

Revised: March 28, 2022

Background

The Crofton Fire Hall is in need of replacement and North Cowichan Council has agreed in principle to proceed with plans to replace the fire hall on the same property. This would require long-term capital borrowing to finance the construction of the fire hall through a loan authorization bylaw. That bylaw must receive approval by the Province and North Cowichan electors before it can be adopted.

Approval of the electors can be obtained through an alternative approval process (counter-petition process) or through an assent voting event (such as a referendum or during a general local election).

Communication goals

1. To *inform* the public about the need for a new fire hall, what the benefits of the new fire hall are, the need to replace the fire hall, and the implications of not moving forward with it
2. To *inform* the public about the fiscal impacts of a new fire hall
3. To *inform* the public about the elector approval process

Spokespeople

- Mayor Al Siebring is the primary spokesperson.

Additional spokespersons may include:

- Ted Swabey, CAO (for general project topics)
- Talitha Soldera, Director, Financial Services (finances)
- Martin Drakeley, Fire Chief (Fire Department needs or other topics related to members, use)
- Shawn Cator, Director of Operations (construction)
- Michelle Martineau, Manager of Legislative Services (elector approval process)
- Barb Floden, Manager, Communications and Public Engagement (in absence of other spokespersons)

Audiences

The target audience are North Cowichan residents (resident electors) and those property owners who are British Columbians but reside outside of the municipal boundary (non-resident property electors):

- Resident electors are individuals who reside in North Cowichan, are at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen and have lived in BC for at least 6 months
- Non-resident property electors are individuals who have owned property in North Cowichan for at least 30 days and are at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen and have resided in BC for at least 6 months

Secondary audiences include:

- Crofton Resident's Association
- North Cowichan Fire Department members

Other levels of government to keep informed:

- Provincial government

Strategy

North Cowichan will communicate in an open and transparent manner with residents and provide key information materials to the electorate using the following tools:

1. Method

The following table describes the methods staff will undertake to inform and engage audiences on the plans for replacing the Crofton Fire Hall and the process for obtaining approval of the electors to adopt the loan authorization bylaw.

Tool	Type	Method
Statutory requirements		
Municipal website (northcowichan.ca)	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statutory notices¹ will be published to the Latest News webpage• Project background• Include link to connectnorthcowichan.ca engagement project page
Notice board (Municipal Hall)	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statutory notices¹ will be posted to the notice board located at the entry to the Municipal Hall
Newspaper ads	Paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statutory notices¹ will be advertised in Cowichan Valley Citizen and the Chemainus Valley Courier.
Recommended tactics		
ConnectNorthCowichan.ca	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a project page on North Cowichan's engagement platform website• Include timeline, background, information on the fire hall, implications, etc.• Continuously update as information changes• Activate the "Questions" tool to allow the public to have questions answered
Municipal website (northcowichan.ca)	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spotlight project on home page with link to web page or Connect page
News Release	Owned /Earned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New release advising that the process to obtain elector approval is underway• News release announcing when or if elector approval is obtained
Additional measures to inform the public		
Site signage	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4x8 vinyl printed plywood sign mounted at site• Show rendering, 3-4 bullets of information, approx. cost, timeframe• Include QR code that links to web page or Connect page

¹ Sections 86 of the *Community Charter* and section 172 of the *Local Government Act* govern notice requirements and who may participate in voting. Statutory notices cannot be advertised until after approval from the Inspector of Municipalities has been received.

Tool	Type	Method
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include space for sash sticker with borrowing process information (added once process is known)
Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)	Owned /Paid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information will be shared through social media advising of the key dates Inform about results of AAP and/or elector assent to the question on the ballot during the 2022 general local election
Subscriber email	Owned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide email updates on the process to subscribers on ConnectNorthCowichan

2. Budget

Type	Cost per Item	Total Cost
Newspaper Ads (4 1/8 page ads – 2 in Cowichan Valley Citizen & 2 in Chemainus Courier)	\$280	\$1,120
Site sign , 8x4, vinyl printed, mounted on plywood and posts	\$500	\$500
Total		\$1,620

**Note: all costs subject to applicable taxes*

Key messages

Fast facts

- The Fire Department serves the municipality, as well as Quw'utsun, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, and Lyackson First Nations from four fire halls: Chemainus, Maple Bay, South End, and Crofton.
- It is BC's largest paid on-call fire department, with 113 members.
- The existing fire hall in Crofton was constructed in 1964. A second floor addition was added sometime later, and the apparatus bays were added in 2002.
- A number of assessments and studies have been conducted in order to identify deficiencies and recommend long-term options for the fire hall. This includes a 2018 Facility Condition Assessment, a 2019 detailed Seismic Assessment, and a 2019 Load Rating Study for the second floor.
- The assessments and studies conclude that the existing fire hall is in immediate need of seismic upgrades and urgent repairs, and given the cost of these repairs, it is recommended the fire hall be demolished and rebuilt in its current location.
- The second floor was closed to all use in 2019 following the load rating study as it was deemed unsafe. Replacing second floor joists could address the load bearing issues, however seismic issues would still need to be addressed.
- The proposed fire hall would be approximately 3,600 square feet and include training and administration space for the volunteer members and the station chief, as well as dedicated storage space for equipment, gear, and electronics.
- A new fire hall will cost around \$4.8 million to construct.

Need for a new fire hall

- Members of the Crofton fire hall have been without adequate training space since 2019 when the second floor was closed due to load bearing issues. Weekly training, as well as space to gather after

significant fires or call-out events, is crucial for members. Expensive technical gear also requires specialized storage space in order to prevent damage and prolong equipment life.

- Fire halls are an important community asset, in addition to serving the needs of the fire department.
- Renovating would likely cost far more than building a new fire hall, as seismic upgrades, required to be built to post-disaster specifications can be very costly, especially for a 58-year-old structure.
- The existing apparatus bays, built in 2002, would not be impacted by the fire hall demolition and rebuilding.
- The new fire hall is expected to serve our community's needs for 50 years.

Finances & Elector Approval Process

- A new fire hall in Crofton will cost around \$4.8 million to construct. This money will be borrowed through the Municipal Finance Authority and repaid over 20 years.
- The total cumulative cost to the average homeowner over the duration of the loan will be about \$340 (\$17 per year).
- Under an alternative approval process (AAP), if 10% of the eligible electors who submit a response form by the deadline set by Council, North Cowichan must seek approval through assent voting (referendum or general local election). If that were to happen, a question asking voters if they approve adoption of the loan authorization bylaw would be included on the ballot for the 2022 general local election being held this October.