

## **An Apology to Our Members**

We apologize that we inadvertently disclosed your email address. The SIFPS membership list is solely for SIFPS communication with members, not for communication between members. We ask that all members respect the original intent and do not make use of the list for personal reasons. Mr. Ziegler, as Past President, was well aware of this yet he chose to use it for his own purposes and for that we apologize.

Due to the many allegations and misinformation presented by Mr. Ziegler in his email, we believe it is important to set the record straight.

## **Volunteer Benefits**

One of our successes this year is the implementation of a Health Spending Account for the volunteers. Mr. Ziegler wants to take credit for that success. The previous Board talked about providing benefits late in their term, but without any details of what to do and how to do it. That same Board (Mr. Ziegler's) also passed a formal motion in 2013 "*that the discussion of medical and dental benefits for volunteers be deferred until the mortgages are paid off*" (a decision that was never made public and would have seen benefits deferred until 2016). The current Board rescinded that resolution on September 20, 2014 to proceed with implementing benefits.

At the same meeting, the HR Committee presented benefit options. Information was gathered from Mr. Wiznuk as well as from Fire Chiefs from other Gulf Islands (who by the way do not provide benefits – as claimed by Mr. Ziegler – only Mayne does with a cost to the volunteers), insurance brokers and online sources. The HR Committee spent 40+ hours to distill the information into a Power Point presentation to the volunteers. This was done by board members, Ms. Zimmerman and Ms. Hage. Not by Mr. Ziegler.

## **Financial Projections**

Each year, the SIFPS Board presents a five-year rolling forecast of how much tax money it will need. At the November 8, 2014 Board meeting, a *proposed* CRD five-year financial forecast was circulated for information and review by the Board. Mr. Ziegler, in spite of being present, decided it was a final version, but the minutes of that meeting clearly state:

*Ron Lewis presented the proposed reduction in requested tax revenue as a responsible decision now that construction of both buildings has been completed. President Quinn suggested that input from the fire chief and his crew regarding expected operating costs for equipment over the next five years would be useful when determining the final amount.*

Mr. Ziegler was the President of SIFPS from 2011 to 2014 and a director for the two years prior. During his five years, a CRD 5-year forecast was prepared each year and was never posted on the website nor was it voted on. Mr. Ziegler obviously did not consider it necessary to inform the taxpayer during his tenure, so one has to ask what his motivation is to make it an issue now?

## **Spending Money and In-Camera Meetings**

In-camera meetings are used to deal with personnel or commercially sensitive matters to protect the individuals discussed or ensure negotiations are not jeopardized. When possible, without causing damage to individuals or commercial positions, the decision made in the in-camera meeting will be reported. An example where our Board voted on money issues in-camera happened on September 20, 2014, where the minutes report:

**15. b.** *The meeting was suspended and went In Camera at 12:41 pm*

*At 12:51 the general meeting resumed.*

*President Quinn reported that the Board passed a motion in camera to increase the Fire Chief's honourarium to \$12,000 per annum. This is to keep up with inflation as well as for merit in performance of his role. This adjustment will be retroactive to July 1, 2014.*

In-camera meetings were used during Mr. Ziegler's tenure to allow a frank and free discussion among its

members, *but the decisions were never made public.*

### **Conflict of Interest**

Mr. Ziegler should be well versed in the Conflict of Interest rules that govern the SIFPS Board. During his tenure as President a conflict of interest situation arose, which resulted in Board members requesting a recall of the decision. They were successful, but Mr. Ziegler's handling of that situation resulted in two directors resigning (incidentally the very same two he consistently vilifies in his "postings").

Mr. Ziegler alludes that the SIFPS Board had a conflict of interest when we voted to increase the Fire Chief's honorarium because Mr. Gaines, who is the brother-in-law of the Fire Chief, was present. He compares us to the paid Island Trustees, who without disclosing their relationship, directed taxpayers' money to organisations of which they were directors. Providing a merit and inflationary increase to the Fire Chief's honorarium provides a benefit only to one person – the Fire Chief.

### **Our Agenda**

Mr. Ziegler claims the current Board has an agenda – and for once he is right! As reflected in the July 20, 2014 minutes, Mr. Quinn outlined the objectives for this year:

- a) to acquire a new fire rescue vehicle;
- b) to ramp up the relationship between the Board, the Chiefs and the volunteers;
- c) to assure that current vehicles are available and ready to perform when needed;
- d) to follow-up on a proposed benefit package for volunteers.

As of today, we are pleased to report that all of the above objectives have been achieved – and exceeded. So, yes, this Board has an agenda and as volunteers, we have worked very hard to achieve it.

### **Conclusion**

While it is a fact that Mr. Ziegler lost his bid for re-election to the SIFPS Board, one can only speculate why he attacks an organisation that relies on the ongoing commitment and diligence of a large number of volunteers and plays a vital role in delivering emergency services.

As an organisation we welcome constructive feedback – it will make us better! But ongoing mistatements of facts and baseless allegations are simply not acceptable and only serve to distract our volunteers from providing quality emergency services.

Sincerely,

Saturna Island Fire Protection Society Board of Directors

Wayne Quinn (President); Ron Hall (Vice-President); Ron Lewis (Treasurer); Eva Hage (Corporate Secretary); Deb Fry; Ian Gaines; Jodi Gilmore; John Hutchinson; and Priscilla Zimmerman

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On Mar 27, 2015, at 5:29 PM, Bernie Ziegler <[zieglerequal@gmail.com](mailto:zieglerequal@gmail.com)> wrote:

Very interesting communication.

The SIFPS president sends out an email to a list of members (with many outdated email addresses, by the way) to communicate with us. I checked, and his letter is not yet on the SIFPS website. Not under news, or anywhere else. I am going to summarize for those not on Facebook (and without the colourful language of the various cheering sections):

1. Firefighter Benefits

On Facebook, my September post pointing out the board's reluctance to fund a benefits package for firefighters – not reneging on a promise made last year by the previous board, but close – was met with denial. Yet, six weeks later, the board meeting attended by a good number of firefighters featured a full-length presentation on firefighter benefits (data gathered by someone other than the board members present, even though some took full credit for the work). I would call that progress, baby steps.

2. Budget Projections

Later, I posted about a \$50,000 budget cut (I got that info at the November 2014 board meeting, where a document circulated in the room showed a \$50,000 budget cut for 2016). When I pointed this out on Facebook the board hurried and posted the version of the five-year budget projection that they had submitted to the CRD. (My question is: how many versions are there?) And as a follow-up, is that document posted on the SIFPS website? And if not, why not? That is taxpayer info.

3. Spending Motions Voted in Camera

This year, the board chose to go in camera (asking everyone who is not a board member to leave), in order to vote on a motion to spend public money with no record of the decision, and certainly no record of it in the minutes. This is transparency.?

4. Conflict of Interest

A board member who is related to the chief and is his employer did not recuse himself when the board voted in camera to give the chief a raise. And if he did recuse himself, why is it not reflected in the minutes? I guess they forgot their reading glasses, because, surely, the SIFPS code of ethics has to be on hand in that room.

The first two examples above highlight the SIFPS board reaction to my pointing out actual facts. The first one is self-evident. The second one is a glaring example of revamping information (financial information, no less) which should be in the official record of the society as part of the minutes of that meeting and on the SIFPS website, and why the hell not circulated to this list of members? It's interesting to see how quickly a "massaged" set

of figures was made public, and this critic called a liar, when so little information was forthcoming prior to that.

In camera (in “the room”, in English) is fine for discussion about delicate topics, but money decisions must be voted on in public. So minutes are kept. Real minutes, with figures, details. So the public has an idea of what is going on.

As to conflict of interest, there is no need for explanations. Remember the Salt Spring Trustees who voted to spend money on their pet projects without recusing themselves (they were directors of the organisations they were voting to fund)? Google them, they had adventures in court.

It’s a pitiful scenario. A group with a certain agenda got elected to a board. The agenda in question may or may not affect the society and the firefighters. But the reluctance to communicate openly does not inspire confidence. Much noise was made about transparency when they were elected. At the moment, the situation is opaque.

It is sad that I had to resort to Facebook to communicate because there was no other means to openly discuss these issues without having to pay membership fees or to pass the censors. The Facebook forum for Saturna is still the only free place where topics like this one can be discussed. And the forum is approaching 300 members. Yay for social media!

And no, your Chief has not endorsed the contents of this message.