



Updated: April 29, 2020

With health and safety top of mind amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Board and the Fire Rescue Advisory Committee are meeting online to work on the Fire Rescue Needs and Facilities Assessment Project. The Board and the Advisory Committee are deeply committed to creating safe, responsible solutions for fire protection and public safety, recognizing the impact of COVID-19 on our Salt Spring community. Our goal is to continue the leg work, ensure all questions are answered and be ready when the time is right to move forward. We are developing online opportunities for you to learn more and to provide feedback on any proposed options for a new fire hall. Please stay tuned for more details.

Project Updates can be found on our website and you can also sign up to receive updates via email at <https://saltspringfire.com/fire-rescue-advisory-committee/>

Thank you – and stay well!

What is the Fire Rescue Needs and Facilities Assessment about?

Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue (SSIFR) provides fire, rescue, emergency medical, hazmat, vehicle crash, fire inspection service, and public education for the Island's residents, businesses, and visitors from three fire hall sites: Fire Hall (Main) #1 in Ganges, Fire Hall #2 at Fulford Harbour, and Fire Hall #3 (Central) on Vesuvius Bay Road. While the Ganges Fire Hall has served the community well for the past 60 years, it requires significant upgrades. The purpose of the project is to identify potential options and action items for the provision of a new or upgraded Fire Hall and associated fire protection services that meet all legislative, regulatory and industry standards for fire protection and public safety.

Do we need to replace the Ganges Fire Hall, or can it be renovated?

Two recent reports confirming the status of the Ganges Fire Hall were reviewed by both the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District Board of Trustees and the Fire Rescue Advisory Committee of community volunteers.

The full reports, as well as the Board Report with the Advisory Committee recommendations can be found on the Salt Spring Fire Rescue website:



1. [2020 Fire Station Baseline Needs Assessment](#), prepared by FireWise Consulting
2. [2020 Update, Fire Fall No. 1 Structural Assessment Report](#), prepared by Herold Engineering
3. [April 27, 2020 Fire Protection District Board Report](#)

These reports provide evidence-based assessments of both the 60-year-old building and the site, information that is critical for making informed decisions about the future of the Fire Hall. The reports conclude that the condition of the building and size of the site cannot support a modern fire hall, and it would be cost-prohibitive to bring it into compliance with the current building code and other legislative and regulatory requirements for fire protection and public safety.

Recommendations include both short- and long-term options.

- **In the short-term:** there are several critical building issues that need to be addressed including repairs to the roof, ventilation and electrical system to meet WorkSafeBC, Occupational Health and Safety and the BC Building Code for the safety of Firefighters and others who work in or visit the building. On April 27, the Fire Protection District Board voted to proceed with getting quotes and options to address these issues. This information will be used to determine next steps to address these deficiencies.
- **In the long-term:** both reports clearly indicate that the current facility is neither suitable nor does it make financial sense to rebuild in this location. Key deficiencies include:
 - The site is not seismically sound, being built on infill without pilings to support it, and may not withstand a major disaster, reducing the capacity of emergency services to respond. The cost of a seismic retrofit, according to the high-level ballpark estimates provided in the Herold Engineering report is in the range of \$1.5 million to \$2 million. This does not include the additional costs to renovate the building.
 - The site is already too small for the existing fire protection equipment, let alone a site that will need to accommodate fire services 30-50 years from now. Currently fire trucks, staff and visitor vehicles need to use the adjacent public property for parking, including the storage container next to the building which is also on public property.

Given this recent and updated information, the Fire Protection District Board voted not to pursue rebuilding the Ganges Fire Hall and its foundations, and instead seek another location for a future fire hall such as the Brinkworthy site.

Options for a new fire hall will be shared with the public as part of the public engagement process, and Islanders will be able to consider the different options to ensure fire rescue services meet the public safety needs of the community. Plans are underway to enable online access to information and engagement opportunities.

If the Fire Hall cannot be reasonably rebuilt on the same site, where would it be built?



Both the Board and the Advisory Committee recognize the importance of investigating the Brinkworthy site as a potential alternative. The Fire Protection District already owns this site and it meets response time criteria. Access to water at the site is being reviewed in conjunction with North Salt Spring Waterworks District.

Progress updates will be posted on our website and you can sign up to receive these by email at: <https://saltspringfire.com/fire-rescue-advisory-committee/>

What about the other recommendations in the Baseline Needs Assessment report?

The Fire Rescue Advisory Committee and Board of Trustees will continue with online meetings to review the remaining recommendations in the Baseline Needs Assessment Report as well as any follow up on the potential of the Brinkworthy site. Project Updates will continue to provide the latest information as the project continues.

What criteria are being used to make decisions about a new or updated fire hall?

Fire facilities must serve the Island well into the mid-century (30-50 years from now).

Options will consider BC Building codes and standards, WorkSafe BC requirements, legislative needs, operational/functional needs, future state, climate change, and siting considerations.

Who is responsible for making the final decision about what will happen?

Following community consultation, the Advisory Committee will make the final recommendations to the Fire Protection District Board, who will make any decisions around next steps.

Will there be a referendum?

If the Board decision involves borrowing, a referendum will be required in order to get permission from the community to build a new Fire Hall.

Why is there a committee? Who is on it and how did they get appointed?

The Fire Rescue Advisory Committee was formed in August 2019 in order to review the current situation with the Ganges Fire Hall, and to consider all options to update or replace the hall. The Advisory Committee is made up of volunteers from the Salt Spring Island community, the Fire Protection District Board, and project team (fire needs experts).

Committee member recruitment was promoted at the Board meetings, on the SSIFR Facebook page, and through word of mouth. Application forms for the Advisory Committee were available at the main office Fire Hall.

Agendas and minutes from committee meetings can be found at saltspringfire.com, and people can sign up for ongoing Project Updates on the website at www.saltspringfire.com

How much will this cost me?



Cost is an important consideration for the Advisory Committee members, who are also Island residents. Identifying potential costs is a key part of the process and one of the many criteria they will consider as they evaluate options. This also includes looking for opportunities to share the space – and the cost – with other related agencies, and further potentially reduce the costs for Salt Spring Islanders.

If the project proceeds to a referendum, Salt Spring Island property owners will be provided with the best known cost estimates of construction, the amount that needs to be borrowed, and how that could impact rate payers through property taxes.

Why do fire halls cost so much to build?

Fire halls need to be built to a higher standard than a typical building. Fire halls are a community's main resource for public safety and must be built to post-disaster standards: they must be resilient and withstand earthquakes, tsunamis, and be free from risk from forest fires and other natural disasters. There are specific regulations and building codes that guide construction and renovation of fire halls in B.C. For example, by law, fire halls in BC must be designed by a professional architect.

Fire equipment has also changed a lot since the Ganges Fire Hall was built in 1960. Trucks are larger, fire rescue equipment stored in the hall has gotten more complex and needs special space, and fire fighters who work or volunteer there need adequate space to train. All of this impacts the cost to build or renovate a fire hall. That why the process will explore the most cost effective options as well as opportunities to share the space with related emergency response agencies, partners, and organizations, who might be able to share construction and maintenance costs.

How can I have a say in what I think about a new fire hall?

Your input is important in creating community solutions for fire protection and public safety. The Advisory Committee is assisting with plans for opportunities for Islanders to review background materials and reports and have their say on options through an engagement process. It is expected these opportunities will take place later in 2020 and Islanders will be provided notice through the media, on the SSIFR Facebook page, and through email (sign up at saltspringfire.com). In light of COVID-19, this engagement process will take place online and will include options for people with limited or no internet.

We said 'no' to this twice. Why are we trying again?

In 2007 and again in 2013, Salt Spring Islanders considered borrowing the funds required to build a new fire hall through referendums, neither of which passed. While referendum outcomes halted previous proposals, the need to improve the Ganges Fire Hall remains, and becomes more urgent as time goes on.

If we build a new fire hall on a different site, what will happen to the site in Ganges?



The mandate of the Advisory Committee is to determine options for fire hall renovation or replacement, and does not include what would happen to the existing land in Ganges should rebuilding elsewhere be considered. If that were the case, the SSIFPD Board would look at options at that time.

How can I learn more?

Regular Project Updates provide ongoing information and opportunities to learn more and provide feedback. Sign up for Project Updates on our website at <https://saltspringfire.com/fire-rescue-advisory-committee/>

GLOSSARY:

Organizations and terms used in the Fire Rescue Needs and Facilities Assessment process.

Salt Spring Island Fire District Board of Trustees:

- The Board of Trustees are elected by eligible landowners within the District
- The Trustees will take recommendations from the Advisory Committee, approve the recommendations and, where required by Local Government Act, will present to the landowners for approval by way of a referendum
- <https://saltspringfire.com/agm/>

Fire Rescue Advisory Committee:

- The Fire Rescue Advisory Committee was created in July 2019 by SSIFPD to ensure a broad range of community voices was represented in the development of a business plan to address the facility and service needs of the Fire District, in particular with respect to the Ganges Fire Hall No. 1
- Committee member recruitment was promoted at the Board meetings, on the SSIFR Facebook page and through word of mouth. Volunteer applications were available at the main office Fire Hall.

Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District:

- The Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District (SSIFPD) holds its monthly Trustee's meeting on the third Monday of every month
- <https://saltspringfire.com/about-trustees/>

