

## Texada Volunteer Firefighters Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Committee Report 041826

From the Committee's Terms of Reference:

**"The purpose of this special Committee is to consider proposals for the recruitment and retention of Firefighters and that this Committee prepare a report for the Van Anda and Gillies Bay Trustees and Annual General Meetings."**

Committee membership:

George Franklin, Chair  
Tyler Danczak, member  
Tom Read, member  
Richard Valentine, ex-officio

The Committee drafted and carried out a written survey of all Texada firefighters and recently retired firefighters serving as auxiliaries. The survey contained 34 questions and was answered by about half of the firefighters listed on the Gillies Bay and Van Anda rosters. Below are the Committee's findings and recommendations, which we present in broad yet distinct categories based on patterns we observed in answers throughout the survey. A copy of the survey questions and tabulated answers is available on request.

**1) FINDING: Overall morale in both departments is currently good to high, but respondents also believe there is room for improvement.**

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Provide formal recognition and appreciation of all fire department members by their respective Improvement District Board of Trustees. This could include having VAID and GBID Trustees jointly host an annual community dinner thanking firefighters for their service, where firefighters would be the honored guests, not volunteer cooks, servers and clean-up personnel.
- b) Provide each firefighter with a customized path to growth and advancement within the department, calibrated to their particular needs, interests and capabilities.

**2) FINDING: Firefighters join and remain in the departments primarily from their satisfaction in providing an essential community service, and for the sense of camaraderie they get by being members of a team. One respondent indicated interest in financial compensation and several alternative benefits and perks were also suggested.**

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Given that service and camaraderie are the primary motivations for members' initial and continued participation in our community's fire departments, each department could regularly communicate the value of firefighters' service to the Texada community. This could be done by profiling examples of the

training being undertaken by firefighters and first responders so that they can better serve the community.

b) As part of communicating the value of firefighters' service, the departments could also provide brief reporting on incidents where firefighters prevented the spread of a fire, either in the forest or to neighbouring structures. Similar reporting could communicate on first responder service during medical and vehicle incidents.

c) Provide team-building exercises from time to time to affirm camaraderie within and between the two departments. Within these exercises provide some form of recognition for individuals and teams, not necessarily monetary, but of practical value (example: discount at Texada gas station).

d) Explore options for compensation, including but not limited to prize draws based on attendance, discounted or free ferry or gas, extended health benefits.

**3) FINDING: Respondents made several suggestions for improving volunteer recruitment and retention in both departments. Most suggestions centered on running online and traditional ads, implementing more structured training, and having the flexibility to accommodate work and home life schedules.**

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

a) Run ads online and offline to recruit new members. Provide a structured on-boarding process for new recruits that keeps them engaged early on. This process to be part of, or done in addition to, regular Monday training schedules.

b) Abide by a commitment that Monday practices will not exceed two hours.

c) Issue a training schedule at six-month intervals, showing the training topic for each week's scheduled Monday practice. Commit to keeping classroom time and related field practice to set times.

d) Focus training on skills development, with the goal of increasing members' competence and confidence. As part of learning, require members to demonstrate their skills at regular intervals.

e) Hold at least one comprehensive scenario drill at six month intervals, simulating an actual major structural fire or other type of serious incident. Evaluate both individual and team performance in the drill with a detailed "lessons learned" review, and commit to follow-up corrective actions.

f) explore earlier start times, as multiple respondents indicate practices run too late for their schedules.

**4) FINDING: There is a distinction in the needs of respondents who are interested only in firefighting, and respondents who are interested in both firefighting and first responder responsibilities.**

RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) Provide customized training tracks based on each member's interests and capabilities, as noted above, and set an expectation that members need only commit to attend practices and call-outs appropriate to their interests.
- b) Use internal communications, such as a text group, to manage how many first responders are needed for any given medical or vehicle incident call-out.
- c) Integrate first responder call-outs from each department, so that the appropriate number of people respond to a given incident where both departments are involved.

**5) FINDING: Respondents seek clear direction from each department on their overall mission in regard to firefighting: interior and exterior vs. exterior only.**

**RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- a) The Trustees of each Improvement District provide their respective fire departments with policy direction on the question of interior and exterior vs. exterior only response to structural fires.
- b) Given the current level of training of members of both departments as indicated in the survey, focus on exterior-only as highest priority for training at present.