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M. Leichter

**Memo**

To: Salt Spring Fire Rescue Board of Trustees  
Andrew Peat  
From: Maxine Leichter  
Date: May 14, 2015

**Dear Trustees and Mr. Peat:**

It is great to see the new Board of Trustees taking steps that will result in board actions being more transparent and accountable to the public. I am offering these suggestions with the same goal in mind.

**Building and Facilities' Committee:** The Walker Report recommended the formation of a "Facilities and Physical Plant Committee composed of ..... up to five members of the public who have experience in building maintenance, construction, property development, mechanical systems, planning, design, engineering or architecture." My concern is that this does not include committee members with experience in planning and implementing public participation programs.

During their campaign, the new trustees stated that that the past fire hall design process did not give adequate consideration to the opinions of the public. I also favor more public participation in that process. In order to offer the public a genuine opportunity to participate in the planning, rather than being asked to comment after major decisions have already been made, the process of designing the hall and the process of obtaining public input should be carried out and planned together by a single committee that is composed both of persons with construction experience and persons with experience planning and implementing public participation programs, public relations and similar subjects.

**Terms of Reference for Committees:** At your Trustee meeting held on May 11, you directed Andrew Peat to prepare a report on committee formation processes as done at the Islands Trust. Although referring to the Islands Trust procedures has its place, I urge you not to consider them the last word on this subject. In fact, during the first year of the current trustees first term of office, the public brought forward several important shortcomings of the Trust process.

One point brought out was that our Local Trust Committees bars its committees from discussing any topic not specifically referred to the committee by the Local Trust Committee. This prevents new and creative ideas from coming forward. There were several committee members who asked that committees be able to discuss topics that they deem to be of value to the trust. I suggest that the Fire Trustee committees could adopt a rule that topics not specifically referred by the Fire Trustees could be discussed by a fire department committee if a majority of the committee members agreed that the topic was worthy. You could require that at least one (or all) of the elected Trustee members of the committee vote

in favor. This would allow the committee more latitude in what was discussed but still provide adequate controls against abuse.

**Selection of Committee Members:** The LTC and the CRD both run ads in local newspapers soliciting applications for committee membership from citizens who meet certain criteria. The elected officials then select who shall be appointed. I have a bold new approach to suggest which is that anyone who wants to be on the committee should be allowed to do so. Under such a scenario, after the committee was formed, new members would not be able to join without the consent of the Fire Trustees. However anyone would be able to attend committee meetings and perhaps participate at the will of the committee members.

One objection to this, is that the committee could become too large to work effectively. I argue that although many people might apply initially, in reality few will end up showing up consistently. The committee could make a rule that anyone who misses three consecutive meetings reasons other than illness will be dropped from the committee.

Another objection is that there may people on the committee who are disruptive. My answer is that the committee could be given the power to dismiss committee members who are disruptive by a 2/3 vote. In reality, good management of the committee by the Chair almost always can manage potentially disruptive individuals.

The advantages of allowing people to self select are:

- Self-selection may produce better committee members as the potential to be rejected often prevents people from applying.
- Self-selection avoids the Trustees having to hold in camera meetings and spending time to select, sometimes among equally qualified candidates.
- Self-selection avoids the risk that Trustees may not select someone who may make a meaningful contribution. There are persons who may not have what seem like the right qualifications on paper who are actually talented and knowledgeable and can make an important contribution to such a committee.
- Self-selection would set a gratifying precedent of openness and would be a breath of fresh air into what are often overly bureaucratic and top down local government processes.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions.