avoid this with questioning techniques.

*what3words* is proving to be a valuable tool for emergency services, allowing 9-1-1 callers to provide precise locations even when they lack a traditional location identifier. While challenges exist, wider adoption and public education can help maximize its potential in saving lives and improving emergency response efficiency.

**Strategic Plan Alignment:**

3.3 Modernize and invest in Hastings County infrastructure and innovative technology to enhance services

**Report Reviewed By:**

Cathy Bradley, Director of Legislative Services & Clerk

**March 31, 2025**

**Report Approved By:**

  
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Connor Dorey, Chief Administrative Officer

**April 1, 2025**