



NORTH WHATCOM REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY COMMITTEE



SPECIAL MEETING #5

via Zoom Meeting
10:00 a.m.
November 2, 2020

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Mark Chamberlain called the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Committee Meeting for November 2, 2020, to order at 10:08 a.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ATTENDEES

Committee Members

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

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 welcomed the group.

2. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

All committee members have reviewed the agenda. Consultant Karen Reed noted that she included the Values and Principles Statement that was approved during the last meeting so that it can be shared with each Board.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to approve the November 2, 2020 agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 6-0.

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

MOTION: Commissioner Andrews moved to approve the October 22, 2020 minutes. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Fischer and approved 6-0.

4. UPDATES:

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. A counter has also been added to track the number of RFA website visitors.

Chief Van der Veen informed the Committee that the monthly NWFR newsletter (Responder) will also include RFA information on a regular basis.

Chief Van der Veen provided information regarding a very involved community member Kathy Berg, who requested that the Committee consider hosting the meetings via a webinar platform, to allow community members to better able join the meetings. Kathy would like to have more interactive discussions with the Committee during meetings. In addition, this type of platform may be required to host public hearings and offer public input.

Chief Van der Veen stated that Kathy is excited about the RFA and streamlining the delivery of services.

Consultant Karen Reed noted that there will further discussion regarding hosting the meetings via a webinar platform during the next meeting.

Any comments, concerns, or questions received via the RFA email will be forwarded to the RFA Planning Committee.

Commissioner Ansell alerted the Committee 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. It is unclear if an RFA is considered a junior taxing district, what the tax levy will be, and if a library tax would impact the RFA. Karen agreed to investigate and report back to the Committee.

Commissioner Ansell will keep in touch with his library contact and disseminate any information.

Chief Van der Veen noted that after contacting the accessor's office, he discovered that neither District has any banked capacity from previous years to be able to collect in the future. Both Districts have always taken the available yearly one percent, in addition to their levy rates. Any additional funds needed by either District prior to an RFA would need to gain approval through an election process (levy lid lift). Chief Van der Veen will continue his exploration into banked capacity.

5. PRELIMINARY GOVERNANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Consultant Karen Reed noted that there had been good discussion during the October 22, 2020 meeting on governance. The memo included will assist in reviewing the Committee's preferences and work through any details.

The attorneys from both Districts also had a chance to review the memo. District 4 Attorney Joe Quinn sent a memo to the District 4 Board reviewing a reason a District may not want to be dissolved following an RFA formation. If one of the Districts has a large amount of banked capacity, and there was an economic collapse after the RFA was formed, the intact District could choose to impose the levies of the fire district instead of

the RFA levy, in order to capture the higher banked capacity levy rate. Since neither Districts have any banked capacity, there is no reason to not dissolve both districts.

Karen further noted if the Districts remain in place, elections for respective boards, annual filings, and separate board meetings would need to continue, even if no business is conducted.

There was discussion regarding the current board member election schedule. Both interim Commissioners from both districts will need to run in the November 2021 election if they desire to continue as Commissioners. Four seats will be up for election in 2023.

The Planning Committee continued their discussion regarding the initial RFA Board. Karen reviewed the Committee's preference from the last meeting which included having all eight sitting commissioners on the initial board however no commissioner vacancies would be replaced on the RFA Board in the event of resignations from either District Boards. Karen reiterated that as long as the Districts remain intact, if a Board member resigns, by law, the vacancy on the District Board must be filled within ninety days.

The group agreed to start with a RFA board of eight and eventually move to a not less than five-member at large RFA Board through vacancies on the District Board, provided that the initial RFA Board must always at least one member from each District until December 31, 2023.

Timing

This structure will work through December 31, 2023. At that point, if the Districts are not dissolved, the Board structure would not comply with one-person, one-vote, and would need to be changed.

The earliest the Districts can be put on the ballot to dissolve is February or April 2023, prior to the RFA election, with the effective date of December 31, 2023. If the Districts are dissolved by the voters in 2022 or early 2023, there will not be a need to run a District 2023 Board election. The Committee agreed to dissolve the Districts in February 2023.

If only one District is dissolved during the election process, an RFA can still proceed however the intact District would still need to hold meetings and elections, which would be inefficient.

It was agreed to add language to the Plan stating the intent for both Districts to dissolve prior to the RFA formation. It will also be vital to educate the voters along the way regarding the RFA process.

There was additional discussion regarding having districted or at large positions. Karen questioned if the voters would think it is important to have Board representation from their area. The Committee agreed that if the RFA message presented to the voters is simple, clear, and transparent, where the Board members reside should not be an issue.

Karen noted that there is flexibility to change the Plan at a later date.

Staggering

There was discussion regarding how to stagger the five-member at large RFA Board member positions. Karen presented various options for staggering a five-member RFA Board over a six-year cycle.

- 4-1-0
- 2-3-0
- 2-2-1

There was consensus to spread out the terms 2-2-1 or 2-1-2 to minimize the impact going forward.

In addition, Karen noted that the order of each basic option can be altered. The initially elected Commissioners could also pick their terms (2, 4, or 6 years) so long as there is some variation in term length between the five Commissioners.

The staggering decisions can be decided prior to or after elections although it would be more transparent and simple to include the terms on the ballot. There was consensus to have the terms included on the ballot allowing candidates to choose which position (1-5) they want to be elected.

Karen pointed out that in the first RFA Board election, all five positions will need to be elected. The only way around that is to keep the Districts in place until longer. The Committee stated at this time there is no apprehension regarding dissolving the Districts prior to the RFA election.

In addition, Karen noted that if the Districts wished to have a more gradual transition, they could leave the Districts in place and have only two RFA Board seats elected in November 2023 and appoint the other three seats from the District Boards. The three remaining RFA Board seats would be elected in 2025. This would require maintaining the two Districts and run their elections through 2025.

Karen recommended revisiting any potential concerns in future meetings if needed.

Commissioner Ansell stated that leaving the Districts intact goes against the reasoning for forming an RFA. He recommends dissolving the Districts and moving on with the process for efficiency.

Future Annexations

There was discussion regarding other agencies joining the RFA in the future and how that may impact the Board. Karen suggested adding language to the Plan to include the process for agencies to join the RFA at a later date. Karen reiterated that the Plan can be changed by a majority of the Board at any time.

Commissioner Andrews recommended keeping the Plan as simple as possible to not confuse the voters. There was consensus among the Committee.

Commissioner Hanson stated that he did not think it will be a high profile item in the Plan.

Although the Plan can be changed, Commissioner Ansell suggested declaring a RFA Board maximum of seven, specifically if a larger agency joins the RFA. Raising the number of Board members will not require a vote of the public, only a majority vote of the RFA Board.

Commissioner Bosman noted that a large Board is not efficient and goes against the initial reasoning to form an RFA.

There will be discussions regarding Board members with any agency who may want to join the RFA in the future. The agency will have a non-voting member on the RFA Board who can run for election as other commissioner terms end.

Karen noted that she will write up the Committee recommendations to take back to each District for review. The recommendation can also be presented to the public at an upcoming public meeting (to be decided).

6. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Chief Van der Veen reviewed the calls for service data for the years 2014-2019. There was a significant increase in emergency medical service (EMS) calls in 2019 due to an auto aid agreement with the Bellingham Fire Department as well as a change in how those calls were recorded.

Chief Van der Veen presented the expected population growth forecast for Whatcom County through 2030. It was noted that there may be an additional increase as a result of people moving out of the urban areas due to COVID concerns. A moratorium on well drillings may limit some of those relocations, which may mean tighter densities in unincorporated areas.

The Committee reviewed the current authorized organizational chart for NWFR. Chief Van der Veen noted that not all spots are presently filled. Since the chart represents everyone who works within the Districts currently, it is anticipated that it will be utilized for the initial RFA.

Chief Van der Veen noted that one position has been changed from a division chief to assistant chief. Kris Parks would be reallocated to training as the training/operations assistant, which would include running the training area at Britton Loop Station 12.

Commissioner Hanson stated that it is important to note that the fire chief chooses the structure of his department.

Commissioner Ansell noted that it will be important to see what the Districts currently expend in personnel and other costs, and what the levy can support prior to determining the number of positions.

Consultant Karen Reed noted that it will be beneficial to have discussions to get a sense of what the staffing and other priorities are in terms of service levels, for building out the “baseline plus” scenario. She asked whether service levels could be maintained with current staffing for seven years.

Chief Van der Veen stated that more staffing will be needed over the next seven years due to the anticipated growth.

Karen noted that voters need to be made aware of what is needed to maintain service levels now and what it will take to maintain/improve them in the future.

The Committee will need to have further discussion regarding future positions and priorities. Financial Bill Cushman will then take that information and add it to his model. Chief Van der Veen continues to send Bill pertinent District information.

The subcommittee has not yet been able to meet to review the department data.

7. FUTURE COMMITTEE MEETING DATES

With the upcoming holidays, the Committee agreed to not have any additional meetings in November and instead have the next meeting the first week in December. Doodle polls will determine upcoming meetings.

8. NEXT AGENDA(S)

- Basis pieces of RFA Plan

9. CLOSING COMMENTS

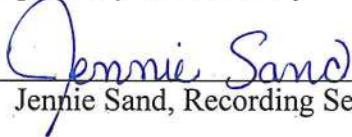
Commissioner Ansell was pleased with the governance discussion and the decisions to stagger the Commissioner's terms and statement of intent to dissolve the Districts.

Chairman Chamberlain echoed Commissioner Ansell’s comments with regards to governance. He also agreed with Commissioner Andrews's comment to keep the Plan simple and transparent.

10. ADJOURN

MOTION: There being no further business Vice-Chairman Fischer moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:29 a.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Andrews and approved 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:



Jennie Sand, Recording Secretary

ATTEST:



Mark Chamberlain, Chairman