

1350-09

From: ( )  
 Sent: September 10, 2009 9:19 PM  
 To: MayorandCouncil  
 Subject: De-staffing Fire Apparatus  
 Attachments: West Van-De-staffing.doc

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Attached Word Document

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September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Dear Mayor &amp; Council of West Vancouver,

Regarding: De-Staffing Fire/Rescue Services.

Due to the length of this letter, for the benefit of councillors, I have separated the content and added an executive summary.

## Executive Summary;

- Citizens deserve the basics that taxes are designed to take care of. Essential services should never be compromised, with Security and Safety being the top two priorities for any community! The decision to allow the staffing level to go below norm rather than maintaining staffing with overtime, as needed, is placing their lives and properties in jeopardy.
- Your decision to de-staff Fire Apparatus directly places your Fire Fighters at a much greater degree of risk of injury and or death.
- Mutual aide should not be relied upon to provide Fire Coverage; it should be relied upon only at those times where additional resources are needed. Because your policy clearly makes a choice to reduce your own resources it is unfair to expect that Mutual aide should pick up the slack.

## Content;

It has been brought to my attention that a new policy is in place regarding the capping of overtime used to backfill vacancies. I have a great deal of concern with this decision being made by your administration and feel that it directly affects my safety as well as others.

I am a lifetime resident on the North Shore, residing in North Vancouver. I also have ( ) Fire Fighting experience and currently a Captain with Vancouver Fire & Rescue Services. I find it disturbing that one of the richest communities in Canada has decided to cut costs by lowering the already minimal fire protection coverage West Vancouver has. In my opinion, West Vancouver, prior to any recent policy decision, was below the safe staffing levels they should be at to effectively protect its citizens and the potential risk of life and property West Vancouver Fire/Rescue is charged with protecting. I understand that Chief Cook, your Fire Chief, has implemented a policy that has been embraced by you and your council. I am hoping that you will see that this policy needs an immediate reversal, and the

judgment of Chief Cook should also be investigated. His policy, let alone your acceptance of that policy is more than troubling.

I have 3 main issues with the current policy that has been implemented;

1. **The Citizens** (yes the voters and taxpayers) deserve the basics that taxes are designed to take care of. Essential services should never be compromised, with Security and Safety being the top two priorities for any community! The decision to allow the staffing level to go below norm rather than maintaining staffing with overtime, as needed, is placing their lives and properties in jeopardy. If I were a West Vancouver taxpayer, I would need it outlined to me, and proven that every possible option of civic cutbacks was done before ever even considering loosing my basics of Security and Safety. It is not acceptable or believable that cutting positions as vital as the staffing of emergency first responders was the last resort in this case! If anything, West Vancouver should be expanding their staffing of Fire Fighters to a more acceptable industry standard.
2. **The Fire Fighters** (yes the Employees who serve the Citizens) deserve better from you. You are their bosses, and I do not expect you to understand fire ground strategies and tactics. You see fires on TV, so I understand how a council could fall into making this poor decision. In this case you may have relied on your hired "expert", in this case Fire Chief Cook. In my opinion, his decision in this case is blatantly wrong. I believe his decision was not well founded or based on fire protection coverage and is only based on budget constraints. You, as elected officials need to listen to your real experts. I encourage each of you to visit any Fire Station and ask those experts what difference it will make when a Fire Truck is not staffed and an emergency occurs. Listen to your own Fire Fighters, they are your employees, and they are the best resource you have. Your decision to de-staff Fire Apparatus directly places your Fire Fighters at a much greater degree of risk of injury and or death. It is an old saying that the Fire Fighters are willing to make a sacrifice when called on, but this policy takes this to the extreme. The longer it takes for Fire Fighters to arrive on scene, the bigger the fire. With limited staff to control the blaze the bigger the fire. If a rescue is necessary and there aren't enough Fire Fighters on scene early, not enough can be done to save both life and property, and people die. It is very easy for a Fire Chief/Administrator to say, "just wait until enough people arrive before initiating an interior fire attack or rescue" but those people aren't the ones on the front lawn as the house burns with a Mom standing in the front yard screaming about her baby upstairs. The Fire Fighters on scene will always go the extra, as far as humanly possible to save a life. The difference is they depend on back-up to be able to do their job. They need that next Fire Apparatus fully staffed to arrive to save their life. Mayor Goldsmith-Jones, I remember going into a preschool 15 years ago to my son, and your daughter's class. After showing the kids some tools, and getting them to Stop-Drop and Roll, I told them that a Fire Fighter coming to help you can always be depended on. I remember saying, "You can depend on me, just like I depend on the next Fire Fighter to help me". I wonder what she would think about a policy that takes the guy I depend on away. Don't leave your Fire Fighters hanging. Give them the support they absolutely need!
3. **Me and my Family** (yes, it might be selfish, but I pay taxes too) deserve a fair mutual aide system. I feel the policy to de-staff Fire Apparatus is putting my family at risk. I am disgusted that the richest municipality in Canada is lowering my Safety and Security because they don't want to pay for their own! A long standing arrangement of Mutual aide is something every smaller community must have but in this case it is being abused. Mutual aide should not be relied upon to provide Fire Coverage; it should be relied upon only at those times where additional resources are needed. Because your policy clearly makes a choice to reduce your own resources it is unfair to expect that Mutual aide should pick up the slack. This new policy places a higher demand on resources I pay for in the District of North Vancouver and I will be pursuing my own

Mayor and Council to strongly question this policy.

Please advise me before September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009 if this policy has reconsidered and revoked. In the alternative, if it is your intention to continue this policy, I will be pursuing other avenues to protest this policy and am requesting the following information be supplied to me as soon as possible;

- The previous 10 years of the West Vancouver total budget, broken down to reflect;
  - i. tax increases
  - ii. percentage of taxes that is allocated to Fire
  - iii. West Vancouver Fire Rescue Budgets, including Overtime.
- The previous 10 years of documented mutual aid occurrences that assisted West Vancouver and any cost associated.
- The previous 10 years of document mutual aid occurrences that West Vancouver was requested to assist others and any cost recovered.
- Any studies regarding West Vancouver Fire/Rescue staffing over the previous 10 years.

Thank you in advance for your immediate attention into this matter. If you have any concerns or questions please don't hesitate to contact me by phone or email.

Sincerely,

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