

Community Process to Explore and Recommend Emergency Dispatch Service for Lasqueti

Summary Document

Lasqueti Community-Regional Advisory Group

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1 Overview

In June 2014, the Powell River Regional District (PRRD) was notified that Telus' paging service would end on March 31, 2015. Since the Lasqueti emergency dispatch service¹ used the Telus paging service, this required changes. In response to the discontinuation of the Telus paging service, the PRRD decided to add Lasqueti Island (Electoral Area E) to the North Island 9-1-1 emergency dispatch service. Unfortunately, the process by which the PRRD chose to proceed had several major deficiencies, namely:

- Decisions were made unilaterally
- There was no meaningful community consultation
- No alternatives other than 9-1-1 were explored by PRRD
- When concerns were raised, community input was rejected
- The consequences of the decision were not fully and clearly communicated

As a result of these problems, many in the Lasqueti community voiced strong objections, ultimately resulting in the PRRD Board voting to defer a final decision on how to address emergency services dispatch on Lasqueti Island until early 2016. As an interim solution, our Fire Chief has rented Rogers pagers to replace the Telus pagers (representing a change of pager service provider, but not a change to the emergency dispatch service itself).

¹In this document, we use *emergency dispatch service* to refer to the methods, procedures and policies used for alerting and dispatching during a fire or medical emergency on Lasqueti. We use the term *system* to refer to the underlying hardware, protocols and technical details utilized to operationally implement a service.

In order to address the concerns raised, a community consultation process has been set up by a group of concerned residents to explore options and arrive on a recommendation for the best and most appropriate way to provide emergency services dispatch on Lasqueti. At the start of this process, this group consisted of the people involved in a well-supported delegation from Lasqueti to Powell River. As the process proceeds, community support will be ascertained in a transparent manner open to input and participation by all interested members of the community.

The fundamental issue is: what should Lasqueti use for an emergency dispatch service?

As a starting point in this community process, the goal of this document is to cover:

1. A description of the process proposed to address this issue
2. A guide to participants in this process
3. A history of the issue, up to the start of this community process

2 Principles Underlying Process

We propose that this issue may best be resolved using an interest-based approach to reach mutual agreement among the primary stakeholders: the community, the fire department and first responders, and the PRRD. To provide context, this section describes some of the underlying principles to design an inclusive and transparent process to ensure that everyone has opportunity to be heard, and that evaluations are fair, open and objective.

2.1 What is an Interest-Based Process?

In order to address this issue, we need to know what we want: that is, we need to identify our *interests*.

In land-use planning and many other contentious decision-making processes, interest-based rather than position-based approaches have been crucial to reach agreement. Interests include desires and goals —what we want to achieve —and define the basis for assessing alternatives. The province recommends the same kind of approach for establishing and reviewing regional services² because it works to find solutions more acceptable to the parties involved.

Any major change being considered for regional services should follow an interest-based process.

²BC Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development. 2001. Guide to Regional Service Arrangements and Service Reviews. 65pp. Available online: http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/regional_service_arrangement-review_guide.pdf Also: Regional Service Reviews: an Introduction. 12pp. Available online: http://www.cscd.gov.bc.ca/lgd/intergov_relations/library/regional_service_reviews_intro.pdf

Much of the 9-1-1 process followed by the PRRD has been position-oriented (with positions stated by both the regional district as well as by Lasquetians). The following are some positions that have arisen:

- “dispatch must be done with the 9-1-1 service”
- “the house numbering service must be used to locate residences”
- “9-1-1 won’t work here”

An interest-based approach starts by documenting interests of the various parties, such as

- “we need a dispatch system in place before the Telus paging system ends”
- “local dispatchers and responders need improvements for locating residences”
- “local addressing for emergency response should preserve personal privacy”
- “options for emergency dispatch need to be evaluated using agreed-upon criteria”

The key difference between *interests* and *positions* is that interests identify stakeholder goals, while positions identify specific outcomes. One flaw of position-based negotiation is that parties often dig in their heels to unbending positions in a win-lose fashion. Interest-based negotiations are more likely to reach agreement and win-win solutions. The above examples are meant to help focus the discussions about what we want as a community for emergency dispatch. An interest-based approach will allow us to move forward cooperatively, to find broadly-supported solutions in a transparent and inclusive manner.

2.2 Stages of the process: Interests, Options and Assessments

To make an objective, informed comparison requires each option to first be described on its own. This implies a set of stages in the process:

1. Interests are articulated to set goals against which different options can be compared.
2. Options are explored, designed and described in terms of their own features as well as in terms of these interests.
3. Options are compared and assessed in terms of how well they relatively meet or address the set of interests.
4. Further research and discussion is done to improve the ability for leading options to meet interests.
5. A single option is selected as a recommendation based on the comparative assessment.

3 Proposed Process

The process we propose is consistent with the service arrangement and review processes recommended by the province, and referred to in the previous section. Steps include defining the issue, describing the present service, developing and describing options, assessing options, and selecting an option for recommendation (see Figure 1). This section describes the goals and outputs of each step to ensure that the process is transparent, and that the objectives are clear. Each step will be documented. The goal is to ensure that everyone involved feels that their concerns are heard and discussed, and that the final recommendations can meet interests as well as possible, and truly be representative of the desires of the community.

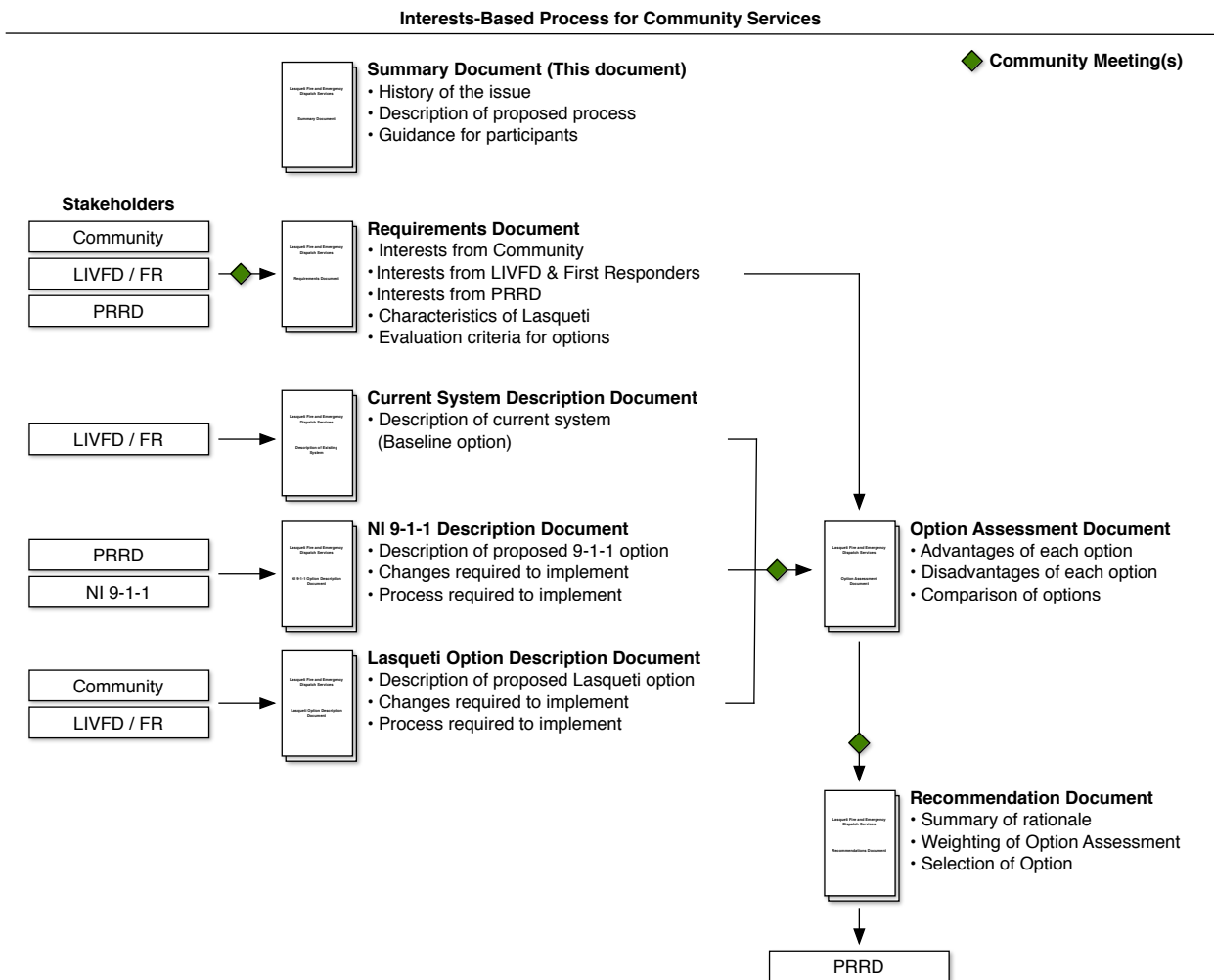


Figure 1: Proposed interest-based process for exploring and recommending emergency dispatch service

3.1 Meetings to Identify Interests

To make an informed recommendation, we need to compare how well options meet the interests of the community, the Fire Department/First Responders, and the regional district. Hence, the first and perhaps most important step in this process is to clearly identify interests. Note that the focus of these meetings is on interests, and not on the details of a particular emergency dispatch system.

Since community interests can only come from our community, a public meeting was held May 3, 2015 to start identifying community interests. Interests were recorded and level of support ascertained and recorded. These are being made available in a separate document so that all interested residents and landowners, including people who were unable to attend the meeting, have an opportunity for input, clarification and further thought.

A meeting with the Fire Department and First Responders was held May 5, 2015, to start identifying Fire Department and First Responder interests. Firefighters and First Responders may have community interests as residents of Lasqueti as well as interests as responders.

Information will be provided to our regional director (who attended the community interests meeting) and PRRD to provide opportunity for the regional district to express their interests.

3.2 Creation of Requirements

The results of the interest-based meetings and discussions will form a set of goals for an emergency dispatch service. In addition, the specific characteristics of Lasqueti will be described (e.g. geography, isolation, infrastructure, etc.) . For each interest, one or more *criteria* will be identified for assessing options, where a criterion is an objective measure or descriptor. For example, an interest such as “calling for emergency help should be easy” can be assessed with criteria such as “method and time required to call for emergencies.”

3.3 Creation of System Descriptions

System descriptions are the main technical step for the proposed process. A description is required for the current emergency dispatch system, the proposed NI 911 system, and option(s) proposed locally. These descriptions should be as clear and complete as reasonably possible.

3.4 Evaluation of Options

Given the system descriptions, the process of comparing and evaluating can proceed. This needs to be done in an open way, since it fundamentally depends on the underlying interests. This will be done, in part, in a future community meeting, as well as a meeting with the Fire Department/First Responders.

3.5 Recommending an Option

Selecting an option for recommendation will depend on degree of support. The interest-based method aims to improve, for every option, the degree to which interests are met. However, a single option must ultimately be selected to set in policy and to implement. This requires an objective and fair method to ascertain support, which may range from a referendum, polls, open meetings, etc. The Local Government Act has some section regarding “elector approval” for services. Selecting an appropriate approach will need to be done cooperatively among all stakeholders.

A Appendix 1: Details on Issue

In 2012, the regional district conducted a Fire Services Review that identified risks and priorities for each Fire Service Area. For Lasqueti, there was no mention of any risk related to dispatch, although the report clearly describes the Telus-based pager dispatch system. Likewise, there was no mention of the need to shift to 911, or risks of continuing with the same system.

From when Telus notified the PRRD in June 2014 until March 2015, the need for a replacement of Telus pagers was the only documented rationale for change by the PRRD. Documented PRRD meeting agendas, minutes and staff reports since June 2014, consistently stated that the reason for the proposed change in emergency dispatch for Lasqueti was because the Telus pager system was to be canceled on March 31, 2015. This was the reason provided to the public in the notice for the public notification meeting Feb 13, 2015.

The public was not notified about the proposed changes until a notification meeting was held on Lasqueti by PRRD on Feb 13, 2015. At this point, the two bylaws were sitting at third reading and already approved by the province.

After the public outcry began, in particular starting at the first community meeting on this issue on Feb 23, 2015, claims of liability risk began to be made by PRRD staff. In March 2015, a legal opinion from the PRRD lawyer was released to the public. This opinion did not support the claims of liability risk. To the contrary, this legal opinion stated “our advice can be that the Board may consider alternative dispatch services.” Further, the legal opinion stated “The writers were unable to identify any statute or regulation that prescribes a level of dispatch service” and “the Court will not interfere with the level of service prescribed by the Board so long as the decision is reasonable”. In essence, the legal opinion supports the process proposed in this document.

B Appendix 2: Timeline of emergency dispatch service issue

This section will be filled in with a summary of the events that transpired, with links to other resources such as online postings and PRRD meeting minutes.

The list below summarizes the steps in the process up to March 2015.

- **June, 2014:** PRRD received official notification that Telus will cancel its paging system at the end of March 2015.
- **Sept 11, 2014:** A PRRD staff report on NI 911 service for Lasqueti was submitted, stating: “Public consultation: Once the implementation costs are fully understood the Regional District will need to engage with the Lasqueti public to explain costs and benefits of inclusion in the NI 911 service.”
- **Sept 17, 2014:** PRRD Board directed staff to explore Lasqueti joining 911 service.
- **Dec 11, 2014:** A PRRD staff report was submitted, explaining: To add Lasqueti to 911 and house numbering services requires an amendment to the establishing bylaws of these two services, which requires consent from Lasqueti (the proposed electoral participating area). Staff spoke with the Ministry of Community, Sports and Cultural Development, who advised that consent may be made on behalf of Lasqueti electors by the regional director and that “Although assent of the electors is not required to make these amendments, the Ministry will want to see that a process of public consultation has taken place.”
- **Dec 17, 2014:** PRRD Board decided to add Lasqueti as a participant in the 911 and house numbering services AND passed first, second and third readings to bylaws 317.1 (911 service amendment) and 350.1 (house numbering service amendment).
- **Jan 22, 2015:** PRRD Board meeting: The third reading of house numbering bylaw 350.1 was rescinded, and an amended version given third reading.
- **Feb 5, 2015:** Bylaws 317.1 and 350.1 approved by the Inspector of Municipalities.
- **Feb 13, 2015:** PRRD information meeting on Lasqueti to notify public about decisions that were made.
- **Feb 23, 2015:** first community-led meeting to discuss issue. Petition introduced (signatures given to Merrick on the 25th).
- **Feb 26, 2015:** PRRD postponed bylaws 317.1 and 350.1 for one month.
- **Mar 2, 2015:** Second community-led meeting to discuss issue. Decision to send delegation.
- **Mar 11, 2015:** Telephone/email poll results sent to Merrick.
- **Mar 19, 2015:** Lasqueti delegation presented before board at Committee of the Whole, requesting board to postpone bylaws 317.1 and 350.1 for one year.
- **Mar 26, 2015:** PRRD postponed bylaws 317.1 and 350.1 for one year.