

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
via Zoom Meeting
1:00 p.m.
September 16, 2021
Regular Fire Commissioners Meeting**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ansell called the regular Whatcom County Fire District #21 of Fire Commissioners meeting for September 16, 2021, to order at 1:04 p.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Bruce Ansell; Vice-Chairman Rich Bosman, Commissioners Scott Fischer, and Kimberly McMurray; Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen; Division Chief Shaun Ward; Attorney Peter Ruffatto.

Commissioner John Crawford was previously excused from this meeting.

Other: Consultants Karen Reed and Heather Logan; Local 106NW Representative Chris Hollander.

Chairman Ansell noted that with the upswing in COVID pandemic cases and new mandates, the district meetings would return to Zoom Meetings for the foreseeable future.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) August 19, 2021
2. Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
3. Financial Report
 - a) Total Revenues – August \$738,649.91
 - b) Total Expenditures – September \$837,490.92
4. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$366,217.16
 - b) Payroll Taxes Voucher: \$78,901.65
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$221,929.75
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Voucher: \$87,192.86
 - e) Capital Projects: \$334.47
 - f) Capital Projects Facilities: \$9,748.16
 - g) Capital Projects Apparatus: \$73,166.87

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Bosman moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and approved 4-0.

NWFR FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

Commissioner McMurray attended Whatcom County Fire Commissioners via Zoom on Wednesday, September 15, 2021. No decisions have been made regarding combining the 9-11 law enforcement and emergency medical service dispatch centers.

Commissioner Crawford informed Chairman Ansell that emergency response will be utilizing a supplemental radio frequency as a backup for communications with the hospital emergency room.

Both Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen met with the volunteers on Monday, September 13, 2021, to provide information regarding the upcoming levy lid lift. Chairman Ansell commended Chief Van der Veen on how he effectively managed the meeting and answered some tough questions. The volunteers were appreciative that time was set aside expressly for them to voice any concerns or opinions.

Chief Van der Veen thanked Commissioner McMurray for arranging meetings with key citizens on the east side in an effort to provide fire department education. Some business owners agreed to provide feedback to the levy lid lift information before it is disseminated to the community.

Chairman Ansell noted that it is more challenging to get the message out to the community due to the pandemic.

LEGAL ISSUES

Attorney Peter Ruffatto attended the meeting in place of Attorney Richard Davis. He provided information regarding the federal vaccine mandate proclamation issued on Thursday, September 9, 2021. The information is expected to continue to evolve.

- A non-government business with 100 or more employees is required to either get the vaccine or be tested once a week. (if exemptions apply)
- Exemptions or accommodations include medical exemptions or strongly held religious beliefs.
- Employers are required to provide paid time off for employees to get the vaccine and/or recover from the effects of the vaccine.
- All state workers are required to be vaccinated with no exemptions.
- Contractors hired by government entities, hired after Oct 15, 2021, are required to be vaccinated with no exemptions.

There are many unanswered questions, including:

- Does this mandate apply to employees working remotely?
- Who is required to pay for COVID testing?
- What is the deadline for vaccinations for federal employees?

- Are exemptions allowed for federal employees?
- Are volunteers considered employees and does the vaccine mandate include them even if they are not engaged in emergency medical response?
- What is the industry standard for vaccine compensation?

It is expected that the Department of Labor and/or OSHA will issue further rules and specifics for implementation in near future.

Attorney Peter Ruffatto left the meeting at 1:39 p.m.

IAFF LOCAL 106NW MONTHLY REPORT

Local 106NW Representative Chris Hollander noted that the Local is ready to support the levy lid lift through door-knocking and flag-waving and by putting up signs prior to the arrival of the ballots.

All Local members have complied with the COVID 19 vaccine mandate ahead of the order.

The Local recognized both Lieutenant Keith Zylstra and mechanic John Lovatt for their years of service. Both members will retire on October 1, 2021.

The Local recognized the promotion of both Danny Jensen and Troy Freeman to the position of lieutenant.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Levy Lid Lift: Both Consultants Heather Logan and Karen Reed continue to update the ever-changing frequently asked questions and the new mailer. The supplemental September newsletter has also been disseminated. The attorney will review the frequently asked questions before it is publicized. It is expected that the mailer will be mailed out on the same day as the ballots.

The commissioners requested to review the material before being sent to the public or added to the website.

Heather Logan noted that the information is expected to have a darker, grittier tone as it discusses the risks of the levy lid lift not passing, including eroding service and higher insurance rates.

It was emphasized that the district can only provide education by laying out the facts but cannot advocate for the levy lid lift.

Chief Van der Veen pointed out the average age of the district's apparatus:

- Tender fleet - 27.5 years old
- Ladder – 19 years old

- Engines - 15.25 years old
- Brush rigs – 19 years old
- Aid units (*even with three new ones purchased in the past eighteen months*) - 10 years old

Vice-Chairman Bosman noted that the wording of the information needs to be carefully laid out, as some people do not like to be told what to do and respond better when given options.

Karen Reed stated that it will be impactful for the commissioners to provide information and educate their friends and neighbors.

2022 Contract for Services with District 4: Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen continue discussions with the District 4 Chairman regarding the one-year contract for services. It was suggested by legal to utilize the current agreement and to only focus on clarifying the language on the payment portion. The District 4 Chairman agreed to the suggestion.

A meeting will be scheduled to discuss the budget in the near future once the district receives more concrete numbers from various agencies.

Law Enforcement Response Update: Commissioner Crawford stated during last month's meeting that the Whatcom County Fire Commissioner's Association is currently working on a letter to the Whatcom County Emergency Medical Services (WCEMS) requesting that funds be utilized to provide one or more critical response units in the county.

During the Operation's Meeting, Division Chief Ward noted that there was discussion that the WCEMS is not considering adding a staff or chase car for possibly two years.

The Board agreed to compose a similar letter to send to Mike Hilley, WCEMS Manager, requesting the addition of a county-wide critical response unit.

Facilities Update: Chairman Ansell commented on the excellent work completed on the repainting of the bay doors at Northwood Station 72 and Delta Station 68. The contractor provided additional work outside the contract to ensure a superb finish. Chairman Ansell indicated that the extra time and effort put in should be compensated. The Board concurred.

Chairman Ansell commended the Birch Bay Station 63 crews for their continued upkeep of Semiahmoo Station 62 following July's volunteer work party efforts.

Chief Van der Veen alerted the Board that the training tower at Birch Bay Station 63 has been blocked off for use due to safety concerns and code issues. It was discovered that a

structural engineer had inspected the tower in 2017 and advised a representative of the district to replace the tower within one year.

Letter to Governor Inslee regarding COVID 19 Vaccine Mandate: Chairman Ansell reviewed the letter written on behalf of the Board regarding Proclamation 21-14. Chief Van der Veen noted that the letter includes how the vaccine mandate impacts the district. Even though all responders have received the vaccine and are in compliance, the district will most certainly be overtaxed responding to the surrounding departments that are not fully vaccinated.

Chairman Ansell requested approval for himself and Chief Van der Veen to sign and send the letter on the Board's behalf.

All the commissioners present provided verbal approval to send the letter.

NEW BUSINESS

Proclamation 21-14 Covid 19 Vaccine Requirement: Chairman Ansell provided information regarding the mandatory vaccine mandate.

Resolution 2021-06 Mandatory Vaccinations: Chairman Ansell provided information regarding proposed Resolution 2021-06.

Chairman Ansell noted that regardless of whether the Board agrees with the mandate, since the district collects Medicare, Medicaid, and GEMT funds, it is a requirement that could put the district at risk for non-compliance. The resolution notes that the Board has received and understands the mandate.

MOTION: Commissioner Fischer moved to approve Resolution 2021-06 Mandatory Vaccinations. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Bosman and approved 4-0.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Draft Policy 0400.0326.00 Mandatory Vaccinations: Chairman Ansell noted that the draft policy addresses how the district will manage the mandate. The draft policy was included for review only and not in its finished format. The policy has yet to be vetted by the Local regarding the impacts and potential compensation.

The district's attorneys assisted with drafting both the policy and resolution.

Vice-Chairman Bosman pointed out a discrepancy in the religious beliefs exemption between the state guidelines and the policy. Chief Van der Veen noted that the language continues to evolve. Chief Van der Veen will check with the attorney regarding ensuring that the policy coincides with the most up to date language.

Any input, questions, or concerns can be directed to Chief Van der Veen.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Whatcom County Auditor's Office re: Statement of votes cast in the election
- Blaine Library: Thank you for posting book sale on the reader board
- Kay Sooter: Vaccine mandate
- Natashcha Wolter: Vaccine mandate
- Susan Prosser: Vaccine mandate
- Starlet King: Vaccine mandate
- Kayla DeWaard: Vaccine Mandate
- Bellingham Herald article re: Vaccine mandate
- Bellingham Herald article re: Paper fire
- Open House Haynie Fire Station flyer
- The Responder: District newsletter, September issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

October Meeting Attendance Query: It was noted that the upcoming Washington Fire Commissioners Conference conflicts with the upcoming October 21, 2021, NWFR Board Meeting. Three Board members plan to attend the conference.

A Special meeting will be scheduled for Tuesday, October 19, 2021, via Zoom.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Levy Lid Lift
- Contract for Services with District 4
- Law Enforcement response
- Facilities update
- Policy 0400.0326.00 Mandatory Vaccinations
- City of Blaine Fire Marshal Interlocal Agreement (*tabled*)
- Assistant Chief Process (*tabled*)

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business, Commissioner Fischer moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:25 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Bosman and approved 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Board Secretary

ATTEST:

Bruce Ansell, Chairman

Rich Bosman, Vice-Chairman

Scott Fischer, Commissioner

Kimberly McMurray, Commissioner

Jason Van der Veen, Fire Chief