

Whatcom County Fire District #21
via Zoom Meeting
1:00 pm
April 15, 2021
Regular of Fire Commissioners Meeting

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ansell called the regular Whatcom County Fire District #21 of Fire Commissioners meeting for April 15, 2021, to order at 1:02 p.m. via Zoom Meeting.

ROLL CALL

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

NEW BUSINESS

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) March 18, 2021
 - b) March 27, 2021 – special
 - c) March 29, 2021 – special joint
 - d) April 1, 2021 – special
2. Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
3. Financial Report
 - a) Total Revenues - March \$545,602.58
 - b) Total Expenditures –April \$833,811.92
4. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$336,388.50
 - b) Payroll Taxes Voucher: \$70,803.95
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$293,793.53
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Voucher: \$132,825.94
 - e) Special Voucher: \$7,980.00

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Bosman moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 5-0.

NW FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

Commissioner Crawford provided an update regarding discussions surrounding merging law enforcement and emergency medical communication centers. The meeting was held on April 1, 2021, and included fire chiefs, fire commissioners, law enforcement, and county and city executives.

The dispatch center originally separated in 1999 and has been revisited by various consultants in 2015 and 2018. Each time the consultant concluded that there would be no financial benefit to combine agencies.

Commissioner Crawford noted that multiple fire districts and cities are not in favor of joining the centers.

LEGAL ISSUES

Attorney Richard Davis provided an update regarding returning to in-person meetings in the near future. Things that will need to be considered before in-person meetings can move forward include meeting room occupancy capacity (50%), ventilation, and social distancing.

Attorney Richard Davis offered to work with Chief Van der Veen to develop a procedure to conduct open and in-person meetings in the future.

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.”*

Per RCW 42.30.110(1)(i) ”to discuss with legal counsel representing the agency matters relating to agency enforcement actions, or to discuss with legal counsel representing the agency litigation or potential litigation to which the agency, the governing body, or a member acting in an official capacity is, or is likely to become, a party, when public knowledge regarding the discussion is likely to result in an adverse legal or financial consequence to the agency.”

at 1:09 p.m. for at least thirty minutes until 1:39 p.m. Chief Van der Veen, Division Chief Ward, and Attorney Richard Davis remained for the executive session. Action may be taken.

Chairman Ansell extended the executive session at 1:40 p.m. for another ten minutes until 1:50 p.m.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chairman Ansell called the regular meeting back into open session at 1:51 p.m.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Regional Fire Authority (RFA): Chairman Ansell recited the below resolution:

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Resolution 2021-02

A RESOLUTION OF THE OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS OF WHATCOM COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT NO. 21 (“DISTRICT 21”) WITHDRAWING FROM THE REGIONAL FIRE PROTECTION SERVICE AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEE (“PLANNING COMMITTEE”) WITH WHATCOM COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT NO. 4 (“DISTRICT 4”).

WHEREAS, District 21 and District 4 formed an RFA Planning Committee pursuant to RCW 52.26.020; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Committee has held a series of meetings for the purposes of discussing the components of a possible RFA Plan to be submitted to the voters, analyzing pertinent financial information of both Districts, and collaboratively discussing the future of providing fire and emergency medical services to residents of both Districts; and

WHEREAS, the Board of District 21 officially recognizes the high-quality work that has been accomplished by the consultants who provided services to the Planning Committee; and

WHEREAS, the Board of District 21 has determined that while regionalization opportunities should continue to be explored for the benefit of its citizens, this is not the right time to seek voter approval for formation of an RFA.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that District 21 hereby withdraws from the Planning Committee and that the Chair of the is authorized and directed to provide the appropriate written notice to District 4 of this decision.

ADOPTED by the Board of Fire Commissioners of Whatcom County Fire District No. 21, at an open public meeting thereof this 15th day of April 2021, of which notice was given in the manner provided by law, the following Commissioners being present and voting.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Bosman moved to approve Resolution 2021-02.
The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fischer and approved
5-0.

Chairman Ansell stated that the RFA process has been long, filled with many ups and downs and seriously disappointing at times. Chairman Ansell went on to state that part of the issue may have been the significant amount of turnover with the District 4 commissioners over the past two years.

With two District 4 board members from each district up for re-election in November, the dynamics could change yet again. Chairman Ansell stated that it is not prudent to commit to a new and unknown RFA at this time.

Chairman Ansell further noted that another significant factor included the change to a District 4 employee’s contract. The change could potentially leave the district in an unfunded liability if the remainder of the employee group expects the same severance package. The district is not willing to take on such a huge financial obligation.

Chairman Ansell looks forward to revisiting the RFA process possibly after the next election.

Chairman Ansell reviewed the districts values statement: "Trust, Integrity, and Accountability form the foundation of North Whatcom Fire & Rescue. Strong Leadership brings forward effective Teamwork, Communication, and Respect, which are the pillars of our organization. As our capstone we serve with Humility and value Loyalty and Compassion."

Chairman Ansell summarized the rules of commissioner effectiveness found in the Washington Fire Commissioners Association Handbook provided to each elected fire commissioner in Washington State. Chairman Ansell hopes that anyone who holds a current office or is considering running for an office in the future, reads and take these guidelines to heart.

TWELVE SIMPLE RULES OF COMMISSIONER EFFECTIVENESS.

1. Respect and comply with the law.
2. Work cooperatively with other board members to govern your District.
3. Act in a manner that promotes public confidence in the office of fire commissioner.
4. Participate in establishing, maintaining, and enforcing high standards of conduct and personally observe those standards.
5. Manage and direct personnel only through the board, do not attempt to unilaterally direct or manage personnel. You were not elected to run the District by yourself.
6. Understand, respect and uphold the District's adopted chain of command.
7. Lead by example.
8. Keep an open mind and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."
9. Get proper advice when appropriate.
10. Recognize and understand that your actions and most of your work will be in the public eye and will be scrutinized by the public.
11. Recognize that fire protection districts are municipal corporations and often cannot be managed the same way that you manage your personal business.
12. Take advantage of the resources and experience of the Washington Fire Commissioners Association as well as your local and regional commissioner associations. Chances are the question or challenge facing you has been addressed or experienced by other commissioners.

Vice-Chairman Bosman commended Chairman Ansell for his role as chair on the RFA planning committee. Although he is also disappointed and still believes an RFA is the best option for the taxpayers of both districts, Vice-Chairman Bosman agrees that this is not the right time to move forward. He expects to revisit the RFA process in the future.

Commissioner Crawford also stated his desire to revisit the RFA process in the future, noting that there are too many major roadblocks to move forward at this time. He

expressed his regret and thanked the staff and labor group for their hard work and effort put into this process.

Chairman Ansell noted that when this process began, the Board made a commitment to the labor group that no decisions would cost members their jobs. Moving forward and under Chief Van der Veen's leadership, Chairman Ansell renewed the Board's commitment to the labor group and reassured employees that District 21 is a place that employees will want to remain.

IAFF LOCAL 106NW MONTHLY REPORT

Local 106NW Representative Scott Brown understands that the Board's decision was not easy and appreciates all the time they invested in the RFA process, although he is disappointed in the outcome.

Scott Brown stated he has been with the district for fifteen years and is extremely disappointed to see someone like District 4 Commissioner Hanson come in and drastically affect the ten-year successful collaboration between the two districts.

Scott Brown appreciates the Board's commitment to the labor group and remains hopeful for a future RFA.

NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Ansell added some new business to the agenda.

Levy Lid Lift: There was discussion regarding pursuing a levy lid lift.

Chairman Ansell noted that through the RFA process the Board was able to review a lot of financial information tabulated by the financial consultant. The district has not raised taxes in the past ten years, and it is obvious that the district cannot sustain the current level of service nor the increased demand for service in the future.

Chairman Ansell requested feedback regarding moving forward with a levy lid lift of \$1.45 as recommended through the RFA process. The maximum the district could request is \$1.50.

Chief Van der Veen stated that with the data received from Financial Analyst Bill Cushman and following the Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) and Capital Facilities Plan developed specifically for the district, he is confident that the \$1.45 is adequate and reasonable for a levy lid lift. Chief Van der Veen expressed his desire to conduct some additional research that could be reviewed during a special meeting.

Chairman Ansell noted that timing will be important as a levy lid passed in November 2021 will affect taxes in 2022. The deadline for a levy lid lift to be placed on the August ballot is May 14, 2021. The Birch Bay library tax is also expected to be added to the

November ballot and an EMS levy renewal is expected to be added to the August 2022 ballot.

Attorney Richard Davis provided information regarding the two types of levy requests (single or multi-year with an inflator). Levy rates will decline yearly as property values increase. The district is entitled to ask for a yearly one percent increase.

Chairman Ansell polled the Board to see who was in favor of moving forward with levy lid lift. With the district's ongoing financial responsibility, not requesting an increase for the past ten years and with the continued growth (35% in some areas) and concurrent call volume, all commissioners are in favor of moving forward with levy lid lift discussions.

A special meeting will be scheduled within the next two weeks to investigate what a levy lid lift will entail and how to move forward.

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

- None

CORRESPONDENCE

- Copy of NWFR RFA Taxes
- To D4 Commissioner Dave Hanson re: RFA clarification
- Kristi Martin re: Thank you for service
- Peggy Shambaugh re: Thank you for service
- Lynden Tribune article re: NWFR ambulance donation
- WFCA Fireline Newsletter: upcoming conference October 21-23
- The Responder: District newsletter, April issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

May Meeting Attendance Query: All Commissioners present are expected to attend the May 20, 2021 meeting via Zoom Meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- City of Blaine Fire Marshal Interlocal Agreement
- Assistant Chief Process
- Facilities
- Policy and Procedure Review

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business Commissioner Fischer moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:17 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Board Secretary

ATTEST:

Bruce Ansell, Chairman

Rich Bosman, Vice-Chairman

John Crawford, Commissioner

Scott Fischer, Commissioner

Kimberly McMurray, Commissioner

Jason Van der Veen, Fire Chief