Mayor Finall and North Saanich Council   (letter of June 4/2018)

My colleague, Colin Nielsen and I belatedly viewed the video of your Council meeting of May 28 and compliment your Councillors for giving serious consideration to our letter of May 24 as a contribution to Council's decision to defer final approval of fire dispatch contract with Surrey. We are providing this follow-up letter to further assist you and your staff with additional information to bring forward to the June 11 Council meeting.

In our previous letter we suggested there is an apparent misunderstanding on the merits and costs of shifting fire dispatch services from Saanich. Since our letter; even more alarming is the rhetoric around the claims of the cost saving that have been even more exaggerated (e.g. Staff report going to View Royal Council on Tuesday June 5th, claiming savings for the 5 municipalities of **more than $1.9 million** (the View Royal report may be read at: https://viewroyalbc.civicweb.net/document/21628/City of Surrey Fire Dispatch Services Agreement.pdf?handle=96EDF4F3C5C94D0A8B6B103A4878A6D5. Much of that arose from badly outdated information from initial discussions earlier in the year and been perpetuated and seemingly ignored during subsequent developments within the CRD's Regional Fire Dispatch feasibility study. In our investigation of this we have learned that fire dispatch is not as simple as "just answering the phone and paging firefighters". Researching this topic has taken considerable time and much homework, site visits and meetings. Sadly it appears that advice to various Councils and dialogue between municipal officials has lacked the currency and detailed review of a somewhat complex topic. This critically important public safety service is a significant responsibility for Council(s)

that merits careful consideration of all the factors, including all related costs.

Our original intent was to provide additional information on the CRD's feasibility study and costs they have collected, to date, as detailed in the CRD Staff report of March 28. Table 1, included in our May 24th correspondence to you, includes a succession of 3 Saanich bids over the past 7 months and the angst of your council's search for savings was based on the Saanich and CRD figures of Jan 31, contained in Columns B & C in Table 1, which were in response to your Joint RFP (and which **did not** include savings due to "economies of scale" that a regional fire dispatch would achieve). Table 1 broke out the bids by year, beginning in 2019 and ending in 2022. Column B, from the RFP responses was the source of the figure for "collective savings of $1.5 million". However in the subsequent the CRD proposal to the CRD Planning & Protective Services for a Regional Fire Dispatch, shown in Column E, Saanich costs for 2019 of $69,200 are significantly reduced from the RFP response of $93,800.   While still more costly than the Surrey bid of $45,320, it narrows the differential. Apparently some councilors read those figures and asked staff to confirm whether our claims of much lower cost saving was valid. We stand behind our original figures but again ask you to confirm whether a simplistic comparison of bids is valid.

As of this week you, your staff and we, have now had a chance to read the Surrey contract and compare it to the current Saanich agreement (May 2017 with 3 extensions) *to compare the totality of the contract obligations,* not just a simplistic comparison of the rates for service. The devil is in the details not the numbers! Our ongoing review suggests there is further evidence that your estimates of cost savings are misunderstood and misleading. Apart from the your share of "one-time CREST interface costs,

the Surrey contract identifies some ongoing costs only alluded to in Schedule A of the Surrey contract.   The figures in **Item 7 of Schedule "A" of the Surrey contract**, only cover ongoing call answer and dispatch service costs. We refer you to **Item 4,** which states that **Annual Operating costs do not include any telecommunications cost incurred to transmit data to and from Surrey, including modems, routers and other means (e.g.** the cost of communications circuits between Surrey and CREST for Voice and data communications). We are informed that these costs could run as high as $50,000 per year, without including redundant communication routing. **These additional costs are not identified in your staff report.**

This would seem to confirm that our claim that estimates of savings to your taxpayers as identified earlier by your own staff were grossly overestimated.

Additionally now with benefit of actually having copy of the Surrey contract we would strongly suggest you have the "*fine print*" carefully reviewed by your municipal solicitors, if you have not already done so, to more carefully examine the scope and limitations of your contractual obligations. Several clauses of the contract and Appendix seem to basically absolve Surrey of any liability, even for errors made by Surrey Staff (Item 13 in the contract) and leave the entire range of these eventualities to you, their client. We are not lawyers but in our estimation this is a one sided contract that may not adequately protect the interest of client municipalities and their taxpayers. We would suggest you compare those obligations with provisions of your current contract with Saanich. There appears to be some differences.

In contrast the Saanich bid was 'all in" and no extra costs to reconfigure CREST and, over time, their cost would be even less

if more agencies joined in and, particularly, when Victoria moves to its new fire hall.

In your debate councilors implied that a full "all in regional fire dispatch service" would take a year or more before possible merger of Saanich and Langford could be finalized. In the sense of negotiating and formalizing an integrated regional "governance model" that time frame might be true. <u>But if you (and others) were to stay with Saanich *the operational core* of a regional dispatch does and could continue to exist</u> ; i.e. Saanich/Oak Bay/Central Saanich plus the 5 of you. Negotiations are underway for possible joint Saanich - Victoria dispatch that would then serve 2/3 to ¾ of regional population. In short term Langford could continue to serve small Westshore municipalities and CRD rural services. It seems seem wasteful and backward step to dismantle the current arrangement when we are more than halfway towards a "in region' system. To suggest that "maybe we will come back some day" seems cavalier to the extreme.

We strongly suggest that with a closer scrutiny of both the costing model and your onerous contractual obligations a transfer to Surrey may not be such a great deal and we urge you give serious consideration to our list of concerns.

Again thank you for your serious consideration of our submission and trust it provides useful information and perspectives.

Respectfully,

James D. Anderson and Colin Nielsen (see BIO's below)

cc to Mayor and Council: View Royal, Colwood, Esquimalt and Sidney.

cc Peninsula News Review, Goldstream Gazette and Victoria News

BIO's:

James D. Anderson: Saanich resident, M.A. in Regional Planning (UBC). Retired senior provincial official with considerable experience in preparation of and vetting of briefing notes to political officials and to draft, negotiate and administer a wide range of contracts for technical service. As a citizen activist, has attended majority of CRD and Municipal council meetings and met with numerous municipal officials on matters effecting governance and fragmentation of *regional service delivery* i.e. transportation, land use planning and emergency services.

Colin Nielsen – former RCMP Member, served as the RCMP Telecommunications Manager for Vancouver Island for 24 years. Served on the CRD, Central Island (Nanaimo) and North Island Enhanced 9-1-1 Implementation Groups as the RCMP Representative. Duties included technological and operational support to three RCMP Operational Communications and 9-1-1 Centres (West Shore, Nanaimo and Courtenay), supervision of communications system maintenance and enhancements.