

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
via Zoom Meeting
1:00 pm
January 21, 2021
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 21, 2021, to order at 1:04 p.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Bruce Ansell; Commissioners Scott Fischer and John Crawford; Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen; Division Chief Shaun Ward; Attorney Richard Davis.

Commissioner McMurray and Vice-Chairman Bosman were both excused from this meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

NEW BUSINESS

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) December 10, 2020 – Budget Work Session
 - b) December 17, 2020 – Public Hearing
2. Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
3. Financial Report
 - a) Total Expenditures – January \$861,332.64
4. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$379,080.82
 - b) Payroll Taxes Voucher: \$84,764.81
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$222,507.22
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Vouchers: \$174,979.79

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.

MOTION: Commissioner Fischer moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 3-0.

NW FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

As a Whatcom County Fire Commissioners representative, Commissioner Crawford has been part of discussions with the City of Bellingham regarding merging law enforcement and emergency medical communication centers. It was noted that eleven fire districts and two cities officials are not in favor of joining the centers.

Commissioner Crawford provided a history of the Dispatch center that originally separated in 1999. He further noted that joining the two entities has no financial benefit to either agency.

More discussion is expected during the upcoming 9-11 Committee Meeting. Commissioner Crawford will keep the Board up to date.

IAFF LOCAL 106 MONTHLY REPORT

None

LEGAL ISSUES

Attorney Richard Davis reviewed the latest open public meetings proclamation update and extension which has no definite end date.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Regional Fire Authority (RFA): Chairman Ansell stated that the Committee is expecting the financial subcommittee information before the upcoming RFA meeting scheduled for Thursday, February 4 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Chief Van der Veen noted that the communications piece is also beginning to take shape. He plans on meeting with Consultants Karen Reed and Heather Logan to discuss engaging the public in an online open house format. The district has had no inquiries from the community however, District 4 has had one inquiry regarding taxes.

Kathy Berg remains the most engaged community member in the District 21 area.

Personnel Recruitment: Chief Van der Veen provided information on various personnel-related topics.

Firefighter Probationary Year Completion

On January 6, four current probationary firefighters completed their period of probation. Final testing was a cumulative assessment of skills and experience that they have learned over the past year. Each probationer was evaluated and passed by their peers.

Four New Probationary Firefighters

The new probationary firefighters officially began work on January 15, 2021. Three of the probationary firefighters will be heading off to the Recruit Academy at North Bend on January 27, 2021, and the fourth (a recent North Bend graduate) will be assigned as a fourth crewmember until he has been trained and be assigned to a shift.

Lieutenant, Shift Captain, and Training Captain Posting

The ninety-day posting was announced on January 4, 2021. The district will provide preparation and training for the testing process. The assessment centers will be completed simultaneously in-house and will utilize both outside and internal evaluators on each assessment. Interviews will be completed for each position on separate days.

The goal of the district is to have a promotional list in place at all times, allowing those members able to act and learn in those positions before they become available.

Chief Van der Veen announced that Captain Ray Davidson has announced his plans to retire earlier than expected. His last shift will be June 29, 2021.

Permanent Assistant Chief

Chief Van der Veen is currently reviewing the assistant chief's job description and the hiring process. An update is expected during the next meeting.

Facilities Contractor

Chief Van der Veen noted that Chief Ward has spent an abundant amount of time composing a request for proposal for a facilities contractor. The document was sent to Attorney Richard Davis for review.

Attorney Richard Davis provided information regarding utilizing a facilities contractor on an on-call basis to complete minor facilities repair. A performance bond can be waived for one-time work or small projects. The work expected to be completed qualifies as either public works or personal service.

Public works include improvements to real property. The fire district can enter into public works contracts up to \$30,000 without completing a competitive process. If the project is \$30,000 or above, the district must utilize a competitive sealed bid process. It was noted that if one contractor completes a variety of jobs over time that total over the \$30,000 threshold, a competitive bid process must also be completed.

To become a participant on a public works roster, a contractor must pay prevailing wage, have a payment performance bond and retainage.

Personnel services include putting together furniture or workstations, which can be completed without a process.

Attorney Richard Davis suggested not utilizing on-call contracts until the legislature updates the statute. The district could develop a policy that includes what specific jobs entail, and the parameters including a dollar threshold that on-call contractors will be utilized, although the auditor may still voice concerns. Attorney Richard Davis agreed to review the district's current purchasing policy which has not been updated since 2016.

Attorney Richard Davis further suggested that the district utilize their own forms to administer construction projects more easily as they arise.

Chief Van der Veen expects to have a trusted contractor complete an assessment on each station. If the bid is 20% below the \$30,000 limit, a formal phased process will be completed.

Richard Davis left the meeting at 1:35 p.m.

Train Delay: Commissioner Crawford discussed whether a formal letter was ever composed to the public and the BNSF railway regarding delayed fire department responses due to train delays.

Chief Van der Veen noted that contact was made with BNSF regarding providing the district advance notice of possible train delays to have the ability to reroute the response. It was noted that making certain knowledge available through a website or CAD may pose a security risk to BNSF and cumbersome for officers to locate prior to responding to calls.

Some of the delays may be rectified in the future by an overpass, possible relocation of the railway's X-ray machine, and utilizing auto aid as needed.

Commissioner Crawford was contacted by a community member requesting information regarding delayed responses due to the train.

Commissioner Crawford will review past minutes for additional information.

NEW BUSINESS

Board Officer Elections: The Board completed their yearly officer elections as per the Fire Commissioner Guidelines.

MOTION: Commissioner Fischer moved to elect current Chairman Ansell as Board Chair. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 3-0.

MOTION: Chairman Ansell moved to elect current Vice-Chairman Bosman as Vice-Chair. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and approved 3-0.

Training Agreement with District 4 and the City of Bellingham: At the insistence of District 4 Chairman Hanson to remain transparent and possible impacts to the future RFA, Chief Van der Veen provided information regarding the training agreement between District 4 and the City of Bellingham.

In the past, the City of Bellingham has had an agreement with the North Whatcom Fire and Rescue (NWFR) to utilize the training grounds at Britton Loop Station 12 for an exchange of services. Because of the auto aid agreement between NWFR and the City of Bellingham, District 4 is no longer receiving any benefit from the agreement.

District 4 recently updated their facility rental agreement and are currently in the process of renegotiating compensation for the use of the training grounds, building D, and a portion of the large meeting room with the City of Bellingham.

The agreement will include damages to the training grounds and formation of the RFA implications.

Attorney Richard Davis plans to review the draft agreement.

Fire Chief Quarterly Review: Chairman Ansell expects to discuss Chief Van der Veen's quarterly, upcoming annual review, and the fire chief's contract.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Northern Light article re: Thanksgiving Basket Program
- Northern Light article re: Train derailment
- Northern Light article re: NWFR year in review
- Bellingham Herald article re: Train derailment
- The Responder: District newsletter, January issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **February Board Meeting Attendance Query:** All Commissioners present are expected to attend the February 18 meeting via Zoom Meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- City of Blaine Fire Marshal Interlocal Agreement
- 2018-2019 Audit
- Assistant Chief Process
- RFA Planning Committee Update
- Facilities Update
- Train Delay Correspondence Inquiry
- Train Derailment Recognition
- Staff Appreciation

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Training: Chief Van der Veen announced that all district members including the commissioners will be completing online annual diversity and sexual harassment training in the near future.

Train Derailment: Chairman Ansell expressed his appreciation to all members involved in the Custer train derailment incident. Chairman Ansell commended both Chief Van der

Veen and Chief Ward for their quick reaction and providing up to date information, along with the coordinated efforts of all agencies involved.

Chief Van der Veen thanked Chief Ward for establishing command and also to District 7, specifically Chief Crosswhite and Chief Iverson for their quick response and involvement.

It was also noted that the district received a combined thank you letter from the Department of Natural Resources, BNSF Railway, and the Whatcom County Department of Emergency Management for their part in the train derailment response.

Chairman Ansell noted that the district needs to celebrate its successes.

In light of the pandemic, Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen commended all members (on the floor and admin) for learning a new way of conducting business, keeping themselves safe off duty, keeping their brothers and sisters safe during this challenging time, and for their response during the train derailment. A letter will be drafted and reviewed during the next meeting before being sent out to all members.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chairman Ansell 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."

at 2:17 p.m. following a five-minute break until approximately 2:45 p.m. Chief Ward remained for a portion of the executive session. Action may be taken. Chief Ward left the executive session at 2:22 p.m.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chairman Ansell called the regular meeting back into open session at 2:36 p.m. Action will be taken.

Following the executive discussion regarding the upcoming Fire Chief's performance review, the Board recommends that Chief Van der Veen receive a three percent COLA raise, effective February 1, 2021, which is in line with the current collective bargaining agreement.

MOTION: Chairman Ansell moved to approve the Fire Chief's salary increase by three percent effective February 1, 2021. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and approved 3-0.

In addition, Chairman Ansell expects to meet with Attorney Richard Davis to update a portion of Chief Van der Veen's employee contract language.

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business Chairman Ansell moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:39 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and approved 3-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Board Secretary

ATTEST:

Bruce Ansell, Chairman

John Crawford, Commissioner

Scott Fischer, Commissioner

Jason Van der Veen, Fire Chief