

September 6, 2024

Mayor and Council
Village of Belcarra
4084 Bedwell Bay Road
Belcarra, BC V3H 4P8
Via email: jross@belcarra.ca

Re: Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department Service Review

Mayor and Council:

We are in receipt of the notice that the Village of Belcarra is initiating a service review of the Sasamat Volunteer Fire Department (SVFD) Letters Patent that governs our partnership approach to this valued emergency response service. After the SVFD Board of Trustees unanimously moved the fire hall project forward over a year ago, this notice comes as a surprise and causes us great concern. The existing fire halls in Anmore and Belcarra do not meet current WorkSafe BC regulations, and they are not expected to be able to withstand a seismic event. Neither community can afford any further delay to the replacement of these vital structures. We have made a commitment to our SVFD volunteers that we will move forward with new fire halls as a priority for their safety, and ultimately the safety of our citizens.

The timing of this call for a service review is poorly contrived as the outcome will result in not only a delay in the replacement of the firehalls, but significant negative impacts for both communities and our citizens. We feel it is objectionable for Belcarra Council to put us in the position of risking our communities with this process. In addition to an unnecessary delay, if the review moves forward, we have been advised that it may result in a six-figure cost to the taxpayers – money that should be spent on building fire halls to improve the safety of the workplace for our volunteer firefighters.

We also want to set the record straight about how the shared service is currently managed and the work that has been done over the past few years to address the outdated and compromised infrastructure at our fire halls.

As we have already articulated on multiple occasions in numerous meetings with Belcarra Council members both separately and at Fire Trustee meetings, as well as through written correspondence, and our position remains clear.

1. In 2018, the SVFD Board of Trustees received a Fire Hall Seismic and Conditions report indicating the urgency of infrastructure replacement. These serious risks include the lack of safe storage for contaminated breakout gear, which doesn't meet WorkSafe BC standards, the fact that the buildings are not seismically engineered and would likely

collapse if we have a significant seismic event (potentially trapping our trucks and equipment in the rubble when needed most) and the failing infrastructure overall. Anmore Council began saving money in 2018 to pay for the construction as this is when we were apprised of the condition of the fire halls and the safety risks for our volunteer firefighters. Furthermore, Anmore has funded and begun the plans to provide a temporary facility for equipment during the construction and we are awaiting to hear Belcarra's plans for your temporary facility. To our knowledge, Belcarra Council was advised by a financial consultant to begin saving money in 2020 but no action was taken. On June 6, 2023, Anmore Council gave its unanimous support to replacing the deteriorating fire halls.

2. Anmore Council has a responsibility to represent the interests of its residents, and this includes addressing financial and safety risks. To this end, we have made it clear that we will uphold the current agreement, which is rightfully based on population. Currently, Anmore bears close to 80% of the operational costs, and if our community continues to grow, that amount could increase based on the established formula. The capital costs for new equipment and fire halls are split 50/50 as a fire hall is equally needed in each community and the SVFD generally uses the same equipment for both communities. The Letters Patent was set up to be equitable for both communities, but sometimes equipment is needed in one community and not the other. A recent example is the plan to purchase auxiliary mobile water storage equipment. Unlike Belcarra, Anmore has an ample water supply, so we don't need this type of equipment, but under the current Letters Patent we would still split the cost evenly with Belcarra. While this instance is in Belcarra's favour, we believe that overall, this is still a fair and equitable arrangement as we would have access to the equipment, if ever needed.
3. We have explained our position clearly to Belcarra Council in our many Trustee meetings over the past few years and in recent months. Comments from Belcarra Councillors saying that Anmore is reluctant to meet with them are simply untrue. The fact is, we have met – repeatedly but Belcarra Council has not been agreeable to what we have to say, which is that we support the current agreement and are not interested in making changes currently. It's also worth noting that Belcarra was fully supportive of the Letters Patent as a fair service agreement during the many years when its population was larger than Anmore.
4. We want to emphasize that Belcarra Council is initiating and pushing for this review and at the September 5, 2024 SVFD Board of Trustees meeting, it was agreed that Belcarra would be solely responsible for the total costs of a service review. The proposed review is not a simple process and could have irrevocable consequences for our communities., Anmore Council would like to continue with the current partnership to deliver this shared service through the SVFD, even though we are capable of independently providing emergency response in our community Before proceeding with a service review, we ask Belcarra Council to consider the following:
 - Anmore already provides most of the volunteer firefighters as Belcarra has not been able to meet its demographic requirements for the past few years.

- Anmore has developed a financial plan that would support the construction of a fire hall in our community.
- Anmore is already paying the bulk of the operational costs, which means moving forward with our own volunteer fire department would not involve a significantly higher cost for our residents.
- If a service review results in an outcome where Anmore must pay more to support Belcarra than the current agreement, it will not be supported by Anmore Trustees as it is not in the best interest of our residents and the Trustees would recommend that Anmore Council withdraw from any shared services.

We are requesting that Belcarra Council have a change of heart after considering the potential consequences of a service review. To be clear, ending the shared fire services agreement in our communities is not what Anmore Council wants. Even though we are capable of independently providing emergency response in our community we believe in the value of working together and sharing the costs in a way that is beneficial to both of our taxpayers. We also recognize that losing fire service in Belcarra would result in both safety impacts and risks related to insurance coverage and costs for its residents as Belcarra must have a minimum of 15 volunteer firefighters along with related equipment to meet the Fire Underwriters' requirements. We do not want to see this happen, but it is not within Anmore's power to stop this process. Only Belcarra Council, who triggered this service review, can withdraw the request. At this point, we are all locked into a process that must be initiated within 120 days of the notice being issued, which is a deadline imposed on Metro Vancouver by legislation.

We want to express our thanks and appreciation to the SVFD. We recognize the value of the essential emergency response services they provide to our communities in a skilled, responsible and cost-effective manner. Our volunteer firefighters are the foundation of this service, and we want to see the fire halls replaced as a priority and without further delays. The Village of Anmore is ready and willing to do our part to make that happen as we believe the health and welfare of our volunteer firefighters is paramount.

Yours sincerely,



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cc: Paula Richardson, CAO Village of Belcarra
SFVD Board of Trustees, Metro Vancouver