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10 Aug 2017

Andrew Peat

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Sent: August-09-17 23:12
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Subject: Open letter to the SSIFPD board

Open Letter to the Fire District Board of Trustees

It's fire season. We can see it in our air from fires that are hundreds of miles away. In the summer, there is almost always a fire ban on Salt Spring. This year is no exception. In fact, this year, the risk is so high that the Fire Chief has even banned small campfires. Nevertheless, some people don't or won't follow the rules. The Fire Chief reports that it's happened 13 times in July, and August isn't likely to be better. What happens on Salt Spring if somebody lights a fire or engages in other hazardous activity outside while the ban is on? A neighbour reports it and fire trucks roll. Firefighters have the legal authority to tell the firestarter to put the fire out and, if that's not done, to put the fire out themselves. They educate the person about the risks and they leave.

If the fire is re-lit, they come back, douse it again, and deliver another stern lecture. That is the practical extent of their legal authority, because they work for an improvement district, which provincial law gives virtually no enforcement authority.

Contrast this with what happens in a municipality if somebody lights a fire outside while a ban is on. Fire trucks will come, just like before.

The first time, chances are there is just the same stern lecture about risks. The second time, bylaw enforcement comes along after the fire engines. Tickets get written. Fines get levied. The consequence for breaking the law and endangering your neighbours is more than having a finger wagged at you.

If everyone understands the risks and complies with rules enacted to protect the whole community, then governance structure doesn't matter.

Mix in a few rule breakers, and it matters a lot.

The Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District hasn't yet decided what opinion they should express about the incorporation question that's on the ballot in a few weeks, or whether they should express an opinion at all.

So we ask the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District for a response:

You are guardians of public safety. Your enforcement ability is affected by whether the island votes Yes or No on September 9th. The public wants to know where you stand.

Michael Craig, Fire District Trustee, 2015-16 Grant Eckberg, Fire District Trustee, 2009-13 Mitchell Forest, Fire District Trustee, 2015-17 Derek Hill, Fire District Trustee, 2015-16 Ken Lee, Fire District Trustee, 2004-07 Linda Lee, Fire District Trustee, 2015-16 Mark Lucich, Fire District Trustee, 2011-2013 Norbert Schlenker, Fire District Trustee, 2015-16