

Saturna Island Fire Protection Society President's Report for AGM, June 20, 2026

One thing stands out for me after my first year as SIFPS President: our two emergency services—Saturna Fire Rescue (SFR) and Saturna Ambulance Service (SAS, formerly SIR)—are staffed by an extraordinary group of volunteers who deliver an outstanding level of service to our small island community. During the past year, they have been tested by fires that could have proved disastrous and major medical emergencies, and in each case they have responded with skill and professionalism. For me this is the bottom line in everything SIFPS does. We work to ensure that SFR and SAS are adequately staffed and resourced for the essential services they deliver to Saturna Island residents and visitors.

The effectiveness of the services begins with their leaders. At SFR, Chief Peter Clark, assisted by Deputy Chief Brent Sohier, has demonstrated consistent strong leadership in keeping his crew trained and ready to respond to all manner of fires and emergency rescues. At SAS, Chief Samantha Fache, assisted by Deputy Chief, Joyce DeRuiter (and before her, Chief Chak Estable-Duquette and his Deputy Chief, Tyler Battle), has worked tirelessly to maintain around-the-clock emergency medical response, while recruiting new volunteers and shepherding them through difficult training and licensing exams.

Amid the successes of SFR and SAS, we cannot ignore the challenges they face. The sourcing and funding of major equipment, especially firefighting vehicles, is an on-going issue for SFR. The purchase of a replacement water tender from a dealer in Ontario turned out to be a long and frustrating process, which (we hope) has come to a successful conclusion through the efforts of Chief Clark. The tender is undergoing final modifications at a shop in Vancouver, after which we expect it to join SFR's fleet. Next up is the purchase of a replacement for Engine 2. Here, again, we may seek grant funding to supplement capital funds reserved in SIFPS's budget.

At SAS, the major on-going issue is the recruitment and retention of volunteers. SAS leaders have worked diligently to address this perennial problem, while often shouldering an excessive volume of shifts themselves. The new SAS Steering Committee, led by SIFPS Vice-President Chaya Katrensky, is collaborating closely with the Chief and Deputy Chief to address the problem. A bright spot are the connections that have been forged with BCEHS, through the support of Shannon Brayford on Pender Island. This has led to the delivery of some material resources from BCEHS and useful mentorship for SAS's leaders.

My own work has focused on securing the long-term viability of our emergency services. This begins with a reset of our relationship with the CRD, which collects and distributes the property tax revenue on which the activities of both SFR and SAS depend. Preliminary discussions on the renewal of SIFPS's Service Agreement with the CRD (valid until the end of 2027), have exposed shortcomings in our founding bylaw (no. 2165) that will need to be corrected. (In brief, that document does not authorize SFR as a fire protection service from

the perspective of the CRD and provincial law.) At the same time, there is a move underfoot, spearheaded by CRD Fire Manager Chris Vrael, to bring all rural fire departments in the CRD under a common governance model. At this point, all our peer departments, except Pender, operate under CRD Fire Commissions. We continue to study whether such a move would be in the interests of Saturna taxpayers and what it might mean for the future of SAS and SIFPS. Details on these developments will be shared at the Town Hall meeting on June 20, with follow-ups in the *Scribbler* and on our website (saturnafirerescue.ca). I underline that we are far from reaching a conclusion, and no decision will be made until we have thoroughly consulted with the Saturna community.

The past year has witnessed an explosion of support—witnessed in community fundraisers and individual charitable giving—for our emergency medical responders. There is consistent praise for the vital work they do and a commitment to maintaining the current level of service on the island. For many, the ideal situation would be the establishment of a permanent BCEHS ambulance station on Saturna. SIFPS is working with CRD Director Paul Brent to explore this possibility. Looking at the situation realistically, we must recognize that this is a long-term project. BCEHS itself is strapped for funds and Saturna does not stand at the top of its list of priorities.

In the meantime, we will continue to think of other ways to secure SAS's future as a critical part of Saturna's health safety net. I am optimistic that we can make progress on this front, but to do so we will need more islanders to step up, as SAS responders and as SIFPS board members. After many years living in cities where one takes for granted that someone else is looking after things, I am excited and sobered to discover that, on our small island, we are often called on to look after things for ourselves. This can be a struggle when trying to extract resources from regional and provincial agencies, but it is also a source of great satisfaction to see how, together, we can build a strong and resilient community.

Respectfully submitted,

Don Rutherford
President, Saturna Island Fire Protection Society