

FIRE DISTRICT

Saanich bargain gives island first ladder truck

Cost of used apparatus covered by existing budget

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Island firefighters struck gold at a closed-bid auction, officials said, and Salt Spring's fire district will put its first-ever ladder truck into service this spring.

Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue (SSIFR) Chief Jamie Holmes told the Driftwood Friday, March 13 that the district's bid on a used 2009 Spartan-Smeal "Gladiator" ladder fire truck had been accepted, and the aerial apparatus — formerly in service for the Saanich Fire Department — would soon be joining the island's fleet for a fraction of the cost of buying new.

The purchase of an elevating



PHOTO COURTESY SSIFR

A 2009 Spartan-Smeal "Gladiator" ladder fire truck in the Saanich Fire Department fleet that the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District was able to acquire for \$305,000, much less than it would cost to buy a new version.

device has been part of the fire district's strategic plan for a few years, Holmes said, although ladder trucks cost upwards of \$2.5 to \$3 million new and have multi-year wait times for delivery. The used Saanich "quint"

fire truck has been professionally maintained, he said, and represented an "excellent value" for the district at a cost of \$305,000.

"At that price point, we can protect current structures on

Salt Spring, and evaluate if in the future we need something bigger — or even smaller," said Holmes. "We've never had an elevating device as part of our operations before, so we don't know what we don't know. We want to make sure we don't make a \$3-million mistake."

"Quint" apparatus simply means the truck has five functions, Holmes said. In addition to the 75-foot ladder, the new truck has a pump, hydraulic generator, extrication equipment and ground ladders. The fire district's board is expected to authorize the purchase through reserve funds already allocated for apparatus replacement.

In the meantime, Holmes said, the Saanich Fire Department has agreed to temporarily store the vehicle and coordinate training for Salt Spring firefighters on it at their facil-

ity, until the new fire hall on Lower Ganges Road is complete and ready for SSIFR operations to shift there — still expected to take place May 1.

The truck will meet firefighters' needs to respond to emergencies at several multi-storey care facilities on Salt Spring, Holmes added, including the four-storey supportive housing complex built on Drake Road, and will help "future-proof" the department for any future densification planned in Ganges.

"An apparatus like this, with care and maintenance, we can get it to 30 years," he said. "So buying a used one is going to cost us about \$25,000 a year to operate, versus a new one being closer to \$100,000 per year. And if we find after a number of years it's not right for us, we will get very close to what we paid for it."

RECREATION

Salt Spring lakes stocked for summer season

Freshwater Fisheries Society of B.C. delivers coastal cutthroat, rainbow trout

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Anglers can expect another robust

lake fishing season on Salt Spring, as islanders spotted the familiar silhouette of the Freshwater Fisheries Society of B.C.'s stocking truck Thursday, March 12, releasing thousands of hatchery fish into local lakes.

Annual March visits to Salt Spring typically bring some 2,500 coastal cutthroat trout to Salt Spring — 500 at Cusheon Lake and the other 2,000 sent out into St. Mary Lake. In addition,

each April sees a delivery of some 4,000 rainbow trout into St. Mary Lake, and on odd-numbered years another 500 of those fish are usually stocked into Stowell Lake.

Rainbow are also periodically released into Magic Lake on North Pender Island, according to the society, which owns and operates six hatcheries and raises and releases fish into 800 lakes around the province for the recreational stock-

ing program — itself funded by revenue generated from the sale of fishing licences.

Freshwater fishing licence sales this year are moving to the Wildlife Information and Licensing Data system; anyone 16 or older must have a valid basic freshwater licence.

For more information and maps of stocked lakes people can visit gofishbc.com.



NORTH SALT SPRING WATERWORKS DISTRICT

NOTICE

FLUSHING OF WATERMAINS

FLUSHING OF WATERMAINS WILL BE CARRIED OUT IN THE DISTRICT ON TUESDAYS, WEDNESDAYS, THURSDAYS AND FRIDAYS MARCH 3 - APRIL 30, 2026

Short periods of low pressure and discolouration of water can be expected between these dates. Consumers are warned to be on alert for discoloured water, especially before using washing machines, dishwashers and other appliances.

Please sign up for alerts on our website to receive email or text notification for advance warning of flushing in your area. We will no longer be calling customers with pumps to advise of flushing. If you have a pump, please ensure you have a water pressure switch installed.

www.northsaltspringwaterworks.ca

IN NO CASE CAN THE DISTRICT ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY CLAIMS ARISING OUT OF THE USE OF DISCOLOURED WATER.

Lawyer's letter discussed in-camera

POLICY STATEMENT

continued from 1

After it was included as "correspondence received" on an Islands Trust agenda, the legal opinion mostly made the rounds within local policy enthusiast circles, where few likely found Leichter's March 10 statement revelatory. The broader public learned of the letter's existence Feb. 21 when it was posted online by an account associated with Saanich North and the Islands MLA Rob Botterell.

Botterell clarified for islanders at an ASK Salt Spring gathering March 6 that he was neither the author of nor impetus behind the letter, but had merely been among three people copied: himself, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs Christine Boyle and Islands Trust CAO Rueben Bronee.

"And when it was posted on the [Salt Spring] Exchange, there wasn't a suitable explanation that I was simply republishing this out of a civic 'openness and transparency' approach," said Botterell, "giving the impression I had written it."

A retired lawyer, Botterell was a professional associate at Lidstone & Company for five years ending in 2019. The letter was addressed to trustee Laura Patrick as the chair of Trust Council, a standard for such correspondence that further confused many readers.

"So, lesson learned," he said. "I need

to put a bit of a preamble on anything I publish."

At Trust Council Tuesday, language from both the meeting agenda and trustees themselves indicated the letter would be discussed during an in-camera session Wednesday morning. In response to a later question during the continued public meeting Thursday, Bronee told trustees they could share with constituents merely that the letter had been received, and staff would provide "communications support to address questions in your communities."

But any reassurances Trust Council may have received from lawyers regarding the Trust's legal footing was likely little consolation for task-oriented trustees, who had set a goal of completing the TPS revision process before the end of their elected terms. Trust Area Services director Clare Frater said Thursday the work would "inevitably" carry over past the election.

"I'm here to tell you today, I think we're now in the place of advising you the project will not be able to be completed this term," said Frater, citing an extraordinary number of responses to a call for feedback from Indigenous, local and regional governing bodies and agencies — and the general public, who sent more than 2,000 completed surveys, some 750 of which were "long-form" responses. All of that will need to be organized for trustees to digest.

"There is a vast amount of information that's coming in, and we want to honour all the commitment and effort and passion that communities, other governments and staff have brought to this — such that we can then refine and polish the document in a way that reflects all the values and interests."

That volume, combined with an indication from the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs that their process may take longer than originally envisioned, will easily push the process well past October elections. The TPS has not seen meaningful revision in three decades, with the current iteration described as an attempt to address shortfalls in the guiding document — such as addressing the climate crisis, growing housing needs and a commitment to reconciliation with local First Nations.

Frater and Bronee said next steps would include bringing distilled feedback to Trust Council for their consideration — perhaps during a scheduled May 13 meeting of that body's Committee of the Whole, or just as likely in a separate, dedicated and as-yet unscheduled meeting.

"This remains in your hands to advance as far as you can, and as far as you wish," said Bronee. "If you can get it to the point where it'll be with the minister, great; I don't think we can or should presume what a new council may, or may not, choose to do with that."

ISLANDS TRUST

Trust budget nears \$11.8 million

Growing staff, falling grants drive property tax increases

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

After consideration — and reconsideration — of seemingly every corner of its budget, spending by the Islands Trust will be a half million dollars higher than last year, landing at \$11.77 million.

The final vote came during the Trust Council's last day of deliberations in Duncan Thursday, March 12, and correlates to an 8.1 per cent hike in general tax requisition for Local Trust Areas, and 13.5 per cent for Bowen Island.

New construction and development within those tax bases will also see another 0.8 and 1.4 per cent in expected revenue respectively, all supporting what adds up to a smaller 5.1 per cent increase in total spending, or roughly \$572,000 for operations, projects and capital purchases.

Decisions came neither swiftly nor unanimously, and for the second year running there were eight trustees voting against passing the annual budget.

"Recognizing the pressures on the community, Islands Trust Council committed significant effort to reduce the proposed budget," said Salt Spring trustee and Trust Council chair Laura Patrick. "The approved budget balances the ongoing needs of the Islands Trust Area with responsible stewardship of taxpayers' dollars."

Despite that effort, the three-day meeting functionally approved a net increase in planned spending in an environment of shrinking grant income; taxes this fiscal year represent about 94 per cent of revenues, according to financial and employee services director Julia Mobbs.

And while plans to take on a full-time staff biologist have stalled, the addition of three new staff positions survived debate Thursday, although all three are slated to begin later in the summer, likely understating their effect on future years' budgets.

Those positions include a part-time Indigenous relations advisor at the Islands Trust Conservancy and full-time hires of both an Indigenous relations manager and a separate communications and engagement lead, with budget implications this cycle alone of roughly \$56,000, \$115,000 and \$95,000 respectively, according to funding request documents.

As is typical, some 70 per cent of total planned spending goes toward paying staff and trustees, according to Mobbs; the 26 trustees' remuneration increased 2.5 per cent in line with inflation, and staff salaries and benefits for nearly 70 employees grew by three per cent through BCGEU's collective agreement.

"The approved budget balances the ongoing needs of the Islands Trust Area with responsible stewardship of taxpayers' dollars."

LAURA PATRICK
Islands Trust Council chair

The remaining drivers of the rest of the budget increase were the costs of holding an election this October — roughly a quarter million dollars — rising costs of software support and licensing and higher costs associated with the Trust's three staffed office locations.

While not affecting the current budget cycle, Trust Council March 10 approved a raise in remuneration for future elected trustees, who under new policy will see an upward adjustment that will likely cost an additional \$260,000 annually — an expected 2.8 per cent tax increase on its own — as it bumps the median trustee pay from \$13,836 to \$24,322. Alongside a modest increase in costs to enhance the mental health coverage benefit for trustees, the hope is the package will attract a wider range of candidates to run for office.

"We lock leadership for our islands behind a barrier that only financial privilege can scale," said Denman

Island trustee Sam Borthwick, who has said he holds down multiple jobs himself. "That robs us of a significant percentage of the vibrant, brilliant and diverse voices that constitute our communities."

Rising Islands Trust budgets appear baked-in for at least the next several years, rankling some trustees to the point that several entertained the notion of voting down the 2026/2027 budget as a form of civil disobedience — in hopes the provincial government might take a larger funding role, and as a way to telegraph to constituents their disapproval for raising taxes generally during an economically uncertain time.

"A new engagement and communications lead will have their work cut out for them," said Saturna Island trustee Mairead Boland, who joined trustees voting against the budget. "Trying to explain to the residents of the Trust how careless we are when we address budgetary issues year on year, and why staffing levels are so high."

Trust staff noted the Islands Trust Act does not contemplate that trustees might not pass a budget, and said if that happened the ministry's response would likely be guided by the Local Government Act — leaving open the possibility of an imposed budget and appointed administrator being put in place until council could come to an agreement about what would be appropriate.

Ultimately, 16 trustees voted to advance the budget, with many suggesting their Local Trust Areas were supportive.

"Many in my community want the Trust to innovate," said Gabriola Island trustee Tobi Elliott, who voted in favour of the budget. "I think we've supported the land use planning function adequately; now it's time to support the Trust Area services and the intergovernmental relations that are just as critical to our mandate."

Trust Council had approved a budget last fiscal year of \$11.2 million, which at the time required a combined 8.3 per cent tax bump over the previous year between the Local Trust Area tax base and new construction/development.

REGIONAL SERVICES

Island CRD taxes rise 7.5 per cent

Record-setting regional district budget tops \$930 million

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

As the Capital Regional District (CRD) board met to finalize its 2026 budget, taxpayers on Salt Spring Island learned their bills will indeed be higher this year than last — if not by quite as much as expected.

Salt Spring Island property owners can look forward to a 7.5 per cent rise in their CRD and Capital Region Hospital District (CRHD) requisitions, according to a presentation to directors Wednesday, March 11, amounting to a \$1,326 estimated cost per average household.

CRD services within the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area are budgeted at \$8.8 million, according to a final budget review, \$5.3 million of which are from services delegated to the island's Local Community Commission (LCC). Put another way, of that estimated average-household cost, \$801 comes under local services.

"For the LCC services, the overall increase [in costs] was 8.5 per cent," said CRD director Gary Holman.

"We were able to whittle that down a little bit from the initial [estimates]; people are coming to Salt Spring and there are new [property assessment] folios, so per household it was 7.5 per cent."

An average residential property owner on Salt Spring will be paying about \$95 more this year than last, the second-highest average-property dollar-value increase in the CRD after only Central Saanich's \$113 bump. Typical property owners in the Southern Gulf Islands will see an increase of about \$39, roughly the same jump as Victoria, with Metchosin property owners seeing the smallest increase of just over \$5.

Those numbers do not include costs related to specific CRD water and sewer service areas, applicable only to owners of property in those areas.

Wednesday's CRD board meeting marked a record-high \$930 million budget for the regional district, up from an \$872 million figure set for 2025.

ELECTIONS

Fire, water districts set trustee elections

Voting plans made for Salt Spring's two largest improvement district boards

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Once again, governance for Salt Spring Island's two largest improvement districts could see changes this spring, with candidates nominated and elections set for trustee positions coming open on both the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District (SSIFPD) and North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD) boards.

Eager voters won't have to wait until October to cast a ballot as with other local government elections, as both districts' elections will take place sooner — with voting for the fire district concluding in April and the water district in May.

With nominations closed, five candidates will vie for

three trustee seats on the fire district's board, according to staff: incumbents Roland Cook, David Courtney and Mary Lynn Hetherington will be joined by new candidates Darryl Martin and Jennifer McClean seeking election to three-year terms.

The fire district will make mail-in ballots available upon request, but those must be received by April 11 to be counted. In-person voting will take place on an advance voting day on Wednesday, April 8 and on election day Saturday, April 11. The results will be announced at the SSIFPD AGM on Monday, April 13.

For the NSSWD board, three nominees will seek election to two seats for what will be three-year terms as well: Philippe Erdmer, Steve Lam (incumbent) and Jon Scott.

Voting packages will be mailed to NSSWD ratepayers on March 23, according to district staff, with mail-in packages due by Monday, May 4 and in-person voting taking place from 2 to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6 at Community Gospel Chapel. Results of that election will be announced later that same evening at the water district's AGM.

TIDE TABLES
PST (UTC-8H)

FULFORD HARBOUR

| DAY | TIME | H | FEET | METRES | DAY | TIME | H | FEET | METRES |
|-----|-------|------|------|--------|-------|-------|------|------|--------|
| 18 | 05:52 | 10.2 | 3.11 | | 22 | 01:25 | 7.5 | 2.29 | |
| | 11:35 | 5.7 | 1.74 | | | 06:59 | 10.6 | 3.23 | |
| | 17:24 | 9.3 | 2.83 | | | 14:12 | 1.9 | 0.58 | |
| | 23:28 | 4.5 | 1.37 | | 21:50 | 10.0 | 3.05 | | |
| 19 | 06:08 | 10.2 | 3.11 | | 23 | 02:09 | 8.5 | 2.59 | |
| | 12:08 | 4.6 | 1.4 | | | 07:19 | 10.7 | 3.26 | |
| | 18:26 | 9.6 | 2.93 | | | 15:02 | 1.6 | 0.49 | |
| | 00:05 | 5.4 | 1.65 | | 23:14 | 10.1 | 3.08 | | |
| 20 | 06:24 | 10.3 | 3.14 | | 24 | 03:01 | 9.3 | 2.83 | |
| | 12:45 | 3.5 | 1.07 | | | 07:43 | 10.6 | 3.23 | |
| | 19:29 | 9.8 | 2.99 | | | 15:57 | 1.6 | 0.48 | |
| | 00:44 | 6.5 | 1.98 | | 00:49 | 10.3 | 3.14 | | |
| 21 | 06:41 | 10.4 | 3.17 | | 25 | 04:17 | 9.8 | 2.99 | |
| | 13:27 | 2.6 | 0.79 | | | 08:12 | 10.4 | 3.17 | |
| | 20:36 | 9.9 | 3.02 | | | 17:00 | 1.9 | 0.58 | |

Driftwood 250-537-9933
241 Fulford-Ganges Rd.
Salt Spring Island, B.C. V8K 2K7
driftwood@gulfislandsdriftwood.com
www.gulfislandsdriftwood.com



**SALT SPRING ISLAND
FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

**NOTICE OF THE 2026
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING &**

**NOTICE OF ELECTION
BY VOTING OF THREE
TRUSTEES**

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given to the owners of land within the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District (SSIFPD) that the Annual General Meeting will be held on Monday, April 13, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. at the Ganges Fire Hall, 105 Lower Ganges Road, Salt Spring Island, BC and virtually through Microsoft Teams (the link will be available on the website).

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given to the electors of the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District that an Election by Voting will be held to elect three Trustees, each for terms of three years, commencing at the Annual General Meeting to be held on Monday, April 13, 2026 and terminating at the end of the Annual General Meeting to be held in 2029. The Trustees will fill offices on the Board of the SSIFPD.

NOMINEES FOR 3 TRUSTEE POSITIONS ARE:

- Roland Cook**
- David Courtney**
- Mary Lynn Hetherington**
- Darryl Martin**
- Jennifer McClean**

Qualified electors have the option to vote either by mail, or in-person on the days given below (Voting more than once in an election contravenes the BC Elections Act and is subject to one or more of the penalties in section 255 (7) of the Act.) The list of Qualified Electors normally contains errors and omissions. All Qualified Electors, whether on the voters list or not, can opt to vote in person. With appropriate identification, those not on the voters list can be registered and enabled to vote.

Mail in ballot packages are available by request by calling or emailing the Ganges Fire Hall at 250-537-2531 and/or corpadmin@saltspringfire.com. Mail in ballot packages must be received at the Ganges Fire Hall by 4:00 p.m., Friday, April 10th, 2026.

ADVANCE VOTING shall be open to QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE SALT SPRING ISLAND FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT on Wednesday, the eighth (8th) day of April 2026. The location for advance voting will be at the Community Gospel Chapel, 147 Vesuvius Bay Rd, Salt Spring Island, BC.

VOTING DAY for the election of Trustees shall be open to QUALIFIED ELECTORS OF THE SALT SPRING ISLAND FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT on Saturday the eleventh (11th) day of April 2026. There are two locations for voting day: 1. The Community Gospel Chapel, 147 Vesuvius Bay Rd, Salt Spring Island, BC and 2. The Fulford Hall Annex, 2591 Fulford-Ganges Rd, Salt Spring Island, BC.

Voting hours on both days shall be between the hours of Nine (9:00) A.M. and Five (5:00) P.M.

ELECTOR QUALIFICATIONS - You are qualified as an Elector if you are:

- » A Canadian Citizen
- » Eighteen years or older on Voting Day
- » A resident in the Province British Columbia for at least six months before Voting Day
- » An owner of land within the boundaries of the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District
- » An Authorized agent, designated in writing as the said agent, of a Board or Corporation that owns land within the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District.
- » If more than one person is registered on title as owner of land, each owner is entitled to vote, providing the qualifications set out above are met. No persons may vote more than once, with the exception that they may vote as an authorized agent and personally if they own land on a personal basis. Eligible voters not found on the List of Registered Electors may register on Voting Day and Advance Voting Day by providing two pieces of identification, one of which has a signature, preferably with an identification photo, e.g. driver's license; and documentation proving ownership of the land for which a vote is to be cast, e.g. tax notice, assessment notice, or duplicate certificate of title.
- » Corporate votes - Written proof must be provided by a Corporation or Board that owns land within the SSIFPD and wishes to authorize an agent to vote on its behalf. For detailed requirements, please e-mail the Returning Officer at anthonykennedy10@shaw.ca.

Dated at Salt Spring Island, B.C. this 13th day of March 2026.

Anthony A. Kennedy, Returning Officer
295 Mountain Park Drive, Salt Spring Island, BC, V8K 1G3
250-537-8815 | 1-647-284-2900
Email: anthonykennedy10@shaw.ca

95 YEARS YOUNG



PHOTO BY ROB LOWRIE

Ready to cut the cake at the 95th anniversary celebration of Royal Canadian Legion Branch 92 (Salt Spring) on Saturday, March 21 are Legion executive members, from left, treasurer Blair Bryson, Sergeant-at-arms Terry Owen, secretary Fiona Barclay, vice-president Jacquie Gardner and president Noella Fraser. Social and/or entertainment activities open to everyone take place at the branch seven days a week, with perks for Legion members. The national Legion organization is offering free memberships for 2026, marking its 100th anniversary.

RECREATION

Ball field work begins

No disruption to soccer tournament promised

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Construction on the new fastpitch baseball diamond at Salt Spring Island's Hydro Field has begun, thanks to contractors identifying works that could be completed before the May long weekend — and without interfering with the popular soccer tournament.

Capital Regional District senior manager Dan Ovington confirmed Thursday, March 19 the project is funded not only through a \$300,000 anonymous community donation but also through roughly the same amount of Community Works Funds, which had been in the "fix up a ball field" end of the budget for some time — originally as a placeholder for upgrading the field at Fernwood Elementary

School before being transferred to the project at 160 Rainbow Rd.

"This work [now] won't actually impact the tournament or the field," Ovington told the Local Community Commission (LCC) March 19. "You'll see quite a lot happen after the May long weekend."

Ovington told the LCC crews expect construction to be complete by the end of June, after which the field can be hydro-seeded.

Public tender documents have shown a skinned infield — the diamond-shaped dirt area containing bases, base paths and the pitcher's mound — dugouts on concrete pads, galvanized steel backstops and a modest amount of spectator seating in two 12-foot, four-tier bleachers.

"It's quite exciting," said LCC member Brian Webster. "It's always good when community members step up and allow us to encourage important amenities and services for the community."

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TRANSPORTATION

Bus fare hikes part of 'middle ground' scheme

Provincial plans to expand transit systems postponed

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Local officials voted to raise bus fares across all rider categories for the first time in more than a decade last week — and may also have minted the first campaign issue for Salt Spring's fall election candidates, punting plans for a taxpayer-funded expansion of the island's transit system until after Oct. 17.

Those fare increases were built around a "middle ground" option presented to the Local Community Commission (LCC) after BC Transit completed a four-month fare structure review. The LCC voted Thursday, March 19 to approve phased two-year increases in single-ride, DayPASS, 10-ticket and monthly passes, projected to increase revenue by 16 per cent next year and another seven per cent the next.

Single rides, which have been \$2.25, will be going up to \$2.75 on May 2 and \$3 in 2027; DayPASS fares will rise from \$4.50 to

\$5.50 and then \$6; and 10-ticket fares will go up from \$20 to \$24.75 — and \$27 by 2027.

Adult monthly passes, which have cost \$50 on Salt Spring, will rise to \$55 this year and \$60 in 2027. Discount monthly passes for students aged 13-18 and seniors 65+ have been priced at a 20 per cent discount at \$40, and will be rising to \$47 in May and \$51 next year — shrinking that discount to 15 per cent.

Notably, while the first year increase adds 22 per cent to the cost of single-ride tickets, monthly adult passes are going up by just 10 per cent.

"I think the structure here [around] increasing the cash fare will impact visitors, proportionately speaking, more than residents, and it's the right way to go," said CRD director and LCC member Gary Holman, noting it was the most popular of three options presented to riders during engagement events and surveys. "Riders should be expected to make a contribution

to the existing service, and certainly should be expected to if we're considering increasing the level of service."

But expansion of the system — either by adding new routes or increasing bus frequency on existing ones — remains off the table for now, a result of BC Transit's postponing of many such projects across the province. Holman has also expressed an unwillingness to unilaterally raise the so-called "borrowing cap" for the service to a level those expansions are expected to require. In what has been a source of some friction between Holman and other LCC members, the CRD director had insisted such a raise in borrowing limits — a jump up to \$900,000 — should be put before voters, and held the increase on the cap to 25 per cent. That amount, alongside the fare hikes, is expected to just cover maintaining the existing bus service levels.

Recent senior government announce-

ments may have taken even more wind from the sails of that disagreement anyhow; while there were inflationary increases for transit in the province's February budget, there were no new dollars allocated for expansion anywhere in B.C., transit officials said.

On Thursday, the LCC voted — with Holman and LCC member Gayle Baker in opposition — to wait until after the Oct. 17 election to even discuss raising the cap further, putting the brakes on a notional plan to add a borrowing question to the ballot.

"We know we're not going to have reason to spend [at a higher level] for some time, due to the province's fiscal situation and budget decisions," said LCC member Brian Webster. "I also think we need a comprehensive strategy, and I don't think we should be tying the hands of our successors. The urgency to do this by October is not there, and the importance of having the big picture figured out is."

BC Transit will be launching a marketing campaign to notify riders of the changes before introducing them across all Salt Spring routes Saturday, May 2.

"Increasing the cash fare will impact visitors, proportionally speaking, more than residents."

GARY HOLMAN
Salt Spring Island CRD Director

NEWS IN BRIEF

Donation covers new ladder truck

Just hours after last week's Driftwood went to press, Salt Spring Island Fire Rescue (SSIFR) Chief Jamie Holmes dropped news that not only was the island's first ladder truck on its way, it would also be arriving at no cost to the fire district — thanks to an anonymous foundation picking up the tab.

The used 2009 "Gladiator" ladder truck's price tag — \$326,350 including tax, Holmes told district trustees Monday night, March 16 — had already been expected to be paid for from a reserve fund set aside for such a purchase, although before that truck turned up at auction, plans had been to save up long enough to cover a new apparatus' \$2.5 to \$3 million cost.

"Actually, a member [of the anonymous foundation] approached one of our members, asking after some news articles about the need for an elevated device, and the pieces just fit together at the right time," said Holmes. "Now we

are in the elevating [apparatus] game at no capital cost to the community."

The truck will eventually be housed at the new Fire Hall No. 1 on Lower Ganges Road, expected to be operational by May 1. A community celebration of the new facility has been set for May 24, according to fire district trustees.

Health care housing project nearly full

Salt Spring's newest housing facility is filling up, according to officials, with health care workers already slated to move into 15 of the 18 recently remodelled units at Heartwood House on Bittancourt Road, owned by the Lady Minto Hospital Foundation (LMHF).

LMHF executive director Eric Jacobsen reported the former Seabreeze Inne motel is now fully transformed into affordable homes, playing a central role in a LMHF-supported

Island Health recruitment campaign that has brought 10 new hires to Lady Minto Hospital, including four international recruits — two of which came from the United States.

"All four of our recent international hires were able to accept their offers only because affordable housing was available through Heartwood House," said Island Health recruiter Paula Duque. "Having guaranteed staff housing made a huge difference in attracting and onboarding nurses."

Jacobsen said current and incoming tenants included registered and licensed practical nurses, care aides, food services staff, a peer support worker providing community mental health services and a Health Career Access Program student training to become a health care assistant.

"Sustaining Heartwood House and keeping rents genuinely affordable for health care workers over the long term will require ongoing community support," said Jacobsen. "If Heartwood House matters to you, please consider making a donation to the Lady Minto Hospital Foundation."

Health care workers can contact the Heartwood House Housing Society about current and upcoming availability at heartwoodhousesi.ca.

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FIRE ELECTION

Five fire board candidates vie for three seats

Incumbents and newcomers on ballot

BY GAIL SJUBERG
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

The election to fill three trustee seats on the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District (SSIFPD) board takes place Saturday, April 11, with an advance voting day on Wednesday, April 8. See the ad on page 15 of this paper for details about voting eligibility, locations and times.

Five candidates have been nominated: incumbents Rollie Cook, David Courtney and Mary Lynn Hetherington, and Darryl Martin and Jenny McClean.

Cook was first elected to the fire board in 2017 and has been its chair since the end of 2021. Cook said he, Hetherington and Martin are running as a slate because they believe teamwork is essential to a well-functioning fire board.



ROLLIE COOK

"I'm respectfully asking people to not just vote for me, but to vote for the three on the team, and then we'll deliver the results we need," Cook said.

Cook has lived on Salt Spring since 2002 and is a sheep and poultry farmer at his Redwing Farm. He was among those working to establish the island's abattoir and the Salt Spring Island Farmland Trust and served on boards for both bodies. He also served as an MLA in the Alberta Legislature from 1979 to 1986.

Cook said he is running for trustee again because while the current board has accomplished a lot, citing the successful fire hall project

and Fulford fire hall reservoir pond as two examples, "I want to see it through to make sure that everything works out well."

Finding an appropriate spot for and building a new north-end fire hall and seismically upgrading the Fulford hall are two important upcoming projects for Cook. He also aims to keep tax increases to a minimum as the department slowly replenishes its coffers.

"I think a steady as she goes approach, keeping finances under control, but making sure we deliver on what we've done is the mandate for the next three years."

Courtney, a retired commercial airline pilot who has owned property on the island since 1999, joined the fire board three years ago. He said his campaign platform is based on the acronym FIRE: F-Fiscally Responsible. 2. I - Integrity and Credibility. 3. R - Respect for Transparency. 4. Experience. He is separately in the third year of his first term as a North Salt Spring Waterworks District (NSSWD) trustee.



DAVID COURTNEY

"My time at both SSIFID and NSSWD has proven insightful as to how we function — or don't at times — as improvement districts, within our current governance model."

For Courtney, the most important issue facing the district in the next five years is "creation of a new cost-effective satellite fire hall on Sunset Drive, now that Central Hall No. 3 will become redundant at the end of May. This will provide 172 ratepayers fire protection within eight kilometres of a fire hall and reduce dramatically fire insurance premiums for those north of the 1100 block on Sunset Drive." He said the

restriction planning each year, managing both lakes to ensure adequate customer supply and maintain mandated minimum lake levels.

offer of a parcel of land for that purpose should be pursued.

"The cost will be borne by the sale of the Central Hall facility funding the new fire hall, hopefully as cost effective as possible, providing a cost-neutral option for all ratepayers and negating a funding referendum."



MARY LYNN HETHERINGTON

Hetherington, a retired nurse, has lived on Salt Spring since 2000 and served on the SSIFPD board for nine and a half years. In that time she has sat on several committees: health and safety, finance, strategic planning, and facilities and physical plant. She also chaired the communications and marketing committee that brought about the successful referendum for the island's new fire hall.

Locally she has served on the boards of the Legion Branch 92, Croftonbrook, Lions Club, the Greater Victoria Labour Relations Board and volunteered as an Emergency Social Services emergency reception centre manager. In Ontario, she was a nurses' union local president, a legislature rep at Queen's Park and Parliament Hill and a Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario president.

"I grew up around fire halls and firefighters as Grandpa was a firefighter for 32 years and my father-in-law was a fire hall president," she said.

Hetherington says the most important issues faced by the SSIFPD are ensuring islanders become more resilient through FireSmart practices for hotter, drier summers; continuing to build firefighting capacity through measures like the new Fulford Hall reservoir; keeping taxes low; and planning prudently and frugally for a new satellite fire

hall in the North End.

"Teamwork will help keep us safe," she said. "We need trustees who can work together to meet the challenges ahead."

Martin has a mechanical engineering degree from the University of Alberta and held engineering and management positions in the manufacturing industry in Edmonton before becoming the owner and manager of recycling companies.



DARRYL MARTIN

After enjoying holiday times spent at their Salt Spring cottage, he and his wife moved to the island full time in 2013.

Martin has chaired the Salt Spring Community Economic Development Commission and served as alternate Capital Regional District director to past director Wayne McIntyre. He has also chaired Transition Salt Spring, whose comprehensive climate action plan detailed the serious challenges that climate change will bring for fire and emergency response agencies.

"I seek election to the SSIFPD board of trustees because with climate change, population and financial pressures bringing increased challenges, my background with professional engineering and financial management will be crucial because structures and mechanical equipment play essential roles in the function of the fire service."

He cited the Fulford satellite fire hall's needs for extensive modification or a complete rebuild to withstand a serious earthquake.

"I can bring cost-effective ways to achieve that," he said.

"Last and most importantly I respect the current board and am committed to working as a constructive member of a strong collab-

orative team toward goals of safety, reducing islanders' insurance costs and keeping taxes under control."

McClellan was born and raised in Ganges and said she would be happy to serve the community she knows so well.



JENNY MCCLEAN

She has been on a SSIFPD committee for more than a year, has served on the Gulf Islands Secondary School Parent Advisory Council and is a board member for both Island Community Services and the Chuan Society.

"My father Jim McClellan was a volunteer firefighter from 1969 to 1972," said McClellan. "He recalls when a siren would be sounded and if you could hear it, you would show up for service. I like to visit with Dad around safety issues for Salt Spring."

McClellan cited one example of when storms occur on the island "and roads can be blocked by fallen trees and that may be the only way to get to emergencies is by that one road. There is need for better protection north of Central."

She said islanders are also concerned about runaway costs and that is also important to consider.

"In terms of the issues in the future, the most important would be the need for recruitment," said McClellan. "Firefighters can get stretched to the limit in their own communities and also help in other communities with fighting fires."

Another important issue is education, she said.

"Salt Spring faces unique challenges for firefighting due to roads that can be difficult to access, trees that fall on power lines, need for education for the year-round community and visitors around fire safety and increasing dryness and dangers."

First batch of water meters installed

NSSWD

continued from 1

"We also added a 'food producing plants and crops' category, which we didn't have before," said Wells, "and we have that as the most permissive, relative to 'trees, shrubs, plants and flowers.'"

Other changes include allowing vehicle and boat washing during Stage 4 restrictions for safety and invasive species control purposes, respectively; allowing more watering for public parks and fields, through not having specific hours allotted; and adding specific bylaw language setting definitions.

The new rules all fit on a handy one-page colour-coded chart that will be available to download on the district's northsaltspringwaterworks.ca website. Staff said they would also have some printed copies available at the district office and at NSSWD's May 6 AGM at Community Gospel Chapel.

NSSWD's watering restrictions are in effect every year from April 1 until Nov. 1, and enter different stages mostly as conditions shift. The district uses current and historical water levels at St. Mary and Maxwell lakes to chart a course through

restriction planning each year, managing both lakes to ensure adequate customer supply and maintain mandated minimum lake levels.

Also helping out with conservation efforts this year, the first of the district's new water meters have been installed, according to operations director Ryan Moray, who told trustees that 165 of the cellular-capable devices are currently operating. The meters can transmit consumption data back to the office four times a day, he added, and replace devices in the system that are often as much as 40 years old.

"They'll also flag continual use, no use, backflow, that sort of thing," said Moray. "And you can look at your consumption trends."

Eventually NSSWD plans to replace all 1,800-plus meters in the district, a project that will take multiple years to complete. The new meters have already found a few "slow leaks" on customers' sides, according to Moray, which he said would have been "very difficult" to catch during normal meter reads that only took place every couple of months.

Customers will also have the opportunity to create their online "My360"

accounts later this spring, according to district chief administrative officer Mark Boysen, bringing more information about their water use to their own computers.

"We're getting some very excited responses from customers about these," said Boysen. "Particularly strata owners, with 20 to 30 different people connected, there's a lot of interest in having accurate information — and minimizing leaks that can impact the whole unit."

The hot summer predicted for 2026 has the potential to break long-standing dry streak records on Salt Spring, which were nearly challenged last July as that calendar month came and went without a drop of rain falling. The driest month on record, according to Driftwood reporting, was August 1986, when no precipitation was recorded as part of what became a 58-day rain-free streak — although an 1898 drought was also reported in the pages of the Salt Spring Island Parish and Home newsletter.

That year, according to the newsletter, except for "one day's wetting" of 5.6 mm in August, there was no precipitation between June 19 and Sept. 19, or 92 days.

To my dear patients and community,

After more than 30 years of chiropractic practice, I am writing to share an important change.

Effective March 31, 2026, I have chosen to voluntarily relinquish my registration as a chiropractor in BC. While I will no longer be providing chiropractic services (such as spinal adjustments or clinical diagnoses), I will continue to provide Craniosacral and Myofascial release methods to help with ease of movement, relaxation and vitality. I have transitioned my practice to more of a holistic wellness model.

Please note that I will no longer be a registrant with the CCHPBC and will not be licensed to provide regulated chiropractic services. This means I will no longer use the titles "Doctor" or "Chiropractor," and my services will no longer be eligible for extended health insurance or MSP benefits coverage.

I will continue to see clients at my current location in the Lancer building on the main floor and look forward to supporting your wellbeing in this new capacity.

In health and partnership,
Alda M Blanes
aldablanes@proton.me
Phone & Text:
+1-250-537-8875
103-323 Lower Ganges Rd
Main Floor, Lancer Building.



inside:



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Driftwood

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7 ArtSpring Community Showcase on Friday night



9 Islander gives rave review to JCS singalong event



PHOTO BY ROB LOWRIE

NUTTY FOR NETTLES: Adina Guest, left, holds a nettle-lemon moss cake and Robin Jenkinson a pan of nettle artichoke dip for the first Salt Spring Nettlesfest Potluck held at All Saints church on Saturday evening. Co-organizer Jenkinson has been to spring nettle festivals on the other Gulf Islands and asked Guest, a professional baker of Love's Galettes fame, to help her get the tradition going on Salt Spring. Some 35 people, from toddlers to elders, shared about 20 dishes celebrating the versatile wild nettle plant in the church's upper hall area.

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FIRE DISTRICT ELECTION

Cook, Hetherington, Martin win

Modest turnout seen during mostly in-person voting

BY ROBB MAGLEY
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Final results for the Salt Spring Island Fire Protection District (SSIFPD) election have been released, with incumbents Rollie Cook and Mary Lynn Hetherington, along with Darryl Martin, standing elected for three-year terms to the district's board of trustees at the annual general meeting (AGM) Monday, April 13.

Returning officer Anthony Kennedy released preliminary results on the morning of Sunday, April 12, later confirming no change to them after a second counting of ballots.

Cook, first elected to the board in 2017 and serving as its chair since the end of 2021, received

275 votes in the final count. Hetherington, with nearly a decade on the board, tallied 262. New to the board will be Martin, with the most votes of any candidate: 292, according to official election figures. The trio had run as a slate on a theme of "teamwork" being needed in order for a board of trustees to function well.

David Courtney, who served on the board a single term, received 76 votes in the final count; Jenny McClean, who has served on the SSIFPD's communication committee, received 75.

Between early voting April 8 and election-day ballots filled out April 11, there were 295 votes cast in-person, according to Kennedy, and 55 mail-in ballots received. Taking out 11 spoiled

ballots, the total came to 345 recorded, he said.

Turnout was predictably less than the last election held in 2024, when a record high of 1,815 ballots were cast, mostly through the mail. At \$1.25 per envelope, and with approximately 8,400 ratepayers eligible to cast a vote, trustees earlier this year decided to only mail ballots out when requested — as a cost-saving measure.

In 2025, and from 2018 until 2023, trustees were elected by acclamation as there were just enough nominees to match available seats on the board. Before 2024, the previous record for number of ballots cast in a trustee election had been 1,110, set in 2013. In 2012's election, just 174 votes were tallied.

Zen Master Wolfgang says:
"Man who dies with the most toys is still dead."

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