

Minutes of the “Town Hall “ Meeting of the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District

Meeting held: **20 July, 2015**

Lower Hall, Ganges United Church

In attendance: Trustees Michael Garside, Mitch Forest, Derek Hill, Norbert Schlenker, Michael Schubart, Michele Severn

Regrets: Linda Lee

Staff: Chief Tom Bremner, SSIFA Lieutenant Eric Taylor, Corporate Administration Officer (CAO) Andrew Peat.

In the absence of Chair Lee, the “town hall” meeting was called to order by CAO Peat at 7:00pm.

A question was asked concerning whether trustees sought legal advice prior to deciding to assigning the standby duty shift to excluded personnel. Trustee Schlenker replied that the Walker Report had recommended that the District seek legal counsel to assist it with upcoming contract negotiations in 2016. Trustees have informally interviewed several firms and during these discussions, a verbal opinion was provided that said the collective agreement does not preclude excluded staff from doing the standby duty shift. A communication has been received from the IAFF Local regarding this matter and trustees commented that it would be prudent to provide for increased legal fees in the 2016 budget.

A question was asked about what specifically is to be discussed under “Old Business” agenda item “Other matters arising from the minutes”. Trustee Schubart replied that because of the late receipt of some meeting materials he had asked for the item of business to be included to permit discussion of other matters after he had time to review material. In response to a question from Trustee Schlenker, Trustee Schubart said there were no other matters arising from the minutes he wished to discuss.

A question was asked regarding whether the existing Open-burning bylaw gives the Fire Chief sufficient authority to deal with high risk activities. Chief Bremner replied that the problem for the Fire Service is the lack of the ability to enforce regulations - an improvement district does not have the ability to issue a ticket or fine. Chief Bremner further commented that the Fire Service relies instead on public education and communication.

A question was asked about how many applicants were not selected to serve on board committees. Human Resources Committee Chair Hill responded that five staff members who applied were not selected. Staff were advised that because of the possibility of a public perception of a conflict of interest, trustees had decided that staff should not be appointed as members of standing committees. In the discussion the comment was made that public members serving on committees should be property owners and tax payers. Trustee Schlenker commented that a conflict of interest is more than putting money into one’s pocket. - an employee serving on

a standing committee recommending policy to the board would have a private interest and a public interest in the decisions.

A question was asked concerning the 'training in paradise' weekend whether there is additional staffing costs incurred in preparing for the event. Chief Bremner responded that preparation may be assigned as a duty within normally scheduled work hours and/or done on unpaid time volunteered by staff/paid-on-call members.

A concern was expressed that if the District does not have now have a bylaw that could regulate high risk activities during periods of extreme drought one should be done now. Chief Bremner commented that the District is developing policies and tools that can "do the job" but that very often most calls are "neighbourhood conflicts" and that the Fire Service is not the police or party-breakers. Trustee Forest commented that the board members are aware of public concerns and that it will be addressed tonight as an agenda item.

A question was asked about overtime pay. Chief Bremner commented that under his leadership up to last month there had been no claims for overtime pay. Chief Bremner further commented that Paid-on-call (POC) earnings of career members is not considered overtime as they are responding/working as a POC firefighter and not as a career member.

A question was asked about how often in July excluded staff had done the standby-duty shift and the resulting savings. CAO Peat responded that the number of shifts done by excluded staff in July would be included in Chief Bremner's monthly report to be presented at the August board of trustees meeting.

Former trustee Ron Chamney spoke about proposed open-burning Bylaw No. 125, saying that it updates language to confirm with current provincial legislation and that it lays the groundwork for an enforcement element. He emphasized that the Fire Service is not an "enforcement agency" and that District staff are not trained to do so. Once a bylaw establishes regulations the District must develop policies concerning enforcement.

A public member expressed her concerns about the ability of the Fire Service to deal effectively with a wild fire on Salt Spring as a major fire would quickly overwhelm local resources and that Ministry of Forest may have more pressing priorities. Nearly all residential areas on Salt Spring are at risk for interface fires – fires simultaneously involving buildings and wildland areas. Chief Bremner commented that there is need for personal responsibility - for people to work with their neighbours in the Salt Spring Island neighbourhood preparedness program (POD) and to have some awareness of island wide planning. Chief Bremner further commented that the Fire Service will do the "best they can" but there can be no guarantees.

The last question concerned the selection of the summer student (the son of a trustee) and whether there is a conflict of interest. Chief Bremner replied that the Fire Service was approved for funding through the Federal Government's Canada Summer Jobs program. The position was advertised in the local newspaper and three applicants were interviewed. Staff confirmed with the government officials that proper procedures were followed before the position was offered. Trustee Schlenker made it clear that no trustee had any involvement.

There being no further questions permitted the town hall meeting ended at 7:40pm.

Linda Lee
Chair

Andrew Peat
Corporate Administrator

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