



## **NEWS RELEASE: Investing in a Safer Future – A New Fire Hall for Cowichan Bay**

May 3, 2022

(Cowichan Bay, BC) Fire fighters and first responders are there for us when we need them.

The Cowichan Bay Volunteer Fire Rescue is run by volunteers who drop everything to respond when they get a call. These volunteers are working out of a 1977 building that no longer meets WorkSafe BC, BC Building Code or Fire Code requirements.

This June, the Cowichan Bay Improvement District is seeking approval from residents to borrow \$16 Million to construct a new Cowichan Bay fire hall. The funding would be repaid by property owners over 20 years, with an average cost to homeowners of \$354 per year.

“The decision to pursue a new hall has been made after extensive study and was recommended by a Citizen Advisory Group in 2021,” says Marsha Stanley, Chair of the Cowichan Bay Improvement District. “The longer we wait to build a new hall, the more expensive it will be. Investing in this fire hall is an investment in our community’s safety.”

The existing Cowichan Bay fire hall was built in 1977 and has not had any structural upgrades since then. The long list of issues with the building includes:

- Significant seismic deficiencies (the building may collapse in an earthquake)
- Non-compliance with the BC Building Code
- Undersized vehicle bays that require custom-built trucks at great extra cost
- Improper spaces for decontamination after a fire, putting our volunteers in harm’s way
- Improper areas for cleaning and storing fire fighters’ Personal Protective Equipment
- Lack of training space
- Lack of washrooms and showers

The new fire hall is planned for completion in 2025 and it will be built directly behind the existing fire hall to allow the fire department to operate out of the existing building during construction. The new hall will be designed to post-disaster standards, meaning it will be able to withstand significant seismic events, and it will be sized to serve the area’s growing population for a minimum of 50 years.

Funding approval will be sought through an Alternative Approval Process (AAP), a tool commonly used to determine whether there is community support for a project. In an AAP,

if 10 per cent of eligible property owners in the area served by Cowichan Bay Fire Rescue indicate their opposition to the borrowing, the AAP will not pass; if less than 10% are opposed, the AAP passes and borrowing for a new fire hall can proceed. Residents who support a new fire hall do not need to take any action in the AAP.

Residents are reminded that costs are unavoidable to maintain continued fire protection in the community. If we do not take steps now to build a new fire hall, we may be ordered to do so by regulating bodies, costing more in the long run.

Background information and details about the AAP are available at:  
[www.cowbayfirehall.com/](http://www.cowbayfirehall.com/).

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### **About the Cowichan Bay Improvement District and volunteer fire service:**

- The Cowichan Bay Improvement District delivers fire protection approximately 10,000 residents across an area of about 170 square kilometers.
- The Cowichan Bay Volunteer Fire Rescue responds to an average of 200 calls per year (one call every 1.8 days)
- The Cowichan Bay Improvement District is much larger than Electoral Area D (Cowichan Bay). It includes parts of Cowichan Station, Koksilah, Cobble Hill, Arbutus Ridge, and other areas, along with Cowichan Bay (Electoral Area D).
- The Improvement District is governed by a board of elected trustees and is entirely independent from the Cowichan Valley Regional District.
- Volunteer fire fighters give their personal time to serve their community. Each year, they take part in 50 training sessions, 50 maintenance sessions and countless additional training and community events. In addition to responding to fires, they also respond to medical emergencies because they are trained in First Aid and CPR and carry specialized medical equipment. They are often first to arrive on the scene of an accident or other medical emergency.
- The average annual cost to property owners for a new fire hall (\$354) is based on a cost of \$43.10 per \$100,000 of assessed value. According to BC Assessment, as of March 31, 2022, the average residential property in the Improvement District is valued at \$820,477. Property owners with a home assessed at \$820,477 would pay approximately \$43.10 x 8.2 or \$354. Owners of properties valued at less would pay less; owners of properties valued at more would pay more.

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