



OPINION

Driftwood Editorial: Attempt to divert fire hall course unwelcome

By DRIFTWOOD STAFF

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Salt Spring's fire department is poised to bring the community up to speed on the Ganges fire hall project, with a public meeting set for mid-September.

While being open to any and all questions, they clearly intend to present good news. As detailed in our story on page 2, a press release issued Aug. 10 states that "Despite financial constraints, including the rapid rise of chartered bank interest rates since 2022, SSIFR is confident that the project remains within the stipulated referendum limit of \$9.7 million for borrowing."

At the same time, the board's newest trustee, elected by acclamation in April, has initiated an online petition asking for a less expensive option to be looked at and for ratepayers to be "surveyed" on their preference. Despite declaring his actions are taken while wearing his private citizen hat, it would perhaps be odd if David Courtney wasn't acting from a place informed by his position as a new trustee. Alternatively, Courtney could be just saying, "I think we can do this project for less money and I'm sure some other people will agree with me."

However, this project is already well underway and a "survey" — the referendum required for borrowing authority — showed 75 per cent approval by voters just last June. The \$13-million facility was sold as not requiring a taxation increase because future borrowing has been built into recent-year tax increases and reserve building.

If the hall does go overbudget, that falls on the board to explain, manage and be accountable for.

Results of last year's referendum were clear. That's the project the majority of ratepayers approved and want to see built. The fire board should obviously be honest about the financial situation they face with this project and we don't expect them to be otherwise. Conversely, we don't expect them to throw out the current plan and start again just because one of them thinks there's a better idea out there and will reveal X-number of in-agreement online petition names to a future meeting.

We have all become so used to seeing theatrics in politics that a late-in-the-game petition tactic is not a surprise. But just as firefighting should be left to professional firefighters, drama is best executed and most appreciated when done by trained thespians.