

Saturna Island Fire Protection Society (SIFPS)
2023 Property Tax Requisition Increase

Dear SIFPS member,

As a member of SIFPS, the board of directors would like to wish you a very happy holiday season. At the same time, we want to provide you with important updates and outline some significant challenges in providing sustainable emergency services to the Saturna community.

In recent years, the society has continued to rely upon the generosity of volunteers donating significant amounts of personal time and energy to support the provision of emergency response services. This allowed the society to provide those services at a relatively low annual cost. The COVID pandemic helped sustain this low-cost trend, but it also created some false illusions. Resources generally became scarcer during the pandemic (e.g., finding training instructors) and supply chain issues made it difficult to obtain necessary equipment and supplies. In the current year, operating costs have significantly increased (e.g., fuel, equipment, PPE, supplies, insurance premiums, training courses fees, etc.). At the same time, the society's fire and medical response services have been recording year-over-year increases in dispatch calls which closely aligns with the 31% population and visitor growth experienced on Saturna over the last five years.

Changing standards and an increase in mandatory oversight of our operations requires more paperwork, time and effort, particularly by the fire and medical response Chiefs.

SIFPS is also facing an acute volunteer shortage, particularly in the Saturna Island Rescue operations which provides medical response and patient transportation services. Some core volunteers are retiring, and others have dropped out for a variety of reasons. Volunteer recruitment, training, onboarding, and retention activities are expensive and take considerable time, resources, and energy. Accordingly, the Society requires significant additional funding to support rebuilding its volunteer pool and to be in a financially viable position to sustain the valuable services it provides to the island's community.

The primary source of the society's funding is the annual property tax requisition from the Capital Regional District (CRD). As everyone will probably know, this funding originates from

Saturna Island's property tax assessments. However, the current CRD Bylaw No. 2165 does not allow property tax requisition revenues to be used to fund medical response and patient transportation activities. This is problematic and needs to change. No direct funding is available from BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) to financially support the society in providing those necessary services in our small and remote community, even though BCEHS is the responsible provincial authority for those services.

This past summer, SIFPS entered into a Collaboration and Patient Transportation Agreement with BCEHS which formally allows SIFPS to provide such services on Saturna Island at the licensed Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) level. This is the first such agreement of its kind for SIFPS and brings us into compliance with the Emergency Services Health Act. You may wonder why this is necessary when we have already benefitted from these services for several years. Simply put, until this agreement with BCEHS was signed, we were not recognized nor authorized to perform those services with indemnity. Our volunteers and board were at risk.

With the help and leadership of Paul Brent, the newly elected CRD Director for the Southern Gulf Islands, SIFPS made a request to the CRD to amend Bylaw No. 2165 to include medical response and patient transportation. In making the request, the society's agreement with BCEHS was a CRD pre-requisite. The CRD board of directors have recently approved amending the Bylaw and it now rests with the Inspector of Municipalities for approved amendments to be reviewed and enacted. We hope that this last hurdle is cleared sometime in January 2023.

In anticipation of the CRD Bylaw amendments being enacted, SIFPS submitted a 2023 budget revenue requisition to the CRD of \$263,000. This represents a 42% increase over the \$185,000 requisition monies received in 2022. For Saturna Island property owners, this will translate into a 42% increase in the Saturna Island Fire Protection Society component of total property taxes stated on property tax invoices in 2023 but adjusted for any changes in individual property tax assessments and actual tax rates for 2023 as determined by the CRD.

Our goal is to maintain emergency services on Saturna, and to be realistic and responsible in carrying out that goal. Please contact the SIFPS board of directors for any comments you may wish to make. *email:* info@sifps.ca *or write:* P. O. Box 168, Saturna Island, B.C., V0N 2Y0