

GABRIOLA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

A Special General Meeting of the Gabriola Fire Protection District was held November 24, 2021 at the No. 1 Fire Hall with seven Trustees in attendance. The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Chairman Paul Giffin.

Diana Moher gave the opening greeting “The GFPID acknowledges that we are gathering within the traditional lands of the Snuneymuxw Nation”

The Trustees introduced themselves and the Chair explained the reason this meeting was called was to engage a consultant to conduct a governance review.

Correspondence:

The Chair stated that all correspondence that was received and been forwarded to all Trustees, he asked if any Trustee or the Corporate Officer had received any further correspondence - no.

Definition of Governance:

As for Governance Studies, these fall under the Province’s restructure process and only apply to Local Governments. These studies are typically used when there is consideration being given to implementing significant changes in the way a community is governed and how services are delivered. For example, an unincorporated rural community wanted to municipalize. The only governance change that would occur for an improvement district would be converting to a regional district service or changing an improvement district’s boundaries.

Gareth Mogg
Senior Planning Analyst | Governance and Structure
Ministry of Municipal Affairs

The following points were brought forward by the Trustees by going around the table for comments on each topic:

- This is not a meeting to decide to hire someone mor to look at recommendations and how to deal with new things in the future.
- I want this to be a performance review of the whole operation but would be happy if it just focused on us and how we are meeting our mandate.
- Thank you for coming, generally we don’t have a lot of people show up. Would the Board benefit from looking at ourselves, a self assessment things we can do together. We have two new members and don’t want to jump into this kind of expense when we don’t know what we want ourselves.
- It is a good practice for Trustees to carry out some form of governance on their own and every few years with external assistance.
- Regular and ongoing reviews contribute to systems of democratic accountability.
- Definition concerns me, the two other districts that had a review were both in favour of rolling other fire departments together.
- I support a Governance review, this comes up from time to time, there are areas we can improve, we are doing well but could improve.
- This item didn’t appear on the November agenda and it has not been fully discussed, we all have independent opinions of what a review is. I am not against a review or an audit but I am against it by the definition of review as stated by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

Rationale:

- RDN was never in the books the Island is changing and needs to be held to a higher standard.
- As Trustees one of our jobs is to review policies and procedures I don't see why there should be a problem with us doing this internally.
- We can establish select and standing committees with volunteers from outside the Board to look at specific matters. We don't want to waste time and money, can't access it this year and don't want to see it come out of saving funds so if we can get it done internally, so be it.
- What are the things that need to be fixed? When I first came on the Board the first 7 months I listened, read up on the Handbook and Letters Patent until I felt comfortable, if I had questions I could speak with other Trustees or the Corporate Officer. Can we do this review ourselves and come up with a template - yes. Are we working well, the C.O. read of a list of 9 accomplishments from this year alone, and the department continues to grow and recruit.
- All very well to say we can do it within but the Trustees are not communication together very well, not sure we can do it ourselves.
- The organization is growing it would be arrogant of us to believe we couldn't use outside help. I spoke to a consultant and the price tag was \$10,000 what I hope is that we can get a motion to move forward.
- When a person is elected to the Board they are provided with an information package which includes the Letters Patent, Trustee Handbook, Trustee manual, meeting procedure bylaw...it is up to us to read them and learn from them.

Ramifications:

- It is my opinion that there is a firewall between the Board the Operations.
- I only see the positive side, positive responses, pressing forward and learning at the end have a working document we can show to the community. Not everyone loves the Board, that's just my opinion, I want to be autonomous but believe we need outside help.
- I am struggling the Trustees are in charge of the money for the department, we have not had time to get together on this subject. If we are doing things wrong would someone tell me what that is?
- We don't always agree which is a good thing otherwise we would just be rubber stamping everything.
- We are all different and do disagree sometime but our roll is to manage the budget, we are doing everything that is supposed to get done. The department fixes their own trucks, the Fire Chief flew to Calgary and drove the new truck back to save money.
- The department is paid the Trustees are giving up their time and sometimes receive unacceptable emails with unfounded accusations. If you are sick to see a Doctor sometimes you are too close to a matter and need to step back, I strongly believe we should have an external review.
- First time I have heard there is an issue between the Board and the department. We came up with a Code or Conduct this year which will also be included in the orientation package for new Trustees.

Financial Impact:

The Trustees were told at the September meeting that the budget needed to be in at by the end of October, it was presented at the October meeting and explained in detail by John Moeller and passed.

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- Don't know what the exact cost is, possibly get some outside funding but it is premature to talk about funding at this time, we found the money for a lawyer.
- Don't know what the cost is going to be but this won't take away from the fire department. We need to talk about hiring outside and the Trustees having a diverse set of skills.
- As we have passed a budget funding is an issue and should not impact the fire department. Why did we not start at the beginning by finding out we need, we don't even know what we are looking at.
- Unless we know exactly what we are trying to achieve we should look to ourselves first and then outside and setting a budget for it.
- All the items on the budget were gone through, looked at the overages and underage from previous years budget we do not have the money to pay for this at this time and there is no way around it.
- It was mentioned that the money was found to fight the election battle but there is a line item for legal, not enough to cover it but still money in the budget, and that was an unexpected expense.
- We have had 50 years strongly believe we need a review to up our game.
- Our new trucks are paid for by saving up for them.

Questions from the public: (questions or comments to be limited to 10 minutes.)

- Moved by Chris Windess that the public be allowed to speak, discussion, seconded by Sean Lewis, carried.
- Trustees need a strong orientation when they start and need to be transparent and accountable. The Trustees represent us and we want accountability from you, need to figure out how to get the money for next year.
- There is supposed to be a firewall between the Board and Operations stated in guidelines, the government provides all the rules. In the fire department if a member misbehaves they get the boot you can't do that to a Trustee they need to be voted out, the Trustees need to read the manual. One thing that is a problem is secret emails being sent out from a Trustee to a select set of people, I'd like to be on that list. I see a good organization here we do not need to go outside of it. I'm tired of all the backstabbing, there is a reason the Board and fire department is separated.
- I am still confused about this meeting is this about Governance and if not let's drop the term. If there are problems on the Board follow the rules.
- I see dis-function on the Board and believe a review is necessary,
- Governance Review was not on the agenda at the last meeting it came as a complete surprise, a Trustees sent out an email to a select set of people stating that there were more negative letters than positive and begging shamefully for their letters, saying "at last we have a majority on the Board". This is not proper conduct this Board does need to look at procedure, you need advise and better orientation.
- Clear you need to work through things, and am happy to hear you are concerned for the budget. This review is discretionary you need all the budgeted capital for this year, if you feel you need a review put it on next years budget.
- I have attended the last 4 trustee meetings and there is an overall Board cohesiveness. I would be happy to sit on a committee having been on similar Boards and developed training packages in the past. I do not think you should spend any money until you have a defined scope, my recommendation is you define what you believe is lacking.

- I was a Trustee in the past and I commend the community for building this fire department and the firefighters for doing a fantastic job. Everyone sitting on the Board needs to work out their differences.
- Former Fire Chiefs comments discourteous. I support and salute the Trustees for discussing a Review, I support an internal Review. State of the Art fire hall now we need a state of the art Board, right now there is disfunction. You need to prepare a budget for next year. The Board needs diversity, people who will bring different talents.
- In favour of a Review of Policies and Procedures. When you have a working Board you can do a lot and once you figure how it's all going to work that's when you bring in external help, it never hurts. You need to talk about what the scope is, how much it is going to cost, what options are there, are there grants.
- Anyone can benefit from outside advise but maybe not immediately. Board of Trustees and Fire Department should be different.
- I would like to see a cooling off period and everyone make an effort to get along, everyone is trying hard.

Conversation between a Trustee and public member:

- I feel my email requests for support is fine coming from an elected official, this is important to me and I only asked them to support not telling them to or bribing them.
- I never said it was wrong to ask for support just using sending out information that the Trustees had received.
- You have identified a problem and it's brave to bring this forward, all of you want to succeed. I suggest a select committee, I'll volunteer don't sweep this under feet. Get a volunteer external review with a maximum of 3 skills sets on board and write up a report on how problems might be resolved.

Chair asked if there were any more comments from the public.

Moved by John Moeller that the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Diana Moher, carried.

Meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.