

Mayors Jensen, Windsor and Helps and Councils of Oak Bay, Central Saanich and City of Victoria –sent **June 4 /2018**

Re Fire Dispatch Contracts

On May 24, my colleague Colin Nielsen and I wrote to various councils in the CRD region and, in particular, asked the 5 councils to reconsider their decision to shift fire dispatch service to Surrey.

We provided data to suggest their anticipated savings were a bit exaggerated and asked they have second look, based on figures developed for the CRD Planning and Protective Services Committee, which was tasked with a feasibility study for a regional fire dispatch service. From their response and actions it appears that they are disregarding any suggestion of need to review and are determined to leave “in region fire dispatch” (An exception is North Saanich Council which on May 28th sent back their staff report recommending that Council sign with Surrey and directed officials to provide further clarification on several points).

Since this disappointing response to our letter, we have had an opportunity to review public documents from the Sidney and Colwood Council meetings of last week; both in terms of their staff reports and their draft contract with Surrey, specific to each.

While taking this **second look**, we learned some disturbing facts that reinforce our earlier advice and they ignore at their peril. View Royal will review on June 5.

Since the Councils of both Oak Bay and Central Saanich will, during the course of this year, have to decide whether or not to

renew your contract with Saanich we felt it appropriate to bring this information to your attention based on what we learned.

We refer you to the text of the draft Surrey contract (attached below) and suggest there is a need for you to examine that document in great detail to ensure you realize the scope of and limitations of the contractual obligations. It appears that many costs are NOT included in the quoted price of service shown Schedule A. In particular we refer you to **Schedule A – items 4 & 7(b) - over and above the \$150K (+ or - \$25K) non-recurring connection charge with CREST will be ongoing monthly communications circuits charges payable by the 5 municipalities to provide voice and data communications between Surrey and the CREST system. The magnitude of these recurring charges are not specified in either the staff report(s), however the Surrey contract clearly identifies those costs as being the responsibility of the 5 clients (and those costs do not form part of the Dispatch Service fees). These additional recurring costs need to be identified and added to the Service Fee costs in order to determine the “real cost” of the service with Surrey and to subsequently have a basis for a fair comparison with the costs being refined by the CRD for their proposed service and with the costs offered by Saanich. We have been informed that these monthly costs could run anywhere from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per month, depending on the level of security, and for the bandwidth required. If redundancy is required for these circuits fiber leasing, modem/router rentals and/or monthly data plans from common carriers (e.g. Telus/Shaw) could run an additional \$50 K per year and be 100% shared by the 5.**

And even more important if you peruse *the fine print* as enumerated in the contract and the Appendix several clauses seem to basically absolve Surrey of all cost and obligations and

liabilities and leave almost the entire range of risk for these eventualities to you their clients. We are not lawyers but in our estimation this is one-sided contract that does not adequately protect the interests of client municipalities and their taxpayers. We would strongly suggest you have your solicitors review this very carefully. In contrast your current contract with Saanich seems to be less onerous in this regard but we leave it you and your solicitors to confirm.

Although they see determined to ignore our advice it appears the residents of those 5 municipalities will not realize the cost saving their councilors are so quick to claim and fail to recognize there are hidden extra costs not included in the contract. Plus there will be several benefits of regional operational arrangements that an “out of region service delivery” cannot provide as effectively as a region wide fire dispatch centre. Mutual aid can be provided from multiple dispatch centres, however, when time is of the essence, handling all fire agencies in the region from one central facility is more effective than “transferring requests” between dispatch centres. Direct ‘in person’ conversations, with dispatchers operating as teams to get resources dispatched across boundaries, when necessary, is more effective than working in silos. Based on their response to date It does appear the 5 are determined to leave in region even though we suggest the benefits of their rush to judgement may be illusory.

BUT on the other hand it does seem that prospects are still good for you to maintain and establish the foundations of a regional based fire dispatch system even if you initially only have 4 municipal partners and add others. Together you represent 2/3 of the regional population (approximately 233,000) particularly including the “urban core” and with contiguous boundaries that readily allow for flexibility for mutual aid and first responder arrangements. It would be shame if those benefits were not

realized! Hopefully over time the other Councils would recognize common interest and comparable costs and will return to “in region”. Hopefully the new *South Island Communication Centre 9-1-1 and police dispatch* facility will convince others of the benefits of “in- region integrated service delivery” for all emergency services.

It is our hope and understanding that levels of service and the costing have been subject to some degree of ongoing discussion between your officials and Saanich and in fact may have already been generally agreed to in principle. What is needed is for the 4 parties to meet and confirm a “*governance model*” for fire dispatch. Negotiations between Saanich and Victoria would seem to provide an opportunity to consider options to include other possible participants. We urge individual leadership by your Councillors and officials to jointly pursue negotiations to that end.

We trust this additional information is helpful, that it will assist your Council to carefully consider and support the costs, service levels and benefits of “in-region fire dispatch service” and that you will continue to take reasonable efforts to pursue such an objective.

Respectfully submitted

James D. Anderson and Colin Nielsen

CC Mayor of Saanich, CAO Paul Thorkelsson and Fire Chief Michael Burgess

Dave Cockle, Oak Bay Fire Chief, Central Saanich Fire Chief Chris Vrabel, Paul Bruce, Victoria Fire Chief

CC Mayors and Councils of the Colwood, Esquimalt, North Saanich, Sidney and View Royal

CC CRD Planning and Protective Services

CC B Cleverly, Wolfgang Depner, Peninsula News

Link to View Royal Staff Report dated May 31, 2018, with attached proposed contract from Surrey – going to View Royal Council on Tuesday, June 5, 2018:

<https://viewroyalbc.civicweb.net/document/21628/City of Surrey Fire Dispatch Services Agreement.pdf?handle=96EDF4F3C5C94D0A8B6B103A4878A6D5>

Bio: 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.

James D. Anderson; resident of Saanich, 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 services. As 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, planning, emergency services.