

## RESPONSE TO OPEN LETTER TO THE FIRE DISTRICT BOARD OF TRUSTEES

From Samantha Sanderson

A group of ex-Fire Board Trustees have written a letter to the current trustees chastising them for not coming out in favour of incorporation after an attempt was made to strong arm them to do so. Our current trustees sensibly waited to hear what the “no” folks had to say. That group didn’t ask the Trustees to come out in favour of no. They requested that the Trustees remain neutral on the basis that there was nothing to support it being in their ratepayers’ interest for them to express a bias. The referendum itself would allow their ratepayers to indicate their preferences. In addition, the “no” group came with well-researched information about how the Fire Board could find additional funding without incorporating and advised that Fire Departments all over the province rarely receive major infrastructure grants from senior governments. The Trustees appeared grateful for the information and deferred the matter and subsequently decided to stay neutral.

Effective enforcement of fire bans and other fire regulations is certainly needed. However, there is a much simpler way of achieving by-law enforcement than the massive intrusion, expense (roads, policing, and staffing), and loss of our Local Trust Committee that would result from incorporation. Existing CRD bylaws would allow the Fire Chief, CRD bylaw enforcement officer, or the RCMP to issue tickets and levy fines for violations of a fire ban or other offences. The fire district would simply need to become a CRD local service area, perhaps under a CRD advisory Commission, a Local Community Commission, or a non-profit society contracting with the CRD. This can be achieved under our current unincorporated governance status. New fire department facilities could also receive gas tax and other grant funding through the CRD.

That aside, let’s take a look at the whole picture here. Firstly, we have some of the very trustees who thought we should abolish the Fire Board and take out more fire insurance now using our fears about forest fires and the importance of fire fighters to promote incorporation.

Secondly we have the people who tried to browbeat the current Fire Board into submission a month or so ago continuing the assault in their letter and apparently returning for yet another round at the next board meeting. This doesn’t sound like concern about brush fires to me, it sounds like politics.