



## **Sable River Volunteer Fire Department Governance Training Project Update – May 2022**

The Sable River Volunteer Fire Department offers lifesaving emergency response services to the residents of Sable River and its surrounding community. The Fire Department is a registered not-for-profit society governed by a volunteer Board of Directors and has a service agreement with the Municipality of the District of Shelburne. As with most Board of Directors, while committed and hard-working, members often have never had formal governance training. Without this training, a Board of Directors may not always focus on the essential components of their job, may not have the tools to easily complete the work they are tasked with, and fail to achieve their potential.

Chauvin Resource Development is a Nova Scotia based governance consulting firm that focuses on helping make governance easier and much more effective. Our goals in this project are to:

- Complete an orientation to good governance for board members, including the key roles, responsibilities, processes, and tools. This would culminate in a formal commitment to good governance from the member of the Board of the Sable River Volunteer Fire Department.
- Develop or update the Association's foundational documents, including bylaws, mission, vision, values, & code of conduct.
- Develop a series of goals and objectives for the Fire Department.
- Create a recruitment strategy for the Board of Directors, including a skill and experience rubric, a plan for attracting suitable talent to serve on the Board of Directors, a selection process, and an orientation and training program.
- A board self-evaluation process that includes the development of specific plans for improvement and development.
- Increasing the competency of Board members around financial management.

## **Approach to the work:**

1. A kickoff meeting with Municipal Staff and senior representatives from the Fire Department Board of Directors.
2. A two-hour governance orientation and training session (Governance Made Easier ©).
3. Complete a governance survey to gauge where the Board of the Sable River Volunteer Fire Department is in terms of key performance factors. This information will be used to inform future sessions.
4. Six further sessions in 2022 that will include training and coaching elements around key topic areas. There will be work between these sessions to be completed by members of the Board of Directors.
5. A financial management training session for the Board of Directors that will be available to the community as well and held in Spring 2022.
6. A final session for evaluation and to develop a continuing plan for good governance.

## **Progress Report:**

The project was kicked off in October, and a 2-hour governance training session was held in November. Monthly sessions have been held since January in conjunction with regular meetings of the Board of Directors. One meeting was canceled due to inclement weather.

Over this time, the Board has made considerable progress and has demonstrated a number of critical, good governance behaviours. Highlights include:

1. The organization has completed a goal-setting exercise and has identified the recruitment of new first responders and community members as its top priority. Secondary priorities include completing the construction work on the fire hall, which will result in considerable savings in insurance costs and fund development.
2. They have developed a job description, code of conduct, recruitment strategy, a process to review potential candidates, and a promotion plan. The Municipality has participated in this work and offered assistance with printing materials for a community mail out.
3. The Board has discussed communication with the community and how messaging is structured. They have reviewed the responsibilities of Board members as representatives of the Sable River Volunteer Fire Department and representatives of the community while sitting Board members. The Board has discussed reputational issues and how to address any concerns.
4. The Board has improved its financial reporting and includes at each meeting a detailed list of all transactions that have occurred over the past month, pending revenue and expenses, and a current bank balance.

5. The Board has demonstrated a suitable level of diligence in their financial responsibilities. At each meeting, Board members have queried transactions and asked detailed questions about revenues and expenses. Members have inquired about variations from previous reports about pending transactions as well.
6. Members have demonstrated an understanding of risk and liability through regularly asking questions about insurance, inspections, and other issues.
7. The Board takes and maintains detailed minutes of their meetings. These minutes are reviewed at each meeting and approved. Board members have demonstrated appropriate levels of care around minutes by making corrections where there was an issue and, when making decisions, reviewing past minutes to ensure that the decision made is consistent with previous actions.
8. As the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have lifted, the organization is committed to returning to in-person connection and support in the community.

The financial training session for community organizations within the Municipality has been set for Tuesday, May 31, 2022. This will be a general session for any not-for-profits. The June session of the Sable River Volunteer Fire Department Training will be focused on taking the lessons from that program and applying them within the Fire Department.