



NORTH WHATCOM REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

SPECIAL MEETING #6

via Zoom Meeting

10:00 a.m.

January 14, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chairman Scott Fischer called the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Committee Meeting for January 14, 2021, to order at 10:02 a.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ATTENDEES

Committee Members

Vice-Chairman Scott Fisher (D21), Commissioner Dave Hanson (D4), Commissioner Bruce Ansell (D21), Commissioner Harry Andrews (D4), Commissioner Rich Bosman (alternate D21) Commissioner John Crawford (21).

Guests

Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen, Consultant Karen Reed, Division Chief Shaun Ward, Board Secretary Jennie Sand (21), and District Administrator/Board Secretary Kris Parks (D4).

Chairman Mark Chamberlain and Local 106 NW Kenneth Cunningham were unable to attend.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Consultant Karen Reed welcomed the group.

2. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

All committee members have reviewed the agenda.

MOTION: Commissioner Ansell moved to approve the January 14, 2021 agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 5-0.

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Commissioner Ansell moved to approve the November 2, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

4. UPDATES

Board: With Chairman Chamberlain moving out of the District, he will resign from the District 4 Board, effective January 31, 2021. District 4 has posted the position and expects to interview interested candidates the first week of February.

Consultant Karen Reed noted that she was advised by attorney Richard Davis, that as long as District 4 is actively searching for a commissioner replacement, the RFA meetings can continue. Ultimately three Board members from each agency must sit on the RFA Planning Committee.

Commissioner Hanson noted that he will support Vice-Chairman Fischer until a new Chairman is elected most likely during the next meeting.

Website: Chief Van der Veen noted that RFA agendas, approved notes and other information has been added to the RFA tab on the NWFR and District 4 website.

Chief Van der Veen informed the Committee that the monthly NWFR newsletter (Responder) also includes RFA information on a regular basis. The newsletter is sent out electronically and included on various Facebook pages.

Chief Van der Veen noted that during the recent District 4 Board meeting, it was brought to light that a District 4 community member has reached out to either ask questions, voice a concern, or just glean additional information regarding the RFA. Chief Van der Veen intends to meet with the community member in the near future.

Commissioner Hanson noted that the community member is actually the head of a neighborhood Facebook page and may prove beneficial as a community RFA spokesperson in the future.

Consultant Karen Reed noted that ideally, both Districts would have identical in-agency responses to all posted information. Karen Reed recommended that Chief Van der Veen should work on responses for both Districts.

Jennie Sand (NWFR) and Kris Parks (D4) will funnel any questions, concerns or comments directly to Chief Van der Veen for consistency.

Commissioner Ansell stated that at some point utilizing a community advocate from both Districts to reach out to the community will be crucial.

Chief Van der Veen has reached out to a public communications consultant to assist with crafting the message to the public and promoting the RFA. Karen Reed noted that when an RFA is formed, there is a requirement to do public outreach especially in the initial stages to involve the community before final decisions are made and before the actual election.

It was noted that both District RFA website information is identical.

Levy Caps/Library District: Consultant Karen Reed, reiterated there was discussion during the last meeting noting that the Birch Bay Library District is considering running a potential levy of not more than \$.10 in the February 2021 election. Since a fire district is a junior taxing district, the library district could take away a portion of the district's levy opportunity. Karen Reed has followed up with the assessor and included a response from attorney Richard Davis regarding how pro-rationing works.

At this time, other levy rates are low enough that the RFA's levy should be well protected even if an additional \$.10 is levied by the library district.

Work Plan Review: Consultant Karen Reed noted that the RFA work plan was adopted in September 2020. The group reviewed the status of the action items and timelines. There is forward movement in most areas, however, the formation of the financial model is lacking, which will be crucial to determining the levy. Chief Vander Veen will have an update during the next meeting.

Since the deadline for the ballot measure is May 14, Karen Reed noted that work needs to be completed in April in order to get both Board's approval in May.

It was confirmed that the group has previously agreed that the name of the RFA will be "North Whatcom Regional Fire Authority".

5. DISCUSSION: GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Draft RFA Plan Language: Consultant Karen Reed reviewed the governance language that was approved by the Boards and will become part of the RFA plan.

Commissioner Ansell requested information regarding the Board election schedule. Karen Reed provided information regarding the difference between the RFA committee commissioners, Board commissioners and the ultimate RFA Board.

The NWFR commissioners and District 4 commissioners up for election in 2021 if reelected, will all be on the RFA interim Board. The initial/interim RFA governing board shall include all seated commissioners from both Districts as of certification of the November 2021 election, for a maximum of eight members. The terms for this initial group will expire on December 31, 2024. The number of members on the RFA Board may decrease through the end of 2024 as vacancies or resignations occur. Someone may resign from the RFA Board and still remain a District Commissioner in this interim period.

After January 2024, the governing board shall consist of five members elected at-large in the RFA. Before the November 2023 election, the plan is to ask voters to dissolve both Districts; dissolution would be effective anytime after the November 2021 election.

Karen Reed will contact attorney Richard Davis to clarify that the commissioner "drop off" language begins following the November 21 election and that resignation

either the NWFR or District 4 Board. Commissioner Ansell suggested clarifying the language in the RFA plan.

Karen Reed noted that the number of RFA Board members will most likely be a topic of discussion during the public outreach.

6. STATUS REPORT AND DISCUSSION: BASELINE AND BASELINE PLUS SCENARIOS

Chief Van der Veen, Chairman Chamberlain, Commissioners Ansell and McMurray met to discuss the current level of service and where the RFA hopes to go in the future. Chief Van der Veen provided a summary of the baseline and baseline plus organizational charts. Baseline would be what the RFA will look like on day one. It includes all members of both Districts.

Baseline plus (over next seven years) includes the following additions:

- Support for administration, fire marshal division, and training division
- Division Chief of Operations
- Battalion Chiefs
- Peak Transport Unit (PTU) (1 per shift) to alleviate station out of service times
 - Staffed with two firefighters to transport patients
 - Utilized during peak response times (12 hours per day)
 - Recommended by ESCI master plan

Chief Van der Veen pointed out that the upgrades will benefit both internal and external customers.

Commissioner Ansell shared that the baseline plus organizational chart is very conservative, and the minimum needed to be effective. It does not include additional line personnel for dedicated truck companies or rescue companies, which would be beneficial for the area given recent events.

Consultant Karen Reed requested clarification regarding if the baseline plus represents an increase in service with the addition of the battalion chiefs. Commissioner Ansell noted that his personal opinion is that the addition of battalion chiefs is a safety and efficiency issue. The public will receive a better product and internally, the agency will be safer and a more effective workplace (improved command structure, performance evaluations, discipline, accountability, and maintenance). Battalion chiefs will be able to manage the crews at all four stations more effectively and on a regular basis, allowing the chiefs to focus on administration.

Karen Reed noted key community talking points to consider:

- Population growing approximately one percent per year
- Calls fluctuate wildly year to year
- Service level will remain the same or better moving forward

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- If better, explain how (response times, effectiveness, scope)
- Most cost-effective way to keep pace with growth and service and population is by adding the PTU which will improve level of service and keep response times at a status quo or possibly improve
- Internal safety and accountability improvements
- Utilize stations names (Blaine, Birch Bay, Semiahmoo, Laurel, Britton Loop)

Commissioner Ansell and Chief Van der Veen explained that once stations begin covering other stations on transports, it is difficult for the district to recover in a timely manner (long response times). It is not fair to rely so heavily on Ferndale or Lynden Fire Districts to routinely assist with the District's calls. This is the rationale for the PTU.

Karen Reed noted that the preferred seven-year baseline proposal is arguably only a slight increase in service levels for the community, but it should mean the District is taking the steps to avoid a degradation in services, as the population and need for services continue to grow.

Karen Reed discussed the next steps for the subcommittee:

- Seven-year model baseline
- More work to be done on identifying what would be in a baseline plus scenario, including staffing, apparatus replacement, facilities (revenue or upgrades)
- Provide information to Bill Cushman

Chief Van der Veen noted that Chairman Chamberlain's position will need to be replaced by a District 4 commissioner on the subcommittee. Commissioner Hanson offered to take the open position on the subcommittee. A subcommittee report and recommendation is expected at the next meeting and will include what the RFA needs to have to versus what is nice to have in the baseline scenario.

RECESS

The group took a five-minute break at 11:00 am.

7. RFA PLAN ISSUES

Consultant Karen Reed reviewed Sections 1 through 5 of the Draft Regional Fire Authority Plan. Ultimately, the entire plan will need to be approved by both Boards (early May) in order to be able to place the RFA measure on the ballot.

Unless otherwise provided, each section of the Plan can be amended by a majority vote of the RFA Board. The exception is some aspects of the financing plan.

The title will be updated to the agreed upon name of North Whatcom Regional Fire Authority.

Section 1 Background and needs statement: Provides voters with pertinent information prior to the election.

Section 2 Definitions: Explanations and interpretations regarding certain terms and phrases

Section 3 Formation Authority: Confirms the statutory authority for the formation of an RFA and all the steps to approve this plan. The two Districts will remain as they are until dissolved expeditiously following the creation of the RFA (2021 election). Once the Districts RFA is created, all service responsibility will be transferred to the RFA; the only job of the Districts will be to conduct periodic commissioner meetings and ensure calling of the November 2021 election. District operations in this period must be funded by the RFA, since the Districts will have no independent source of funding.

In November 2023, the ballot will include electing five at-large commissioners to the RFA Board. The RFA will be the one to request that election.

Section 4 Jurisdictional boundaries on date of formation and changes thereafter: Discusses what happens if another agency tries to annex an RFA area and mergers.

Section 5 Governance: Discusses how the interim governing board is comprised and what it will look like from and after January 2024.

Karen Reed noted that further review will include funding and finance, organizational structure and operations and services.

Appendices, yet to be developed include the jurisdictional boundary map, organization structure, real property, and personal property.

Commissioner Ansell noted that a lot of the work needed to complete the appendixes has already been done by the Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) who created the master plan.

8. PREPARING FOR COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE DISCUSSION

The work plan includes an online open house to be held mid to late February. This initial meeting will allow the community to be educated about the rationale for the RFA, ask questions and voice any concerns.

Consultant Karen Reed had recommended at a previous meeting to hire a public communications consultant to ensure what is being done will be understandable and well received by the community.

At this time, Chief Van der Veen has had preliminary communications with a consultant via email. A phone conversation has been scheduled to obtain additional information and plan how to move forward.

The Board will need to agree on what the presentation will look like, and how to best to be prepared to answer the most likely questions.

The Board agreed to move forward with the online open house and that Chief Van der Veen will be the main spokesperson and the face for both Districts.

Recommendations regarding content and a date for the online open house is expected at the next meeting.

There will be two consultants: one for public professional communications for initial outreach and then another for public education associated with the ballot measure.

9. NEXT AGENDA(S)

- Meeting #7: Thursday, February 4th @ 10:00 am.
- Meeting #8: Friday, February 19th @ 10:00 a.m.
- Open house - last week of February from 5:00 p.m.-7:00 pm. (to be confirmed)
- Outreach materials
- Financial plan assumptions
- Game plan for open house discussions

10. CLOSING COMMENTS

Consultant Karen Reed thanked everyone for their participation.

Commissioner Hanson appreciates all the time and hard work by everyone.

Commissioner Ansell is excited for District 4 to select a new board member and is looking forward to the financial planning meeting. Chief Van der Veen will set up the meeting with the subcommittee members.

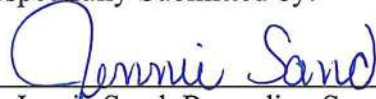
Chief Van der Veen thanked everyone for attending and is looking forward to 2021 and the finalization of the RFA.

Vice-Chairman Fischer stated that the Board continues to move one step closer to their RFA goal.

11. ADJOURN

MOTION: There being no further business Commissioner Ansell moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:24 a.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennie Sand, Recording Secretary

ATTEST:



Scott Fischer, Vice-Chairman