



Cost, Certainty, Construction, Community: Findings of two Advisory Select Committee Open Houses JULY 5, 2018

The Community Fire Hall Advisory Select Committee (ASC) of Creston held two Open Houses in late June 2018 to mark the conclusory stage of its four-month investigation into a new Fire Hall for the Creston Valley. The ASC was formed to make recommendations to Council on solutions to address the deficiencies of the existing Fire Hall in order to meet the Province's legislative/regulatory requirements and industry standards.

Held Sunday, June 24th and Monday, June 25th at the Creston & District Community Complex, the Open Houses attracted approximately 67 members of the public, with facilitation/scribe activities provided by members of the ASC, the Mayor, Town Councillors, Town of Creston and Creston Fire Rescue staff, and two communications advisors, with fire hall expertise provided by three FireWise Consulting Ltd. consultants and additional Creston Fire Rescue staff.

Each Open House was launched with an invitation to browse the ASC's 23 information panels and speak with FireWise experts, followed by a presentation by FireWise consultant Ernie Polsom. Following the presentation, participants self-organized into groups and rotated through four roundtable discussions on matters of Fire Hall size, site selection, cost, and next steps for the project. The Open Houses ended with participants regrouping to hear an overview of what ASC scribes had heard at their discussion tables.

Attendance numbers at the Open Houses were somewhat less than expected, given the amount of community interest in the new Fire Hall, and the fact that the events had been advertised in the Creston Valley Advance (over two weeks), on Juice FM, on the Town's website and Facebook pages, via posters mounted at Town Hall and courtesy other venues, including at previous ASC meetings and a mail-out flyer from the Concerned Citizens of Creston.

However, most of the attendees were engaged throughout the entirety of each event, with participants posing thoughtful questions to the experts and providing input to ASC scribes at each table. Despite critical interpretation of ASC recommendations and processes by a number of visitors, organizers of the Open Houses agreed that both events ended on a generally positive note, with most commentary providing tentatively affirmative responses to the ASC's conclusions.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUMMATION OF FEEDBACK FORM INFORMATION

Feedback forms submitted by 18 of the Open House participants confirm the positive interpretation made by event organizers. Asked (on a scale of one to five) how informative they found the presentation, 14 people found it "very informative," and two, "somewhat informative": asked how informative they found the small group discussions, 12 found them "very informative," and one "somewhat informative" (several participants chose not to complete this section of the form.)

Comments on the Open Houses themselves included the following: “I thought it was great,” “Good worthwhile afternoon; hope it helps pass next referendum,” and “The boards (display panels) were excellent, especially liked the costs & community sizes of other fire halls recently built” (see Appendices section for charts depicting these findings).

Additional commentary from the feedback forms (including responses to the question, “Is there anything else the ASC should consider that hasn’t been addressed in today’s presentation and small group discussions?” and “Do you have any other questions about the fire Hall and the ASC related to today’s presentation and small group discussion?”) has been incorporated in general discussion of qualitative data below.

WHAT WE HEARD: COST DISCUSSIONS

Discussion of costs of a new Fire Hall underlined much of the dialogue between citizens and ASC members and FireWise consultants during the Open Houses. Questions probing issues of site selection and potential size of the Fire Hall often led back to this larger analysis of costs, with participants offering suggestions to the Town for consideration.

- **Consider that many of Creston’s citizens live on limited and/or fixed incomes:** A recurring comment heard during both open houses was “Creston’s tax base is below the average for B.C. – keep that top of mind.”
- **Taxation appears to be related directly to capital projects like the Fire Hall:** A number of participants correlated their annual taxes directly to Creston projects (referencing the Creston & District Community Complex and the Fire Hall): “Taxes have gone up by \$300 – and still no fire hall!”, “Can people in Creston afford the \$20 extra a month in taxation? This still seems too much”, and “What is the cost to the taxpayer – and what are the ongoing costs?”
- **Guard against previous Fire Hall communications missteps:** Some individuals look back to 2017 Town communications before the borrowing Referendum of December 2017, complaining that costs noted at that time seemed exorbitant: “Last time, the idea of \$6.1M scared people – no one knew how we could afford that.”

FireWise consultants and ASC scribes/facilitators provided the following information to direct questions regarding Fire Hall costs:

- The total project cost is \$5.5 Million, less the shares of RDCK and a contribution from the Town’s Reserve Funds.
- The Town’s share of the Fire Hall is approximately \$2.95 Million: this figure includes land, site development and contingency.
- The Town has a signed contract with RDCK for 28% of the total project -- approximately \$1.54 Million.
- The Town will devote \$1 Million from Town’s Reserve Funds (which leaves \$7.9 Million in savings for urgent or emergency events).

- The Town will move forward in its Fire Hall plans without BC Ambulance as at this time there is no signed contract for the project; however, the Town has pledged to “keep the door open” for future discussions with BC Ambulance.
- The Town will tender a contract for building to achieve best possible price.
- The Town will actively apply for building and energy efficiency grants from the Federal and Provincial governments and other sources.

WHAT WE HEARD: DEMAND FOR CERTAINTY

A major theme closely aligned to the issue of costs was that of certainty – that is, participants in the Open Houses continually requested the Town exercise every precaution to ensure it does not overstep citizen expectations or overspend in building the new Fire Hall. At the same time, some citizens emphasized the need for a new Fire Hall to be built with the future in mind.

- **Lock down the maximum price of the Fire Hall:** Much of this discussion focused upon ASC recommendations around the spatial analysis/size of the new Fire Hall, viz., “How did you decide upon 14,000 square feet?”, “Do you really need a large training room? How many times will you have 40 people in that room at once?”, “Could the dorm rooms and kitchens be located in another building?” Closely related to this question was the request for a planner to spend only what is needed: “Who will ensure we spend only what we need?”
- **Provide information on costs per individual home owner:** “What’s the price per household?”
- **Ensure the Fire Hall is big enough:** Some individuals noted that a Fire Hall that is too small may not prove economically feasible in future: “Is the proposed building big enough for future expansion? If there are space constraints, this will impact future growth.”
- **Next Referendum must be communicated with greater clarity and certainty:** “The Referendum timing has got to be right this time,” “What will be the Referendum question?”, “If the Referendum goes ahead, how long before financing is approved?” and “I’d like to see a timeline for the Referendum (process) in the newspaper.”

FireWise consultants and ASC scribes/facilitators responded to these questions with the following information:

- A Borrowing Bylaw is like a getting a pre-approved mortgage or line of credit: you draw only what you need.
- The proposed Fire Hall’s maximum costing is based on the BC Building Altus estimates and comparisons of other fire halls built recently in BC: further, this proposed costing foresees a Fire Hall built at a maximum of \$350 per square foot and an estimated 14,000 square feet.
- The Town will need voter permission to borrow the funds before it invests in further design drawings.
- Town Council has adopted the ASC’s recommendation to develop a Fire Hall Building Advisory Select Committee (FHBASC) of dedicated community volunteers to oversee the process to design, tender and construct a new Fire Hall.
- The tendering process for the new Fire Hall will provide final certainty on cost.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUMMATION OF CONSTRUCTION DISCUSSIONS

Although the ASC did not offer recommendations to either Council or Open House participants on construction options, a significant number of attendees offered the following general suggestions for construction possibilities:

- **Investigate lowest-cost construction materials, such as steel frame buildings.**
- **Use lowest cost location, such as Town-owned land.**
- **Ensure the Fire Hall will meet both current and future needs.**
- **Get confirmation of contracts.**

FireWise consultants and ASC scribes/facilitators responded to these suggestions with the following information:

- The Town of Creston will investigate various construction options, including steel frame buildings, as part of the design drawings. However, the Town is also waiting to ensure it has voter permission to proceed before investing in design drawings this time.
- The Town will continue to investigate the lowest cost options; however, the site must be big enough to hold a Fire Hall that will meet current and future needs. Cedar Street, while owned by the Town, is not big enough.

WHAT WE HEARD: SUMMATION OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PROCESS

Some of the most positive language and suggestions during the Open Houses came from individuals suggesting communications activities and continuing citizen engagement in the Fire Hall process.

- **Communicate in innovative ways around the Fire Hall:** “Having the ASC at the Farmers’ Market is a good idea,” “I like the idea of having the ASC make presentations to social clubs and groups in the community,” “Establishing a store front somewhere downtown would be a good idea – like a public information centre on the Fire Hall,” “You need to develop an FAQ of simple facts around the Fire Hall for the newspaper,” “The ASC should distribute an information flyer in coffee shops, like Black Bear,” “You need to distribute information to the Visitor’s Info Centre, so people considering moving here know what’s planned for a potential fire hall,” and “You need information on paper – in the newspaper, on a billboard, on the bulletin board at Town Hall.”
- **Provide information to people who might not otherwise be engaged:** “It’s important to communicate so you can create educated voters,” “You need to ensure seniors get out to vote – how do we get the message out to them?” and “People here don’t have enough information about the fire hall to debate those with misinformation.”
- **Use caution when choosing engagement strategies:** “Facebook is promoting fear-mongering around this issue,” and “The ASC should not be doing any advertising.”
- **Ensure citizens provide input into the Fire Hall project:** “You need to continue to ensure that public input is part of your process,” “The ASC still needs to balance how it represents all of Creston’s voices,” and “The ASC has not entertained public input until now. Not good enough.”

- ***ASC has for the most part done a good job:*** “This process (as described in the ASC’s Open Houses) is clear to me – the last time, there was not enough time to inform decisions,” “I like the process – let experts do their job,” and “It’s a darn good Committee.”

ASC communications consultants, scribes/facilitators responded to these suggestions with the following information:

- The Town of Creston will consider various communications options during the summer months of 2018 to ensure Creston citizens continue their engagement with the Fire Hall project. At the same time, project organizers will keep spending on communications initiatives to a minimum.
- Pending the results of a proposed Referendum, the Town will appoint a Fire Hall Building Advisory Select Committee of dedicated community volunteers to oversee the process to design, tender and construct a new Fire Hall.

WHAT WE HAVE CONCLUDED: PROCEED WITH RESPECT AND ATTENTION TO COMMUNITY

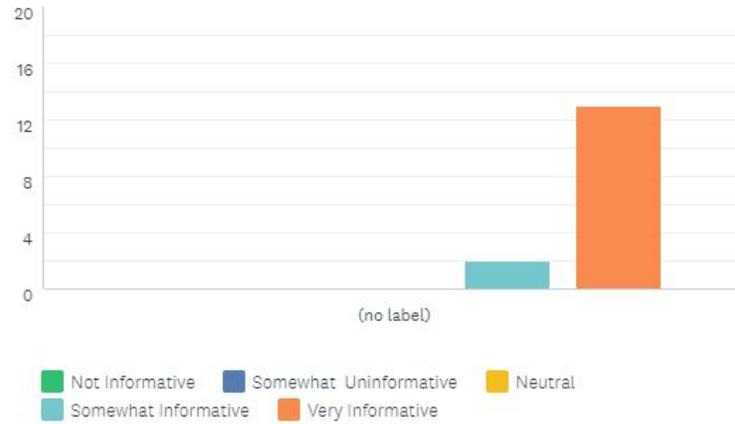
Although the ASC’s two Open Houses revealed valuable and much-needed questions and input from the community, quantitative data collected from the events is insufficient to provide reliable or valid conclusions. At this stage, the ASC cannot assume community consensus regarding the prospective Fire Hall -- nor can it surmise that, while the majority of questions and comments provided by participants at the Open Houses were somewhat more positive than negative, the citizens of Creston are therefore fully supportive of the Committee’s process and recommendations. A comment on one Feedback Form put the situation most succinctly: “The ASC still needs to gain credibility and community acceptance.”

At the same time, the Committee advises that specific suggestions from the community regarding Town priorities and communications strategies in the progression of the Fire Hall project have great merit, and should be incorporated into information strategies from July into mid-October 2018. Suggestions gathered through both Open Houses provide a preliminary roadmap for the ASC over the next four months (given a borrowing Referendum is in play). These suggestions, noted above, will help form the basis of the ASC’s Summer/Fall 2018 Communications Plan.

Appendix 1: Citizen response regarding informative quality of Open House presentation

How informative did you find today's presentation?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 2

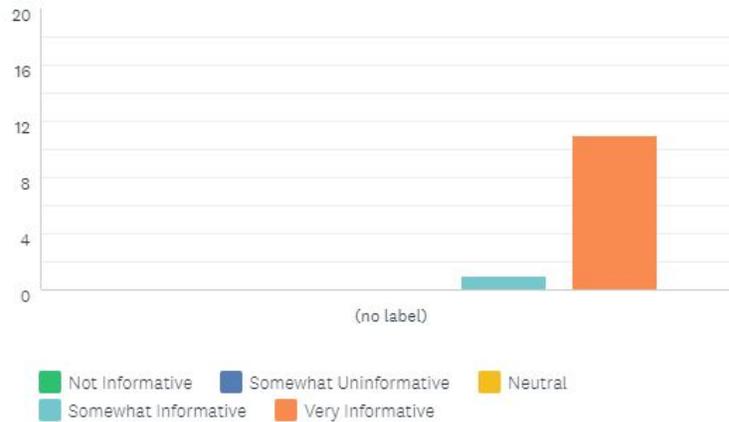


| | NOT INFORMATIVE | SOMEWHAT UNINFORMATIVE | NEUTRAL | SOMEWHAT INFORMATIVE | VERY INFORMATIVE | TOTAL | WEIGHTED AVERAGE |
|------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|
| (no label) | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 13.33% 2 | 86.67% 13 | 15 | 4.87 |

Appendix 2: Citizen response regarding informative quality of Open House small group discussions

How informative did you find today's small group discussions?

Answered: 12 Skipped: 5

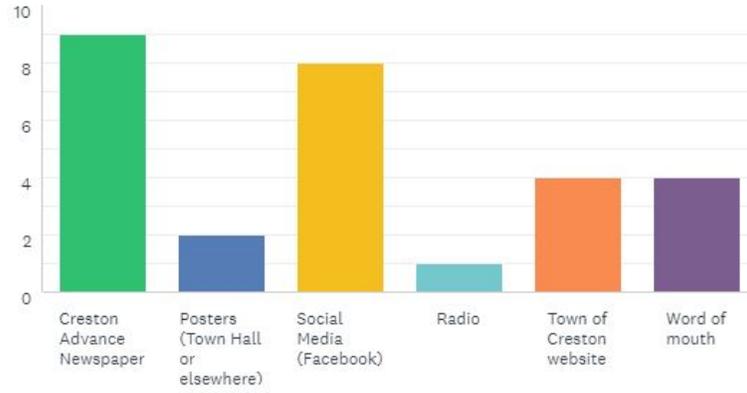


| | NOT INFORMATIVE | SOMEWHAT UNINFORMATIVE | NEUTRAL | SOMEWHAT INFORMATIVE | VERY INFORMATIVE | TOTAL | WEIGHTED AVERAGE |
|------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|
| (no label) | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 0.00% 0 | 8.33% 1 | 91.67% 11 | 12 | 4.92 |

Appendix 3: Citizen response regarding source of information regarding ASC Open Houses

How did you find out about today's ASC open house? (Please check all that apply)

Answered: 16 Skipped: 1



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| ▼ Creston Advance Newspaper | 56.25% 9 |
| ▼ Posters (Town Hall or elsewhere) | 12.50% 2 |
| ▼ Social Media (Facebook) | 50.00% 8 |
| ▼ Radio | 6.25% 1 |
| ▼ Town of Creston website | 25.00% 4 |
| ▼ Word of mouth | 25.00% 4 |
| Total Respondents: 16 | |