

OPINION

2019 CCNA Awards
 Gold - Best Editorial Page | Gold - Best Feature Series (Gail Sjuberg)
 Bronze - Best News Story (Elizabeth Nolan) | Bronze - Community Service

2022 BCYCN Awards
 Gold - Best All Round (for circulation Category C)
 Bronze - Community Service Award



Driftwood

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EDITORIAL

Hall plan is solid

We live in distracting times.

When it comes to the referendum asking Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District ratepayers to approve borrowing \$9.7 million to build a new fire hall, it is easy to be distracted by late-blooming questions, laymen's alternatives and allegations being thrown into the ring.

It is also easy to trash any idea, plan or person. But what is needed to make any good decision in the public interest is to open one's mind, take the time to get reliable information and trust that it is being provided by people who know more than we do, and that they have good intentions. If you, a friend or family member have an alternate idea about what could work better or cost less money, it has likely already been considered and rejected for valid reasons.

Since the 2013 hall referendum defeat, many different fire trustees and staff, architects and professional consultants

THE ISSUE:

Fire hall referendum

WE SAY:

Proposal deserves voter support

Securing of the old hall site as public space for \$1 by the CRD and allowing Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue to remain there rent-free until the new hall is ready is also a good idea. What eventually happens on that property will require public input and approval through a CRD referendum if funds must be borrowed to do anything. We are not voting on future use of that space at this time.

Something else to stress is that getting a new fire hall is not about improving the chances your house will be "saved" if it catches fire. Honestly, it's not about you as an individual. The referendum is about having a safe and healthy, well-located emergency services building with the amenities needed for firefighters and staff to do their jobs as best they can.

No one is trying to pull one over on you. Defensive emotions are not required. What is needed is an open mind, logic, practical considerations and trust. This is not the time to take our eye off the ball, abandoning the years of effort that have got us to the point of having a good, solid, affordable proposal to vote on.

We encourage you to support your community and its fire department by voting "yes" in the fire hall referendum and ensuring your ballot is received by mail or in person at the Ganges fire hall by June 30.

have done their best to get us to the point we are at today. Accumulating some reserve funds is prudent for any local government with taxing authority. Surveying people on building options and tolerance for tax increases — and going for a zero increase — was also smart.



Hall questions answered

BY STAN SHAPIRO

Re: Brian Swanson's June 8 Viewpoint and other questions, as a member of the communications committee for Salt Spring Fire Rescue, I know that questions about the proposed new fire hall take many forms.

The fire department has received questions via surveys, online through our Facebook page, in-person at open houses and indirectly via other social media channels. All of that input is important and worthy of a response.

When voting on any issue, several questions should come to mind. First, has the organization earned your support? Most of you already know that Salt Spring Fire Rescue promptly responds to all fires with a high degree of professionalism that keeps fires from raging out of control and inflaming the whole island during dry summer periods.

But did you know about the "first responder" medical and accident assistance the department has provided for many years? It also provides fire safety protection advice and funding to islanders and is the backbone of our emergency response network for any disaster that might befall our island.

A common question we have heard is "Why a new hall, why not just renovate what you have?" That hall, built in 1959, is well beyond its "best before date." Built on landfill, it might well collapse, just when it is needed most, should our island suffer from an earthquake or flood. In addition, it is far too small, and its poor ventilation poses all kinds of health challenges. It is time for the location in question to be repurposed for community use.

VIEWPOINT

Brian Swanson also asked, "Will spending \$13.7 million to relocate fire trucks

to the new site reduce the response time if your house was on fire?" The simple answer is maybe not. That's not the purpose of relocating. However, if a major earthquake hits Salt Spring, in its current location the response time would be measured in days or weeks, rather than in minutes from the new safer location near Brinkworthy.

Another question is "How much will all this cost taxpayers?" Because of prudent advance planning, you won't be paying any more in taxes. Already budgeted reserve funding will be sufficient to cover annual mortgage costs and the project budget has a contingency fund sufficient to cover any cost overruns.

Some have questioned why we need to spend this money on a new fire hall when we have other urgent needs like access to family doctors and the challenge of finding affordable housing? Housing and health care are top priorities, but so is the safety of our community. This is not a zero-sum game. We need to address all our priorities, not cherry pick among them. To suggest that we take tax money earmarked (by law) for fire protection and divert it to deal with affordable housing ignores the political and legal realities of how tax monies can be spent in a community.

The decision is now up to you and all the other island's property owners. However you decide to vote, carefully follow the instructions given and get your vote witnessed. Otherwise, it won't count.

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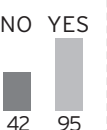
THIS WEEK'S POLL QUESTION:

Does Salt Spring need paved bike lanes?

Yes No

LAST WEEK'S QUESTION:

Are you voting in favour of a new fire hall?



Cast your ballot online at www.gulfislandsdriftwood.com before Monday 2 p.m. or clip this box and drop it at our office before Monday at 2 p.m.