



NORTH WHATCOM REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY COMMITTEE



SPECIAL MEETING

via Zoom Meeting
3:00 p.m.
October 7, 2020

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Chamberlain called the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Committee Meeting for October 7, 2020, to order at 3:07 p.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ATTENDEES

Committee Members

Chairman Mark Chamberlain (D4), Vice-Chairman Scott Fisher (D21), Commissioner Bruce Ansell (D21), Commissioner John Crawford (D21), Commissioner Rich Bosman (alternate D21) and Commissioner Harry Andrews (D4).

Commissioner Dave Hanson (D4) was unable to attend.

Guests

Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen, Consultant Karen Reed, Board Secretary Jennie Sand (21), Local 106NW Kenneth Cunningham and District Administrator/Board Secretary Kris Parks (D4).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Consultant Karen Reed provided an overview of the agenda. She anticipates that the Committee will complete the foundational process and review the draft work plan during this meeting. The only action item will be to approve the committee charter.

2. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to approve the September 24, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

3. FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

EMS Levy: Consultant Karen Reed provided detailed EMS levy information including material provided by both NWFR and District 4.

Consultant Karen Reed provided some clarification regarding how the two EMS levies (County and District 4) may interact under the current interlocal agreement.

Karen reviewed District 4's EMS levy summary. The attorneys from both districts also reviewed the presented information.

Karen Reed noted that District 4 can decide at any time, not to continue to collect on their EMS levy.

4. COMMITTEE CHARTER

Following the last meeting, both Consultant Karen Reed and Chief Van der Veen worked together to update the draft as requested.

The updated charter includes the project goals, membership, process, public input and communication, Chair and Vice-Chair, resignation and replacement of members, meetings process, decision making, staff support, funding, approval and amendment of the Charter.

It was noted that a motion was passed during the last meeting held on Thursday, September 24, 2020, to split any costs associated with the RFA equally (50-50) between the districts.

Commissioner Ansell requested added language to the Charter (*L. Funding*), noting that the Planning Committee recommended that all project costs be divided equally between the districts.

It was also noted that any action items taken by the Planning Committee will be reviewed during each districts' Board meetings. Any questions/clarifications/concerns can be discussed during the upcoming Planning Committee meeting.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to approve the Committee Charter as amended. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

Karen will make the edits to the Charter as adopted and will share an updated document with the group at the next meeting.

5. PROJECT STAFFING AND COSTS UPDATE

Chief Van der Veen has spoken with financial analyst Bill Cushman, who has agreed to work with the Planning Committee. Chief Van der Veen is in the process of forwarding all pertinent documents (master plan, Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI)) to Bill Cushman to utilize in his financial model.

It was noted that Bill Cushman has already begun preliminary work, gathering past property tax records and assessed values. This valuable information will be utilized to make informed assumptions regarding the districts' future property tax growth rate.

Commissioner Ansell questioned whether it would be prudent to form a subcommittee to review the master plan and ESCI documents as they pertain to stations, equipment and staffing for future planning. These meetings would take place in addition to the scheduled Planning Committee meetings.

It was proposed to form a subcommittee consisting of the fire chief, commissioners from each district and a labor representative. Commissioner Ansell noted that even though he sees both districts as one, it is important to have representation to reflect the wants and needs of both districts, to improve service levels both now and in the future.

Participants will include Chief Van der Veen, Chairman Chamberlain (D4), Commissioner Ansell (D21), possibly Commissioner McMurray (D21) and labor representative Kenneth Cunningham.

MOTION: Commissioner Ansell moved to direct Chief Van der Veen to convene a subcommittee to develop two scenarios on staffing, apparatus and station planning, which will be included in the financial model. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

6. SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON UPDATE

Consultant Karen Reed noted although the Whatcom County Assessor's Office has forwarded the requested information needed to complete the side by side comparison, the information has both districts' information combined. Chief Van der Veen is working through the massive document and expects to have some of the information available during the next meeting.

Karen stated that once demystified, the pertinent data can be utilized when figuring out the impact of the proposed future levy rates on the average household in the districts.

7. COMMITTEE WORK PLAN

Consultant Karen Reed reviewed the draft Committee Work Plan. The timeline is based on the Committee having approximately fifteen meetings between now and the end of April 2021. Additional meetings will be scheduled if/when the RFA is passed. It was noted that the Plan can be adjusted as needed.

Karen noted that the idea is to drive forward on multiple tracks including finance, governance, straightforward items that the Committee is working on now and the organizational chart. It was noted that both the financial and organizational charts are complicated and will take the most time to complete.

The organizational chart will include baseline staffing and filling gaps to increase service levels.

Karen noted that the work plan incorporates two online public input opportunities; mid-February and late March. The full plan will be reviewed and discussed by each Board in April, with approval necessary by the end of April. A resolution must be passed by both Boards by the end of April, or the beginning of May 2021 allowing the RFA to be placed on the August 2021 ballot.

Karen reiterated that the hardest part will be completing the financial model and deciding on a initial levy rate.

Commissioner Ansell reviewed RCW 52.26.030.

Planning committee—Formation—Powers.

“(2) Each governing body of the fire protection jurisdictions participating in planning under this chapter shall appoint three elected officials to the authority planning committee. Members of the planning committee may receive compensation of seventy dollars per day, or portion thereof, not to exceed seven hundred dollars per year, for attendance at planning committee meetings and for performance of other services in behalf of the authority, and may be reimbursed for travel and incidental expenses at the discretion of their respective governing body.”

Each Committee member agreed to not request compensation for any meetings over the allocated amount per RCW 52.26.030.

Karen noted that two uses of the word “Council” will be removed from the work plan document and the deadline to submit the measure to County Elections Office will be corrected to say August 2021, not 2020.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to approve the proposed Committee Work Plan as corrected and with the understanding that the Plan will continue to evolve. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

8. DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN REVIEW

Consultant Karen Reed reviewed the proposed Communications Plan including key messages, audiences, strategy and tactics.

It is expected that the Communications Plan will be updated as decisions are made to keep the staff and public informed. Other ways to keep information available include press releases, online forums, mailers, social media, articles in the media, newsletters, and district websites.

Karen suggested that once the RFA Plan has been passed by both Boards, an election communications strategy consultant be utilized to assist with disseminating information in a timely manner.

Commissioner Crawford suggested contacting retired Fire Chief Ralston, who was part of an RFA process, to inquire who was utilized for communications to the public. Chief Van der Veen will investigate.

Karen provided Chief Van der Veen with three communications consultant names for consideration.

In addition, Chief Van der Veen suggested that the Committee check out how Graham Fire and Rescue keeps their public educated and informed regarding benefit charges. <https://grahamfire.org/benefit-charge/>. Karen noted that Graham Fire and Rescue has in-house communication staff who spend a tremendous amount of time educating the public via social media.

Commissioner Ansell suggested looking in-house for talent who could assist a communications consultant.

Consultant Karen Reed and Chief Van der Veen expect to have further discussion regarding utilizing in-house talent during upcoming meetings.

MOTION: Commissioner Ansell moved to approve the Communication Plan as written. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Fischer and approved 5-0.

RFA Website Information

There was a discussion regarding what RFA information both districts' websites will include. The Committee reviewed some proposed language for the website.

Commissioner Ansell suggested having each Board review the Communications Plan and website information during their upcoming scheduled meetings on Thursday, October 15 (D21) and Wednesday, October 21 (D4) prior to moving forward.

Consultant Karen Reed agreed and further stated that the Planning Committee could update the Board on the expenditure plan and seek confirmation to move forward.

Once approved, it was agreed that Chief Van der Veen will begin crafting an RFA article for the upcoming newsletter and website to begin educating the public and providing an avenue for questions and comments.

Commissioner Crawford suggested providing information on the website regarding fire benefit charges. Commissioner Andrews expressed his concern regarding providing too much information too quickly. Consultant Karen Reed agreed to investigate useful benefit charge information for the public and further commented that at this time there is no way of knowing the financial impacts of forming an RFA.

9. DRAFT STATEMENT OF SHARED VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Consultant Karen Reed presented the draft Statement of Shared Values and Principles for discussion, revisions and suggestions.

Items that may be omitted or need further clarification include:

#5 Participatory Governance: may need to be updated once more information is gathered.

H. In contracting to providing services to other agencies, we are mindful of our own costs of service: communities within the RFA boundaries should not incur additional costs as a result of these external service contracts. (i.e. fire marshal contract, auto aid agreements)

Chief Van der Veen suggested allowing the group to digest the information and to continue discussions during the next meeting before a decision is made.

Karen noted that this document will formally recognize how the Planning Committee defines a healthy RFA.

10. FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETING DATES

There was a discussion regarding upcoming meeting dates. Chief Van der Veen will send out a Doodle poll to determine upcoming meetings.

It is expected that meetings will be scheduled every two weeks, most likely from 3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Next meeting October 22, 2020

11. NEXT AGENDA(S)

- a. Input text for website
- b. Statement Values and Principles
- c. Governance
- d. Facilities, apparatus, station staffing baseline discussions
- e. Bill Cushman may discuss his financial model (*possible*)

12. CLOSING COMMENTS

The Committee recognized Consultant Karen Reed for her hard work.

13. ADJOURN

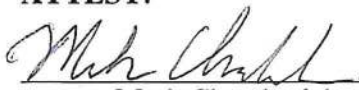
MOTION: There being no further business Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:24 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennie Sand, Recording Secretary

ATTEST:



Mark Chamberlain, Chairman