

# Saanich News

## Saanich expands fire dispatch to View Royal and Colwood

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Saanich dispatchers will soon answer fire emergency calls from View Royal and Colwood following a deal struck with the Saanich Fire Department last week.

The joint, five-year contract comes on the heels of the Capital Regional District's recommendation to reduce the number of dispatch centres in the region.

Both View Royal and Colwood are dissatisfied with the level of service currently provided by the Langford dispatch centre under an agreement managed by the CRD.

Last fall, the fire departments of the two municipalities issued a request for proposals seeking a direct relationship with a centre to improve service and conflict resolution, said View Royal Fire Chief Paul Hurst.

Saanich was one of three centres in the Capital Region, along with Langford and Victoria, to submit a proposal for the joint contract. Langford will continue to dispatch for 16 municipalities across the West Shore, Gulf Islands and as far north as Port Renfrew.

Saanich currently answers calls from residents in Saanich, Oak Bay, Esquimalt, North Saanich, Central Saanich and Sidney, combining for a total of 49 per cent of all fire emergency calls in the region. View Royal and Colwood will officially switch dispatch centres in May - a transition that Saanich Fire Chief Michael Burgess is ready for with two full-time dispatchers based at the Vernon Avenue station.

The computerized dispatch centre is capable of tracking emergency vehicles equipped with GPS technology. The facility was built to withstand a major earthquake, and is backed by mainland-based dispatch providers E-Comm, should a regional disaster affect local communications.

"To go out and invest in these (computer-aided dispatch) and records management systems as an independent department, we're talking seven figures," Chief Burgess said. "It's not practical."

The system is not so different from PRIME - a provincial police dispatch and records management system, he added.

In April, the CRD released a review of fire dispatch services recommending the reduction of the three dispatch centres to two, or possibly a single provider.

"It's my opinion that the region could be easily served by one dispatch centre," View Royal Chief Hurst said, pointing out that other emergency services, such

as hazmat response, are already shared across the CRD.

"Each district is still going to need a fire department, but all of these technical and speciality services can be spread out among the region."

Saanich's dispatch service will cost Colwood taxpayers \$76,332 annually - \$13,226 more than the city had paid through the CRD. View Royal will have a \$44,942 bill from Saanich - an increase of \$8,002 annually.

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