

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
Station 61 – Blaine
9408 Odell Street, Blaine WA 98230
1:00 pm
May 16, 2019
Regular Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Bosman called the regular Whatcom County Fire District #21 Board of Fire Commissioners meeting for May 16, 2019 to order at 1:02 p.m. at Station 61 – 9408 Odell Street, Blaine, WA 98230.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Rich Bosman; Vice-Chairman Bruce Ansell; Commissioners Larry McPhail, Dean Berkeley and John Crawford; Interim Fire Chief Joe Noonchester; Division Chiefs Henry Hollander, Herschel Rostov and Jason Van der Veen; Attorney Seth Wilson.

OATH OF OFFICE

- Chief Noonchester conducted the swearing in of Division Chief / Fire Marshal Herschel Rostov. As a rite of passage, Division Chief / Fire Marshal Henry Hollander participated by pinning on Chief Rostov's badge.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) April 18, 2019
Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
2. Financial Report / Revenue
 - a) Total Revenue –April \$2,806,736.54
 - b) Total Expenditures –May \$608,447.06
3. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$292,231.84
 - b) Non-Direct Payroll: \$17,784.53
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$244,734.81
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Vouchers: \$53,278.15
 - e) Capital Projects Voucher: \$435.73

Chairman Bosman pointed out the revised figures to the payroll voucher. Chief Noonchester explained that there was one mathematical error that has been corrected.

Vice-Chairman Ansell requested information regarding the vacation repayment. Chief Noonchester noted that late last year, according to the new collective bargaining unit language, members were allowed to recap some vacation hours and receive a payout. Due to some accounting errors, overpayment was made to some members who are now in the process of repaying the overages, some in increments throughout 2019. Finance created a new bars number in which to track the monies as they are collected. The current vacation repayment year to date is \$22,454.87.

MOTION: Commissioner McPhail moved to approve the Consent Agenda as corrected. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Ansell and approved 5-0.

NW FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

- **Whatcom County Fire Commissioners Association:** Chairman Bosman attended the recent Whatcom County Fire Commissioners Association meeting in Commissioner Crawford's place.

Chairman Bosman reported that there was discussion regarding the repeater change and merging fire and EMS communication dispatch centers. Minutes will be forwarded to the Board members via email when they become available.

IAFF LOCAL 106 MONTHLY REPORT

- No report.

LEGAL ISSUES

- Seth Wilson reported on some updated legislation awaiting the governor's signature.
 - SB 5418 concerns local government procurement modernization and efficiency. The bill will raise some purchasing and bid limits. It is unclear when this will actually go into effect.
 - Public works - increased from \$20,000 to \$30,000
 - Equipment purchasing – increased from \$10,000 to \$40,000
 - Vendor list – increased from \$50,000 to \$70,000
 - General small works roster – increased from \$300,000 to \$350,000
 - Limited small works roster – increase from \$35,000 to \$50,000
 - SB 5958 clarifies existing law regarding public agencies ability to utilize cooperative purchasing procurement contracts by best value / lowest bid. This will go into effect July 28, 2019.

- SB 5670 allows fire districts to enter into an interlocal agreement with any local jurisdiction to maintain and repair any vehicle or equipment owned and used exclusively by such county, city, town, school district, or other political subdivision of the state of Washington.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- **Interlocal Agreement for Fire and Emergency Services Amendment:** Chairman Bosman reported that the District 4 Board of Fire Commissioners requested additional time (2 weeks) to further review the document. In addition, they would like to schedule a special meeting to further discuss the amendment to the interlocal agreement for fire and emergency services. District 4 Fire Commissioner Harry Andrews agreed to provide several date options for the anticipated meeting. The Board agreed to table the agenda item for this meeting.
- **Master Plan:** Chief Noonchester reported that requests for qualifications have been submitted for review by two companies wishing to assist the district with developing a master plan. Chief Noonchester formed a committee to review the documents who made the collaborative decision to hire Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) versus City Gate.

Chief Noonchester will contact ESCI to further discuss details as well as agreement terms.

The master plan was previously approved and budgeted for completion in 2019.

Commissioner Crawford suggested that the district contact the City of Bellingham for additional master plan information. The City is also currently working on a master plan.

- **Ground Emergency Medical Transportation Program (GEMT) Update:** Chief Noonchester reported that part of the GEMT reimbursement process includes paying administration fees of \$275,802.45 prior to receiving the transportation cost reimbursement of \$1,046,141.79 for 2017. It is anticipated that the district will receive the funds sometime in July.

The district has already received a 2016 partial year reimbursement of \$32,269.88. The money was placed in the general fund.

Vice-Chairman Ansell requested that the Board be notified in a timely manner as the reimbursements are received along with highlighting the line item in the Board packets. Chief Noonchester agreed to make the GEMT reimbursement information clearer in the future.

Now that the program is up and running it will be easier to report transportation costs and predict when the district will receive reimbursements. Chief Noonchester pointed out that there is no guarantee how long the program will remain in existence.

MOTION: Commissioner McPhail moved to approve Expense Voucher 721 in the amount of \$275,802.45 to the State of Washington Health Care Authority for GEMT administrative costs. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Berkeley and approved 5-0.

- **Volunteer Program:** Chief Noonchester reported that there are currently two volunteers who are just finishing EMT school and will be joining the district in the near future. There are currently no new applicants for the resident program at this time although there was recent interest shown by one individual.

In addition, the volunteer program misinformation has been rectified.

- **Levy Lid Lift:** Chief Noonchester reported on his recent dialogue with consultant Liz Loomis. Liz Loomis specializes in elections and her recommendation regarding seeking voter approval for a levy lid lift is to wait until 2020 after the master plan has been completed, allowing ample time to plan and prepare. She has also offered to make a presentation regarding her services at a later date.

Vice-Chairman Ansell noted that the district will receive a comparable amount from the GEMT reimbursement this year as a levy lid lift would.

- **Laurel Station 69 Septic System Replacement:** Chief Hollander reported on the bids for the septic replacement system at Laurel Station 69. Two bids were received and Chief Hollander recommended that the lowest bidder, Brevick Construction be hired to complete the job.

Action is not needed since the Board has already budgeted and approved the amount for 2019.

It is expected that work will begin later this summer when the ground will not be damaged by the weight of the vehicles. The health department is aware of the timeline and given the extensions needed. Other details will still need to be worked out.

Chairman Bosman thanked Chief Hollander for his hard work on this project.

- **Paramedic Consortium:** Chief Van der Veen reported on the recent county paramedic meeting. The district met with other county agencies to discuss how to staff paramedic units in the future within Whatcom County. Agencies included

Bellingham Fire Department, South Whatcom Fire Authority, Lynden Fire Department and District 7. The participants are looking at a consortium type system where any member can work in the system and remain an employee of their home department.

The District is exploring the possibility of sending some members to the upcoming paramedic class scheduled for January 2020. Approximately ten to twelve members may be interested in participating in the class, however, there are only two potential openings.

Many logistical details still need to be discussed and worked out including labor, finances, and how to backfill members as they attend school and then work on county medic units. The county EMS levy money may potentially provide reimbursement, removing some of the financial burden from the district.

It was noted that this may prove to be a good retention program for the district and a way to provide faster ALS to the community in the future.

Chief Van der Veen will continue to gather information and update the Board as necessary.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Firefighter Resignations:** Chief Noonchester reported that newly hired Seth Richmond has resigned from the district to accept a career position where he volunteered, closer to home in Burien.

Mike Ross who has been with the district since 2007 has also resigned to pursue other avenues.

- **Entry Level Firefighter Process:** The district is in the process of hiring entry level firefighters. Following chiefs' interviews on Friday, May 17, a decision will be made regarding how many candidates will receive conditional offers. There are currently five vacancies. All candidates possess Firefighter I, EMT basic credentials as well as a current CPAT.
- **NWFR Academy:** Captain Jorgensen provided an overview of the upcoming skills assessment academy scheduled to begin on June 10. The academy will last three weeks (180 hours) with the goal of taking those newly hired qualified firefighters and enhancing their NWFR fire, EMS, rescue, hazmat and wildland skills to name a few.

The academy will be taught by in-house instructors with the goal of beginning shift work in early July.

- **Fire Code Official Appointment:** Chief Rostov explained that the fire code book refers to the person in charge of the fire marshal's office not as the fire marshal but rather as the fire code official. In addition, all of the references within the code book use the same terminology.

The fire code official has the authority to render interpretation of the fire codes. As per the international fire code, it is required that the fire marshal be appointed into the role of fire code official by the fire appointing authority (the Board), enabling him to run the fire marshal's office and render interpretation of the fire code.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Ansell moved to appoint Division Chief / Fire Marshal Herschel Rostov as the Fire Code Official for the district. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Berkeley and approved 5-0.

- **Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Information:** Fire Chief Matt Morris from Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority provided personal background information, an overview of his organization and information regarding RFAs. At this time there are many districts in the state of Washington exploring RFAs since the cost of doing business is rising three to five percent per year.

RFA Advantages

- Provides multiple revenue sources (fire benefit charge) in addition to the 1% allowed assessed value increase
- Can increase / decrease funding as needed
- More flexibility
- Creates financial stability & resiliency
- Admin cost savings
- Everyone trained to same standard
- Purchasing consortium (*possible*)

RFA Disadvantages

- Voter approved every six years (60% + 1 first vote) (50% + 1 after initial vote)
- Fire benefit charge capped at 60% of operating budget
- Need to be strategic with how money is managed
- Feels like a different tax to the citizens (*possible push back*)

If an RFA is approved, the districts can only collect \$1.00 per \$1,000.00 of assessed valuation (AV) or assessed values and then a benefit charge is applied. Fire Chief Matt Morris reviewed how districts can assign fire benefit charges (fee structure) based on low / high risk commercial and residential buildings.

Fire Chief Matt Morris pointed out that the fire benefit charge is capped at sixty percent of the operating budget, however it can be raised short term if needed. The fire benefit charged is evaluated annually.

The labor groups involved would need to be in support of the RFA for it to move forward.

The Puget Sound governance board consists of representatives (7) of the original organizations including two advisory members who do not vote since technically they are not part of the RFA but do contract for services.

It will behoove the district to research the cost and how a fire benefits charge would be applied to ensure it makes sense for both the district and the community.

The Puget Sound RFA process was led by Berks Consulting who oversaw a work group which included community members. The process took approximately two years before it was placed on the ballot and then another six months to make the transition.

Fire Chief Matt Morris noted that he will be happy to connect anyone interested with other members of his organization with expertise in RFA.

In addition, Attorney Brian Snure provides commissioners with RFA training which both Commissioner Crawford and Vice-Chairman Ansell have attended in the past. Additional training may be available.

POLICIES & PROCEDURE

- None

CORRESPONDENCE

- Northern Light article re: New Fire Marshal
- Whatcom Talk article re: Whatcom County Support Officers
- Bellingham Herald article re: Peace Arch border crash
- Amy Ernlund re: Thank you for service
- Northern Light article re: Peace Arch border crash
- Northern Light article re: Healthy Youth Coalition bike rodeo
- Obituary: Jerry Joubert
- The Responder: District newsletter, May issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **June Board Meeting Attendance Query:** All Commissioners are expected to attend the June 20 meeting.

- **Chief Retirement:** Chief Noonchester recognized and thanked Division Chief Henry Hollander for his twenty six years of service to the district and the community.
- **Retirement Barbeque:** Chief Hollander's retirement barbeque will be held at Odell Station 61 on Thursday, May 30 at 1:00 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Master Plan
- GEMT
- Paramedic Consortium

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Bosman recessed the meeting for an Executive Session, per RCW 42.30.110(g) *“to evaluate the qualifications of an applicant for public employment or to review the performance of a public employee.” And;*

per RCW 42.30.140(4)(a) “Collective bargaining sessions with employee organizations, including contract negotiations, grievance meetings, and discussions relating to the interpretation or application of a labor agreement; or (b) that portion of a meeting during which the governing body is planning or adopting the strategy or position to be taken by the governing body during the course of any collective bargaining, professional negotiations, or grievance or mediation proceedings, or reviewing the proposals made in the negotiations or proceedings while in progress.”

at 2:26 p.m. until 2:50 p.m. Interim Fire Chief Joe Noonchester, Division Chiefs Henry Hollander, Herschel Rostov and Jason Van der Veen, District 4 Commissioner Harry Andrews and Attorney Rich Davis remained for the executive session.

Division Chief Jason Van der Veen was excused from the executive session at 2:40 p.m.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chairman Bosman called the regular meeting back into open session at 2:52 p.m. Action will not be taken as a result of the executive session.

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business Commissioner McPhail moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice- Chairman Ansell and approved 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Recording Secretary

ATTEST:

Rich Bosman, Chairman

Bruce Ansell, Vice-Chairman

Larry McPhail, Commissioner

Dean Berkeley, Commissioner

John Crawford, Commissioner

Chief Noonchester, Board Secretary