

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
via Zoom Meeting
11:00 a.m.
January 20, 2022
Regular Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ansell called the regular Whatcom County Fire District #21 Board of Fire Commissioners meeting for January 20, 2022, to order at 11:06 a.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Bruce Ansell; Vice-Chairman Rich Bosman; Commissioners John Crawford and Kimberly McMurray; Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen; Division Chief Shaun Ward; Local 106NW Representative Scott Brown; Real Estate Agent Mike Kent.

Commissioner Scott Fischer was excused from this meeting.

OATH OF OFFICE

Chairman Ansell conducted the swearing-in of reelected Commissioner John Crawford.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) December 13, 2021 – Joint
 - b) December 16, 2021 – Public Hearing
2. Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
3. Financial Report
 - a) Total Expenditures – January \$937,835.96
4. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$369,609.60
 - b) Payroll Taxes Voucher: \$83,333.89
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$207,275.17
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Vouchers: \$277,059.98
 - e) Capital Projects Apparatus: \$557.32

The district has not yet received the Whatcom County Treasurer's report for December; therefore, the reconciled information is not included in the January Board packet.

Chief Van der Veen provided information regarding the substantial increase in the January monthly bills, which included vehicle and facility insurance renewal, additional bunker gear purchases, membership renewals, and two concurrent IT bills. Chairman Ansell also noted the increase in payroll, which included the yearly vacation and sick leave payouts.

In addition, there has been a significant increase in calls in 2021 compared with 2020. It was speculated that many community members were not contacting emergency services in 2020 due to the fear of contracting Covid 19. In 2021, and due in part to House Bill 1310, the district began responding to additional mental health calls, which, combined with the community asking the district for further assistance, resulted in approximately a twenty percent call increase.

MOTION: Commissioner Crawford moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McMurray and approved 4-0.

NW FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

Chairman Ansell and Commissioner Crawford attended the January 12, 2022, Whatcom County Fire Commissioner's (WCFCA) Meeting.

The meeting focused on drafting a letter to support additional BLS funding, allowing for more EMS surplus funds to be utilized within the county. The extra funds (\$5 million) will help all county fire departments with the increased costs due to levy lid lift failures, recent weather disasters, along with increased responses due to House Bill 1310 and longer hospital turnaround times due to Covid 19.

A motion was approved by the WCFCA to send the letter in conjunction with the Whatcom County Fire Chiefs to the County EMS participants and the Whatcom County Council. It is expected that the letter will be ready for the County's finance meeting scheduled for Wednesday, February 9, 2022.

Chairman Ansell recently met with the Whatcom County Fire Chiefs to assist with crafting the letter.

The current Whatcom County Fire Commissioner Chairman Jim Peebles is expected to retire as soon as a replacement is chosen.

Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen met with a concerned community member Margo Savell, who offered to assist the district after the recent levy lid lift failure. Ms. Savell has vast knowledge and expertise in public messaging in Canada and nationally. After reviewing some district data surrounding the election, she has agreed to provide information regarding how the message resonated with the community and how to best expand public outreach.

A follow-up meeting is expected.

IAFF LOCAL 106 MONTHLY REPORT

Local 106NW Representative Scott Brown thanked personnel for picking up the slack as more firefighters contacted the coronavirus.

Firefighters Scott Brown and Chris Hollander recently completed a lieutenant assessment center and will be promoted to the rank of Lieutenant effective February 1, 2022.

Scott Brown is looking forward to working with the newly hired Training Captain.

LEGAL ISSUES

Nothing to report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Facilities: Chief Ward provided an update of various district facilities.

Baron Telecommunications, who installed the district phone system in 2007, has closed its doors effective December 31, 2021. Chief Ward is investigating options for updating the phone system in the near future.

The recent cold snap destroyed the Birch Bay Station 63 dry system located in the tower. The district is working on attaining a variance with the county.

Both Chief Van der Veen and Ward are in the process of determining whether to have the Birch Bay Station 63 tower repaired or torn down. It is expected to be more cost-effective to repair the tower.

Odell Station 61 had multiple sprinkler heads break, causing some damage. It has since been repaired, and now the district is in the process of filing an insurance claim.

Windemere Real Estate Agent Mike Kent joined the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Chief Van der Veen and Mike Kent met in late 2021 to assess Wiser Lake Station 70. Mike Kent provided a market analysis of the station. The station is 5,100 square feet, including the bays, and has good parking. The building will most likely be purchased as a private or commercial storage facility, which is currently in great demand. He expects that the station could be sold for approximately \$750,000.00. Given the current market, it is an optimal time to sell.

It was noted that an option to lease the station might prove complicated for the fire district.

Chairman Ansell expressed his appreciation to Mike Kent for attending the meeting and providing the requested information.

Mike Kent left the meeting at 11:42 a.m.

Chairman Ansell noted that the district's master plan stated that Wiser Lake Station 71 could only provide limited service to the district and does not fit with the future plan. The district is currently paying insurance, maintenance, and taxes for an unmanned fire

station. Volunteers do not respond from the station and have not for several years. The station is not viable for a career station, nor is the location optimal.

Funds from the sale of the station could be used to purchase two new tenders to compliment the aging fleet that would be utilized district-wide however, Chief Van der Veen pointed out that those funds are “one time only” monies. Chief Van der Veen further noted that the sale of the station would most likely affect the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB) rating. At the same time, the purchase of new tenders and surplus of the aged vehicles may also help the rating.

With current mutual aid agreements surrounding the district, a comparable response to the Wisner Lake area is expected.

Chairman Ansell polled the individual board members who all agreed to begin the process of marketing the Wisner Lake Station 70 fire station.

Chairman Ansell noted that there are no specific statutory requirements for the sale of property however, prior to disposal, the district will need to declare the station surplus by resolution. The district will then use commercially reasonable methods to sell the property. In the past, the district has held a public hearing before determining whether to declare a station surplus. Chief Van der Veen will seek Attorney Richard Davis’s expertise before determining the next steps.

Chairman Ansell noted that the intent is to put Wisner Lake Station 70 on the market by the end of February.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Bosman moved to approve moving forward with the process of declaring the Wisner Lake Station 70 surplus by resolution during the 17, 2022 meeting and contacting the district’s legal counsel to ensure all legal requirements are followed, with the intent to sell the station. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 4-0.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution 2022-01 Surplus Equipment and Donation: The surplus equipment is turnout or bunker gear listed by serial number in exhibit A. Both Commissioner Crawford and Chief Ward will work together to donate the items.

MOTION: Commissioner Bosman moved to approve Resolution 2022-01 Surplus Equipment and Donation. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McMurray and approved 4-0.

Board Officer Elections and Representation at Outside Meetings:

The Board completed their yearly officer elections as per the Fire Commissioner’s Guidelines.

MOTION: Vice Chairman Bosman Commissioner moved to elect current Chairman Ansell as Board Chair. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McMurray and approved 4-0.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Bosman moved to elect Commissioner Crawford as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McMurray and approved 4-0.

The Board and Chief Van der Veen thanked Commissioner Bosman for his many years of service, expertise, and hard work serving as the Vice-Chairman.

The Board discussed representation at outside meetings.

Vice-Chairman Crawford will continue to represent the district at the Whatcom County Fire Commissioner's Meetings.

Commissioner McMurray offered to monitor the Blaine City Council Meetings and attend as necessary. The meetings are held on the second and fourth Mondays. The Deputy Fire Marshal attends most meetings which are currently held via Zoom.

Chairman Ansell will continue to stay in touch with the Birch Bay Chamber members.

Commissioner Bosman offered to monitor the Lynden City Council Meetings and attend as necessary.

The group agreed it was essential to maintain positive relationships with local organizations.

Future Funding: Both Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen plan on meeting with Consultant Karen Reed in early February to discuss the future of the district with regards to levy lid lifts, bonds, mergers, and forming a Regional Fire Authority (RFA) with or without District 4.

Chairman Ansell indicated that the district does not want to compete with either the Birch Bay Library Levy (Feb) or County EMS levy (Aug), which means any funding ballot measure requests would not occur until 2023.

In an effort to save time, it was suggested that initially, one commissioner from District 21 and District 4 attend the meetings and report back to their respective Boards. Community member Margo Savell may be included in the discussions. Chairman Ansell stated that he is committed to working with the smaller group. Chief Van der Veen will connect with Karen Reed to set up dates for the meetings.

Chief Van der Veen noted that a 2023 ballot measure will be a tight timeline based on the district's recent experience. There remains a considerable amount of work moving forward for both districts, separately or combined.

Chairman Ansell reiterated that step one for the district includes the surplus of a fire station to generate funds to purchase much needed equipment. In addition, the district will monitor how other local levy issues progress and continue to contemplate future funding options and how to best craft the message to the community.

District 4 Plan of Action: Chief Van der Veen noted that the District 4 commissioners are in the process of advertising for an interim commissioner. Interviews are expected to occur in the latter part of February during a special meeting via Zoom.

Legally no official RFA discussions can occur until the District 4 Board is whole however, other funding discussions can still take place.

Fire Chief Performance Review: Chairman Ansell noted that the annual fire chief performance evaluation has been completed. The evaluation was reviewed with Chief Van der Veen on Friday, January 7, 2022.

Chairman Ansell thanked Chief Van der Veen for all his hard work and efforts in moving the district forward in the right direction. Some projects have been completed, and there is now additional chief officer assistance in the office. The district has taken over the District 4 administrative services, and a conditional offer has been extended to a potential training captain.

Chief Van der Veen gave credit to the admin and career staff along with the volunteers, noting that during the multiple waves of Covid, members continue to show up, step up and pull together, allowing the district to be effective. He thanked everyone for their support and is looking forward to a better year.

Chief Van der Veen acknowledged all who helped with the recent successful training captain's assessment center. Chairman Ansell echoed Chief Van der Veen's appreciation.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Martha Bennett re: District 13 patch usage
- Northern Light article re: NWFR year in review
- Northern Light article re: NWFR future plans
- Blaine Food Bank re: Food donation
- Whatcom County Fire District 4 Board re: Administrative support functions
- The Responder: District newsletter, January issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **February Board Meeting Attendance Query:** All Commissioners present are expected to attend the February 17 meeting, most likely via Zoom Meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Wiser Lake Station
- District 4 Update
- Future Funding
- Division Chief Contract Review

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Ansell recessed the meeting for an Executive Session, 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 12:19 p.m. for approximately fifteen minutes until 12:34 p.m. Chief Van der Veen remained for the executive session. Action is not expected to be taken.

MEETING RECONVENED

Following technical difficulties, Chairman Ansell called the regular meeting back into open session at 12:40 p.m. Action will not be taken.

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business, Commissioner Bosman moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:41 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Crawford and approved 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Board Secretary

ATTEST:

Bruce Ansell, Chairman

John Crawford, Vice-Chairman

Rich Bosman, Commissioner

Scott Fischer, Commissioner

Kimberly McMurray, Commissioner

Jason Van der Veen, Fire Chief