



1962

2022

Six Decades in the Making:

SUMMARIZING THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING
AND GAINING SUPPORT TO BUILD A NEW
FIREHALL ON SALT SPRING ISLAND
FOR SALT SPRING ISLAND



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Prepared for SSIFPD Trustees
Prepared by Return On Insight
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1.0 Introduction: Six Decades in the Making

Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District, also commonly known as Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue (SSIFR), or Salt Spring's Fire Department, has been operating out of Firehall # 1 in the center of Ganges since 1959. The island has changed dramatically over six decades, but the island's emergency response center has remained headquartered in a building that has steadily become insufficient to the task. The need to build a new modern firehall has been recognized for many years, but although plans were proposed in 2013, gaining community support for construction of a new facility proved elusive.

The SSIFR Board of Directors took the lessons learned from the unsuccessful referendum of 2013 to heart, initiating a public review process starting with convening a Fire Rescue Advisory Committee. That committee took the first steps toward the goal of building a new firehall that is supported by island residents, commissioning an independent third-party expert to assess the state of the current firehall. [*The Firewise Consulting Report*](#) in March 2018 concluded that based on operational challenges, space requirements, and the location of the old firehall in a seismically threatened area that becomes congested at times (think Saturday morning market days) "the SSIFR move immediately to...develop a new Fire Hall."

Internally, the SSIFR Board of Directors began to put plans into place to build for tomorrow, setting aside reserve funds to enable the construction of a new firehall and initiating discussions with the Capital Regional District to monetize the value of the old firehall location. By 2021, architects, planners and consultation firms were engaged to provide the necessary expertise to bring to life practical plans for a new firehall that the whole community could support.

Return On Insight was commissioned to assist Salt Spring Island Fire Protection Improvement District with:

1. **Strategic Assessment.** Assess public attitudes toward SSIFR, including perceived strengths and weaknesses and reactions to the concept of building a new firehall.
2. **Design Options.** Provide an accurate assessment of the preferred options for form and massing of several designs.
3. **Communications.** Develop and implement a communications campaign leading up to a referendum to approve borrowing to build a new firehall, including paid media (advertising in print and online), earned media (editorial coverage), signage, and direct mail literature.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement.** Arranging input from community groups and key stakeholders, in targeted meetings and Open Houses.
5. **Voter Engagement.** Convince Salt Spring voters of the positive aspects of the proposed plan to ensure a successful referendum.

This detailed summary of the entire consultation and communications process has been produced post referendum (July 2022).



2.0 The Strategic Framework of the Campaign

Based upon the February 2022 online research results and feedback received from qualitative interviews conducted in the fall of 2021 and early 2022, the public campaign was structured in three phases:

1. **Prepared for Today** (March through early April) reinforced the underlying strength of SSIFR, that the force is ready and able to respond to emergencies, reminding people of the crucial role they play and the fact that the force is made up of friends, family and neighbours who are “First In. All In. Every Call.”
2. **Planning for Tomorrow** (April to mid-May) showcased the prudent fiscal management that led to establishing reserve funds to enable construction of a new firehall with no new taxes. It also reminded people of all the underlying reasons we invest in firefighting services (climate change emergencies such as fire, flood, wind) as well as dispelling some common misperceptions about salaries and the stringent requirements for building an emergency response center.
3. **Vote YES for a Safer Salt Spring** (mid-May to end of June) asked for a vote of support, stressing that “it is up to you now” and a yes vote will result in no new taxes.

Two community stakeholder committees explored ideas about Firehall #1 in 2019-2020, informing the initial design parameters for project managers and architects. In 2021-2022 a range of public consultations was initiated to better understand taxpayer and stakeholder perceptions, including:

- **Qualitative Exploration.** A series of 25 interviews with community leaders and other stakeholders were held with individuals and small groups in the fall of 2021.
- **Public Opinion Surveys.** In February 2022, an online representative survey of SSI residents was conducted to provide guidance on preferred options for form and massing, and to inform the communications strategy. Wave 2 in early June measured changes in perceptions and provided final input regarding design and communications prior to the referendum vote concluding June 30, 2022.
- **Open Houses.** Two Open Houses were held for members of the public to examine designs and ask questions in April and early June 2022.
- **Active Outreach.** Numerous stakeholder groups were consulted, including Brinkworthy residents, the CRD, ASK Salt Spring, Transition Salt Spring, the Ag Alliance, and a cross section of business leaders in various sectors.



- **Online Outreach.** The Salt Spring Fire website was updated with reports and project information as well as an online survey for ongoing input.
- **Advertising.** Ads were placed online and in print to inform the public about the project and invite them to seek more information online.

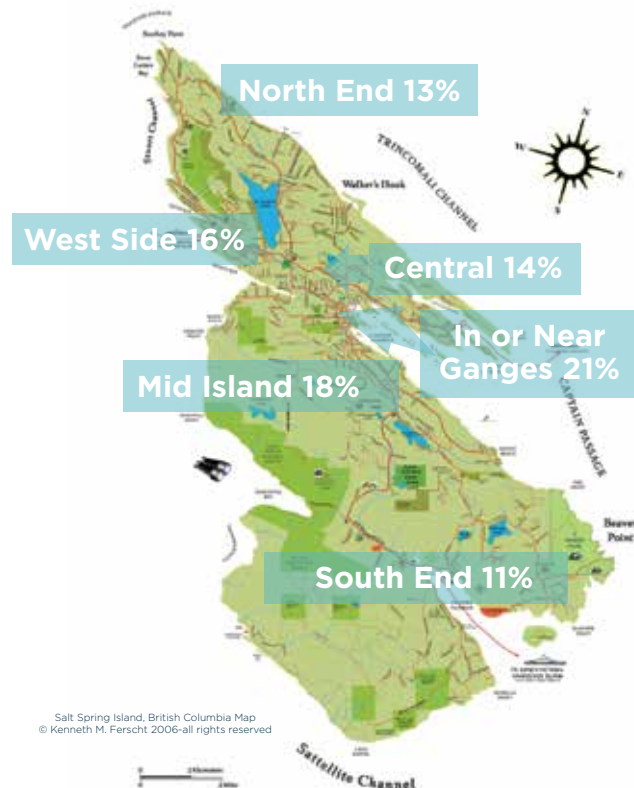
3.0 Community Consultation and Public Input

3.1 Public Input Via Surveys and Interviews

Return On Insight developed a multi-phase process of consultation with the community. It started in 2021 with in-person meetings with key stakeholders, leading to the launch of a representative online survey of Salt Spring Island residents in February 2022 and again in June 2022. Additional meetings with neighbours, businesses, and other Salt Spring Island organizations were held via telephone, video conference and in person where possible. Open Houses were scheduled for April and May 2022 to provide an opportunity for the public to see the designs being developed and to ask questions of the staff and design team. A self-selected survey remained online on the SSIFR website to gather input throughout the process.

The representative online surveys of 367 residents in February and June 2022 assessed perceptions of Salt Spring Island fire services and facilities as well as informing decision-making on finalizing design options for a new firehall. The survey data was weighted demographically to ensure the sample was representative of the statistically known population of Salt Spring Island by age and gender, according to Statistics Canada profiles.

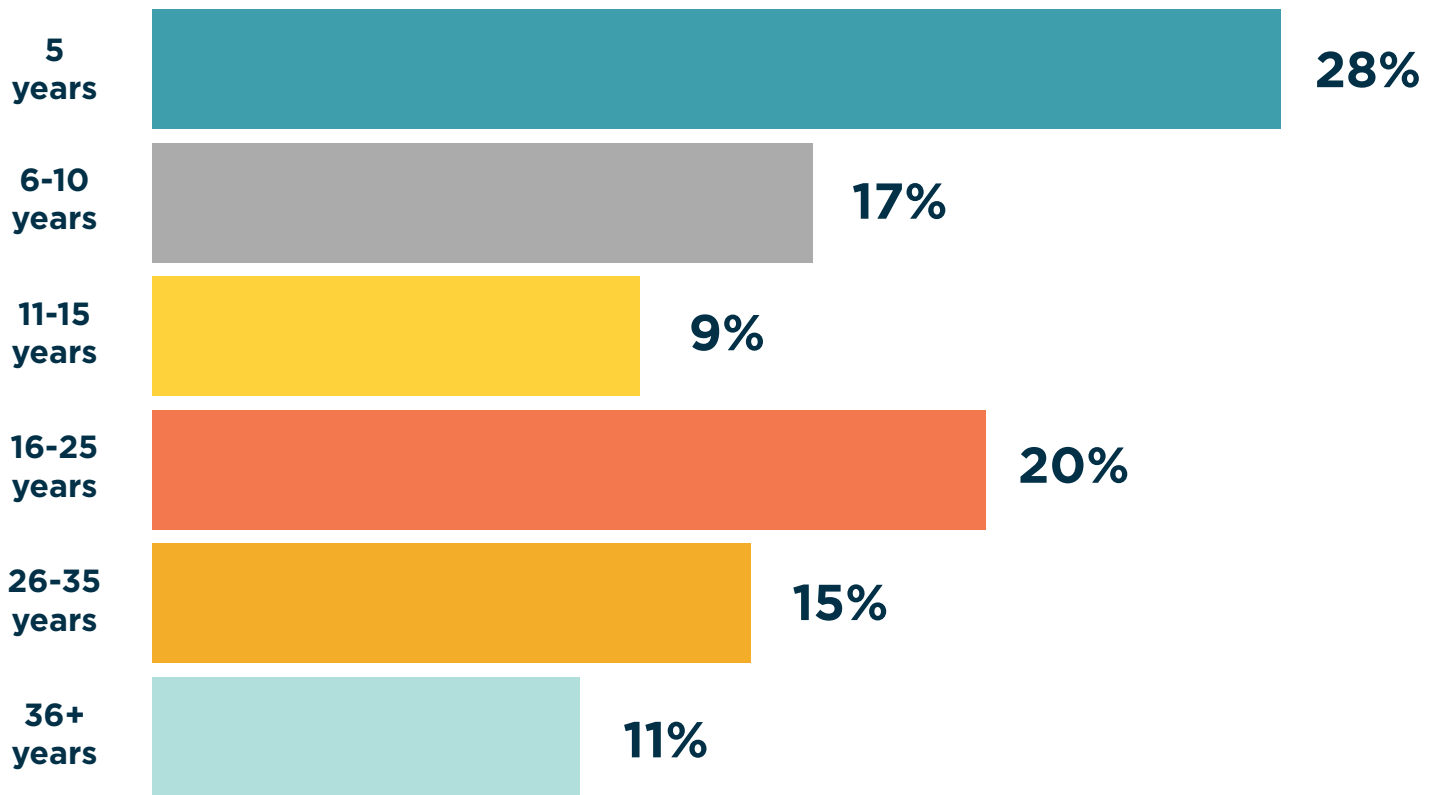
PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS JUNE 2022





YEARS LIVED ON SSI

Base: 157 Participants



AVERAGE LENGTH 16.7 YEARS

Salt Spring Fire Services and Facilities Surveying
February-June 2022

3.2 Incorporating Attitudes Toward Fire Services and Facilities on SSI

Most residents viewed SSIFR favourably in responding to emergencies (eight in ten), and they also believed they received fairly good value for the taxes they pay to SSIFR (just over half). The department's state of readiness was never in question, however, there remained questions among some islanders about how efficiently SSIFR spends tax dollars. While a majority believed SSIFR is doing a good job planning for future emergencies, spending efficiency and future planning are two areas where SSIFR needed to more clearly communicate the actions that had been taken recently, such as reducing the required square feet and setting aside reserves to fund the project without raising taxes. Highlights of key message elements included:

- **Reinforce Strengths.** Most residents viewed SSIFR favourably in responding to emergencies and perceived they get good value for taxes paid.
- **Personal Connection.** One of the biggest assets of SSIFR is the extent to which residents personally know members. The personal connection to SSIFR (we are your neighbours, friends, family) is a key strength of the organization that was featured in the photography and creative elements of the campaign.
- **Increased Engagement.** Only one in three had engaged directly in February, so an active outreach effort was undertaken in person in print and online. Measures of engagement increased substantially in 5 months, with four in five recalling some communications about the project by June 2022.
- **Resolving Questions.** As questions emerged, SSIFR attempted to answer them, including about financial estimates, the need for a new hall, the challenge of renovating the old hall and the steps taken by SSIFR to plan prudently by reducing the size and build the hall without raising taxes.
- **Climate Challenges.** In addition to highlighting environmental aspects of the new design, the campaign also explored how the project addresses a key public concern: resilience in the face of climate challenges such as windstorms, rising sea level, drought and earthquakes.





Old and New Firehall. There was widespread awareness and acceptance of the need to replace Firehall #1, with nine in ten agreeing Salt Spring needs to build a new firehall. There was also high awareness of plans to build a new firehall (four in five), although fewer (six in ten) were familiar with the details at first, rising to 85% by June due to the campaign.

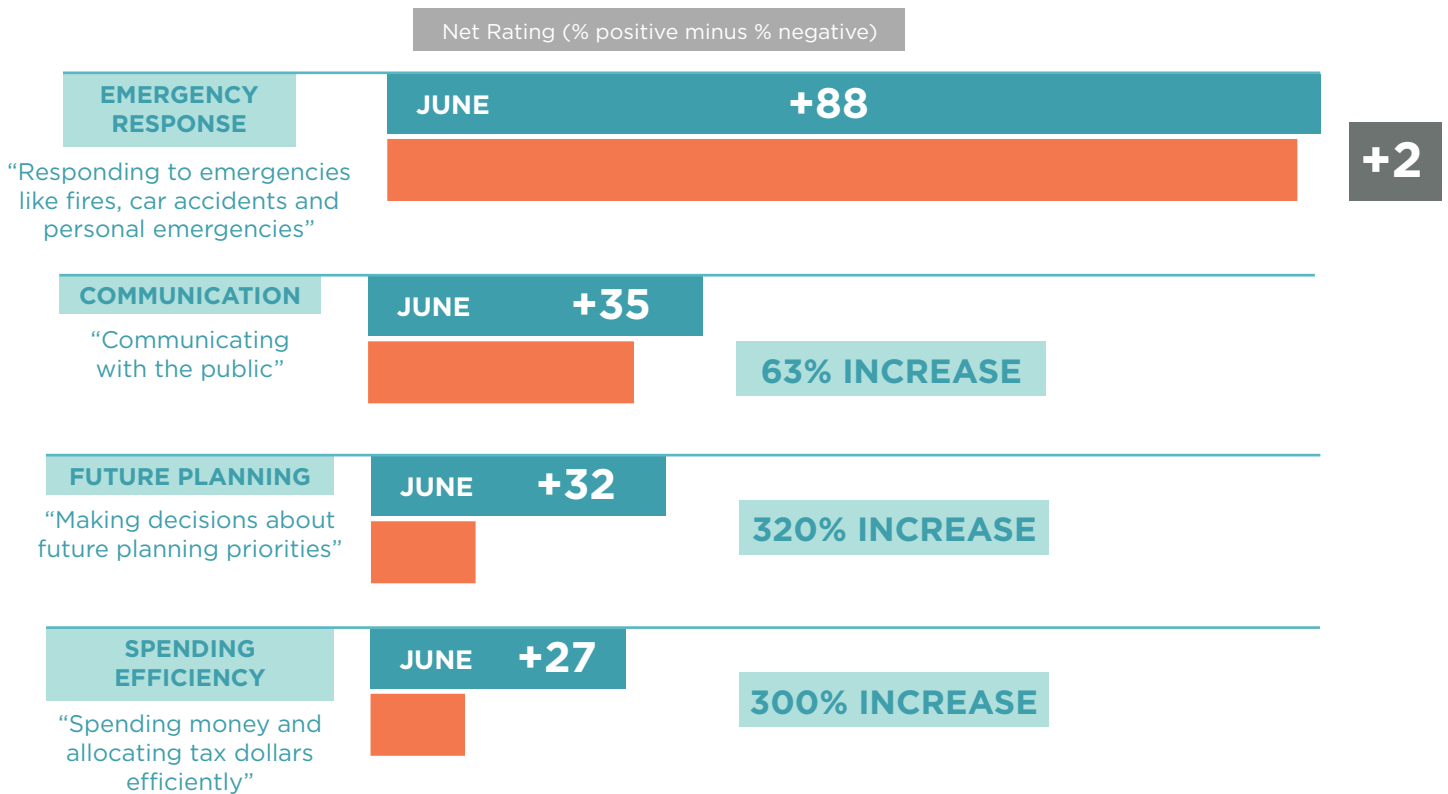
Voting. About half of residents say they voted in the 2013 referendum, with slightly more saying they voted no, rather than yes. Half of the potential voters in a 2022 referendum had no direct history with the previous vote. In early June, polling revealed that 75% were likely to vote yes, an estimation that proved accurate.

3.3 Improving Budget and Planning Perceptions

At the root of some of the critical perceptions about SSIFR was the issue of efficient budgeting. Clearly communicating the steps taken to set aside reserves for future apparatus purchases and construction of the new firehall helped to bolster perceptions of SSIFR. The public campaign successfully raised awareness of the project (63% increase in communications), as well as improving the image of SSIFR regarding future planning (a 320% increase in five months), and spending money efficiently (a 300% increase). Steps taken to highlight the organization’s approach toward planning and spending significantly strengthened public trust in the lead-up to the June referendum.

IMPROVEMENTS IN IMAGE FEB-JUNE 2022

“Based on what you know or what you have heard, how would you rate the way the fire department on SSI handles the following issues? Are they doing a very good job, or good job?”





4.0 Design Options and Input

4.1 Reaction to Facilities and Features

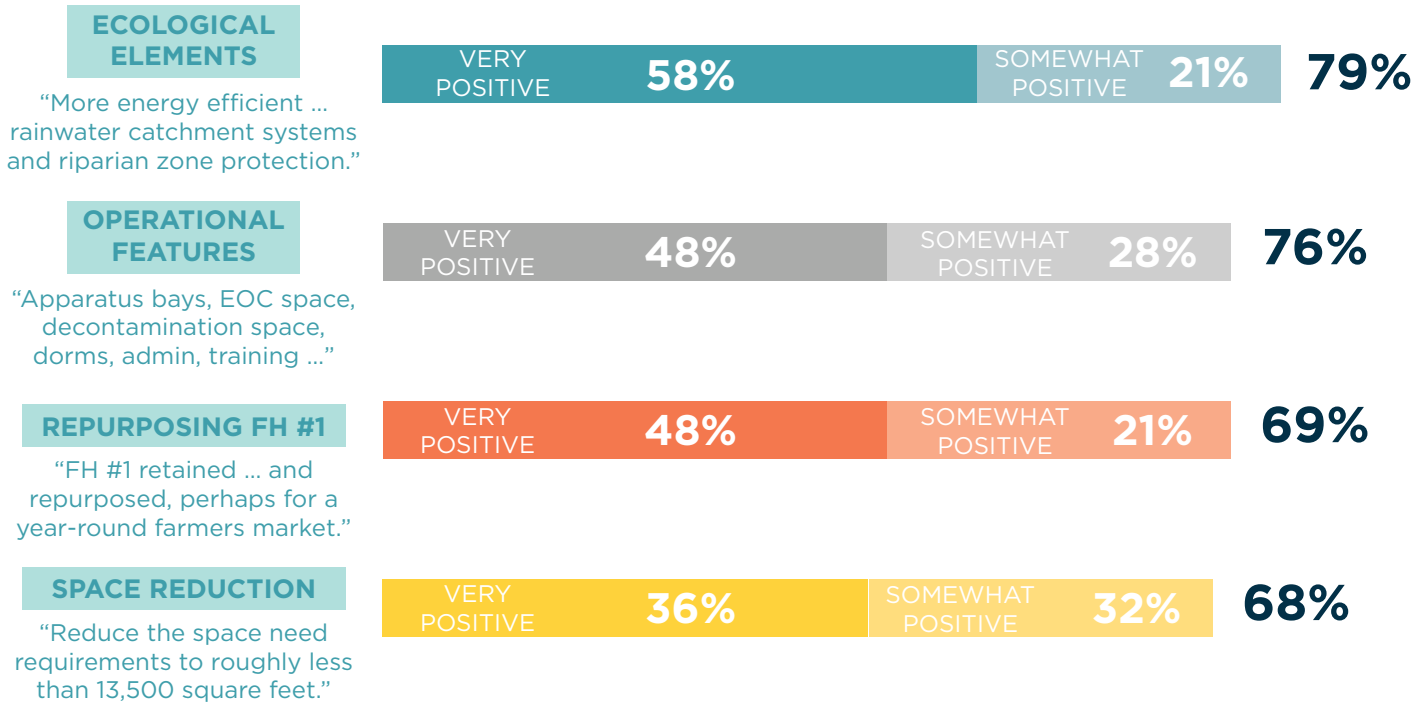
Three draft options were presented for consideration in early 2022, and the one that was least expensive was preferred. Based on results from the initial February survey, the second most expensive option with some enhancements and no new taxes was considered. Surveys showed this option would garner 65% approval.

With respect to examining initial plans for a new firehall, different aspects had varying degrees of positive response:

- **Eco-friendly** steps taken in the design process (riparian protection, energy efficiency, water catchment) were the most positive aspects of the plan (over four in five rated those aspects positively).
- **Operational layout** details (and the emergency preparedness equipment required) were also positively rated (three in four).
- **Redeployment of Firehall #1 as a Public Market** garnered a positive response among seven in ten people.
- **Reducing the required space** also provoked a positive response among two thirds of people. The 36% space reduction from 2013, from over 18,000 square feet to 11,500 square feet, was an important feature of the final communications package.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DESIGN FEATURES

“For each of the following features, does that make you feel positive or negative toward the idea of building a new Emergency Response Firehall?” **FEBRUARY 2022**





With respect to the overall estimated project costs of \$13.5 million, almost three quarters of respondents in February 2022 thought that the estimated range of building costs per square foot for comparable projects (\$900-\$1350) seemed reasonable.

4.2 Input on Form and Massing

Reaction to design options were assessed in several ways. First, initial impressions of each design were sought. Option B (the contemporary design) came out slightly on top of option A. Secondly, people were asked to choose which option they liked best. This produced a mixed response, but it still favoured option B. Finally, each option and its anticipated tax impact was presented, and people were asked if they would vote yes or no to authorize borrowing. The preferred option would result in no new taxes.

As the design process was finalized, the “hybrid’ option became the focal point of public communications, with two mail outs to all Salt Spring residents and two Open House held to discuss and evaluate that plan.

ESTIMATED REFERENDUM SUPPORT FOR EACH CONCEPT

“Should the Salt Spring Fire Protection District be given authority to borrow a maximum of \$9.7 million dollars over a period not longer than 25 years to fund the construction of a new fire hall?”

VOTE YES



Hybrid

Space reduced by 36% from 2013 and within the current budget framework **no tax increase** will be required?



Industrial

If Option A were chosen, how would you vote ... understanding that within the current budget framework **no tax increase** will be required?



Contemporary

If Option B were chosen, how would you vote ... understanding that might amount to an average **\$23 tax increase**?



Heritage

If Option C were chosen, how would you vote ... understanding that a **\$46 tax increase** might be required?






4.3 Consultations Regarding Design Adjustments

Between February 2022 and June 2022, additional adjustments continued to the design configuration based on public input. Space requirements were kept to a bare minimum necessary for safe operations, while renderings and site plans evolved. The net effect was to produce a rendering (shown below, and discussed in person at community consultations), along with elevations and site plans.

The first open house was scheduled for April 28, from 6-9 pm at Firehall #1, to review plans and invite input and questions from the community.

A second open house was held to review the updated plans and the detailed cost estimates on June 2, at Firehall #1. A series of meetings was also organized to consult with stakeholders prior to the referendum vote, including neighbours, businesses, elected officials, public boards and staff, and other community organizations.

The open houses were widely advertised online and in print and direct mail pieces.



Rendering of proposed 11,500 square foot firehall

Come down to Firehall #1 in Ganges for an

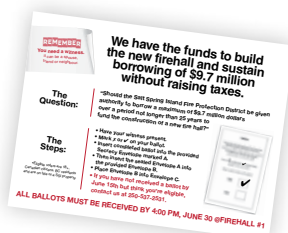
OPEN HOUSE

Thursday APRIL 28 from 6-9 pm

Based on current budgeting, borrowing to build a new firehall can be sustained with no new taxes.

For more detailed information visit www.saltspringfire.com
We'd love to know what you think.

Planning for Tomorrow. saltspringfire.com





4.4 Concept Design Considerations

The proposed site is a greenfield location redesignated for non-agricultural R3 land use. Riparian areas run through the site: a stormwater ditch at the East property line, drainage at the South property line, and another small drainage course that bisects the middle of the site. The proposed site development mitigates riparian concerns by way of a stormwater path, including a location for storm water ponding with off-site discharge. The site access is from Lower Ganges Road along the south property line.

The site design below includes space outside of the front tarmac for maneuvering apparatus on site. These needs were instrumental in the entire design decision-making process, including site and building layout, sizing, services, and exterior design / finishes selection.

4.5 Requirements for Building an Emergency Response Center

One question raised by some residents in the community consultations bears examination: “Why does it cost so much to build a glorified garage to park fire trucks?” The answer to that is simple yet profound. The proposed firehall will be the centerpiece of Salt Spring’s emergency response network, and as such, must be built to exacting post-emergency standards. A detailed review of the numerous detailed building codes and regulations that must be satisfied gives some indication of the complexity of the task. Over 30 regulations and codes must be satisfied. For a partial list see Appendix A.





5.0 The Public Approval Process

5.1 Seeking Approval of Ratepayers for \$9.7 Million in Borrowing

The Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District has put aside reserves to help defray the cost of building a new firehall, earmarking \$3 million in reserves in addition to a \$1 million contribution arranged through the CRD for Firehall #1. Ratepayers were asked to approve (via mail-in balloting) borrowing of \$9.7 in a referendum, with votes being received at Firehall #1 by June 30, 2022. No new taxes will be required to proceed with the project based on the current budget framework. The referendum question wording was as follows:

“Should the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District be given authority to borrow a maximum of \$9.7 million dollars over a period not longer than 25 years to fund the construction of a new fire hall?”

5.2 Voter Eligibility and Balloting

Eligible voters had to be 18 years of age or older, Canadian citizens, residents of B.C. and be named on title of a property on Salt Spring Island. Any dispute about eligibility was adjudicated by the independent returning officer and their deputies who presided over the election process and the counting of ballots. Extensive non-partisan advertising was secured in May and June to inform and educate the voters about the process.

In similar recent elections on Salt Spring Island, mail-in ballots have proven to be superior to in-person voting. The experience of North Salt Spring Waterworks District was instructive:

- For the last all-in-person NSSWD election (2019) the NSSWD received 110 votes out of a possible 2,864, a low **3.8%** turnout rate.
- For the all mail-in-ballot election (2020) the NSSWD sent out 3,030 ballots, and 706 were returned, for a **23.3%** turnout rate.

To facilitate voter participation, a-mail-in ballot was held for the SSIFR firehall referendum.

5.3 Evaluating the Result: 75% Yes

A total of 3,472 votes were cast with 2,608 (75%) voting ‘YES’ and 864 (25%) voting NO.

In addition, there were 245 votes that were not counted as part of the final record (57 non-deliverable mailing votes, 141 votes from voters not on the voters list, 34 corporate returns and 13 spoiled/rejected ballots).

On all accounts, the result is a strong endorsement, both in terms of the percentage of yes votes (three to one) as well as the turnout rate of 43% of eligible voters, much higher than in the previous SSIFR vote in 2013 or recent NSSWD elections.



Appendix A: Post Disaster Building Requirements

Building Codes, Guidelines and Other Requirements (21)

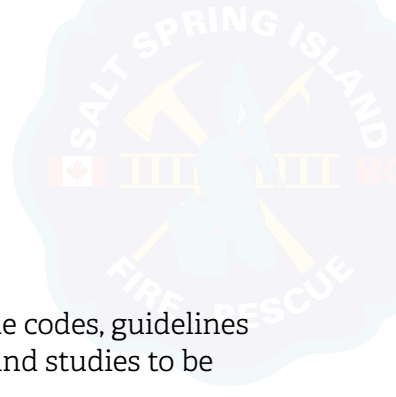
At the time of this report, the current codes and standards that must be followed include, but are not limited to the following:

- British Columbia Building Code, 2018 (BCBC).
- British Columbia Fire Code, 2018 (BCFC).
- British Columbia Plumbing Code 2018.
- National Building Code of Canada, 2015.
- Geological Survey of Canada Open File 7893, Seismic Hazard Model.
- National Energy Code of Canada for Buildings, 2017 (NECB).
- ANSI, IEEE, EEMAC Standard for High and Low Voltage Switchgear.
- Canadian Electrical Code – Part I, latest adapted.
- Illuminating Engineering Society of North America Standards (IESNA), latest adapted.
- NFPA 13 – 2013 Standard for Installation of Sprinkler Systems.
- NFPA 10 – 2013 Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers.
- ASHRAE 55 – 2010 Thermal Environmental Conditions.
- ASHRAE 62 – 2001 Ventilation for Acceptable Indoor Air Quality – Except Addendum N.
- ASHRAE 90.1 – 2016 Energy Standard for Buildings Except Low-Rise Residential Buildings.
- CSA B149.1 – 2015 Natural Gas and Propane Installation Code.
- CSA Standard B651-95 Barrier Free Design.
- CSA Fire Alarm Standards and ULC Standards, latest adapted.
- CSA S16 – Design of Steel Structures.
- CSA A23.1, A23.2 and A23.3 – Concrete Materials and Methods of Concrete Construction/Test Methods and Standard Practices for Concrete/ Design of Concrete Structures.
- CSA S136 – Design of Cold-Formed Steel Structural Members.
- CSA S304 – Design of Masonry Structures.

Codes, Guidelines and Other Requirements (3)

At the time of this report, the current policies and bylaws guiding the project include:

- Islands Trust Salt Spring Island Land Use Bylaw No. 355.
- Islands Trust Salt Spring Island Official Community Plan Bylaw No. 434.
- CRD Building Regulation Bylaw 3741.



Appendix B: Other Reports Approvals and Studies Required (8+)

Any future project development emerging from this study will need to follow the codes, guidelines and policies that will be current at the time of the development. Other reports and studies to be considered during future phases of development include but are not limited to:

- The Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) report.
- Legal Land Survey.
- Power, telecommunication and gas servicing easements and alignments confirmation.
- Water and sanitary servicing off-site agreements.
- Other reports required, as noted within Section 6.0, Engineering Commentary of the S2 Architecture Report #2211169.
- Development and Building permits
- Development Permit (DP)
- Building Permit (BP)

For future phases of the project, reports and assessments at federal and provincial levels may be required in addition to the documentation listed above. The final list of applicable Codes and approvals will need to be determined at the next phase of the Project, in coordination with Islands Trust, BC Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure, the CRD, and BC Ministry of Forests.