



NEWS RELEASE: New Cowichan Bay Fire Hall to Proceed

July 17, 2022

(Cowichan Bay, BC) An Alternative Approval Process (AAP) seeking property owner approval to borrow up to \$16 Million to fund a new Cowichan Bay Fire Hall is considered to have passed with 401 forms received in opposition.

“The decision to pursue a new hall was made after extensive study and we are pleased to be moving forward with this essential community project,” says Marsha Stanley, Chair of the Cowichan Bay Improvement District. “While the AAP passed, we heard loud and clear that residents are concerned about increasing costs; we take these concerns seriously and will work hard to keep the cost of the new fire hall as reasonable as possible.”

The AAP ran from June 2 – July 15, 2022 and gave property owners the opportunity to oppose borrowing for a new fire hall. Under the AAP, if 10 per cent or less of property owners were opposed (448 owners), borrowing for the new fire hall could proceed. 401 votes of opposition were received, meaning that the project can move forward. Reports summarizing results of the AAP communications activities together with resident feedback are available here: <https://www.cowbayfirehall.com/aap-and-funding/>.

The Improvement District must now obtain final borrowing approval, finalize designs, tender the project, and initiate construction. The new hall is planned for completion in 2025 and will be built to post-disaster standards, meaning it will be able to withstand significant seismic events.

The Improvement District acknowledges the opposition expressed by some property owners and the valid concerns that they raised about rising cost of living. The District intends to hold a community meeting prior to the start of construction to provide a detailed project update and revised cost estimates for interested residents.

The existing Cowichan Bay fire hall was built in 1977 and has not had any structural upgrades since then. It no longer meets WorkSafe BC, BC Building Code or Fire Code requirements, puts volunteers at risk of exposure to harmful carcinogens, and does not fit modern apparatus sizes. The existing building cannot continue to operate with no replacement plan in place.

The new hall will be built directly behind the existing hall on property already owned by the Improvement District, allowing the fire department to continue operating out of the existing building during construction. The new hall is designed to serve the area’s growing population for a minimum of 50 years.

While borrowing of up to \$16 Million has been approved, this is a maximum cost and the Improvement District will make every effort to bring actual costs down. Funding will be repaid by property owners over 20 years - the maximum loan term for Improvement Districts - and if the full \$16 Million is used, the average cost to homeowners will be around \$354 per year.

Information about the new fire hall and the AAP is available at: www.cowbayfirehall.com/.

- 30 -

About the Cowichan Bay Improvement District and volunteer fire service:

- The Cowichan Bay Improvement District delivers fire protection to approximately 10,000 residents.
- 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. They respond to both fires and 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.

Media Contact:

Marsha Stanley
Chair, Cowichan Bay Improvement District
Email: info@cbvfr.com