

An Opportunity to Strengthen Our Communications

Marie-Térèse Little, PhD Metchosin Mayor

On Sunday, June 28, 2026, staff at William Head Institution in Metchosin were unable to account for an inmate at the noon count. West Shore RCMP were notified shortly before one o'clock and responded immediately with patrols, dog teams, marine units, check points, and air support. By early Monday afternoon the man had been found deceased on the shoreline of the Institution's own grounds. Our Fire Chief was present when the RCMP and the Coroner confirmed identification. A man has died, and I extend my condolences to his family and to the staff at William Head Institution (WHI).

For most of a day, however, residents did not know how the matter would end. We have been here before. Martin Payne was killed in his home in 2019 and Metchosin has not forgotten it, nor should we. When residents came forward with hard questions about what they were told and when, those questions were fair ones. Some residents experienced profound re-trauma because of past events. I listened and I shared their stories and concerns.

At the end of July, the West Shore RCMP, the Acting and Deputy Wardens and staff of WHI (Correctional Service Canada), and District CAO, Fire Chief and I met to conduct a comprehensive SWOT analysis of the incident: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. I asked that it be honest rather than comfortable. No one in that room was there to defend a reputation. This was not a catastrophe. It is an opportunity to examine our emergency management, to identify what we did well, and to close the gaps we found.

A great deal held. The police response was rapid and substantial. Our Neighbourhood Emergency Preparedness Program (POD) moved information through the community quickly and has the capacity to reach approximately 2,500 residents. I was briefed early by senior officers and passed on what I knew as I learned it, on Facebook, through the POD, and door to door in the village for the neighbours who are not online. I am grateful to the POD volunteers, our firefighters, District and WHI Staff and the RCMP members who worked tirelessly through that Sunday and into Monday morning.

One system did not perform, and it mattered. One Call Now, our text and email alert platform, was not used. Approximately 1,400 residents who had subscribed precisely so that they would be warned received nothing. The reason is administrative rather than dramatic. Fire Chief Stephanie Dunlop, who established the platform following 2019, departed in mid-February. Chief Dan Verdun assumed the role in March. There was no overlap between them, and in the transition One Call was never incorporated into the Firehall's operational processes. No one was negligent. A gap opened during a staffing transition and remained until the day it mattered. That is precisely what a review is designed to find, and Chief Verdun investigated the day residents raised it.

I commit to you that the following has changed. Access to the mass communication tool- One Call Now-has been restored and more than one member of staff is now trained to operate it, so that it no longer depends upon one person being at a desk. Metchosin Fire has reintroduced Alertable, a free application that delivers public safety information directly to your phone and will operate it alongside One

Call rather than in place of it. Chief Verdun has completed an internal review and has made both operational and communication changes, which the department has published on Facebook and circulated through the POD. William Head Institution has updated its contact lists, so they have multiple and redundant contacts to connect to the correct people, more quickly. Discussions between the RCMP, WHI, and the District will continue with regularly scheduled meetings twice a year. Council has requested a revised communications plan, and it is forthcoming.

This Council is committed to public safety, to openness, and to telling residents what we know when we know it. Metchosin is a community of 5,067 people and they are entitled to be reached promptly and on more than one channel. Please subscribe to Alertable and find out who runs your POD. We will continue to strengthen our communications and to set a resilient course for Metchosin.

<https://www.metchosin.ca/fire-department>