

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
9408 Odell Street, Blaine, WA 98230
11:00 a.m.**

July 19, 2022

Special Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting

CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL

Chairman Ansell called the special Whatcom County Fire District #21 Board of Fire Commissioners meeting for July 19, 2022, to order at 11:04 a.m. at Station 61 – 9408 Odell Street, Blaine, WA 98230.

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Bruce Ansell; Commissioners Scott Fischer and Kimberly McMurray; Fire Chief Jason Van der Veen; Division Chief Shaun Ward;

Commissioners Rich Bosman was excused from this meeting.

Vice-Chairman John Crawford arrived at 11:08 a.m.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) June 4, 2022 – special
 - b) June 16, 2022 – special
2. Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
3. Financial Report
 - a) Total Revenue – June \$68,741.82
 - b) Total Expenditures – July \$851,002.34
4. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$372,199.58
 - b) Payroll Taxes Voucher: \$85,383.77
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$276,014.83
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Voucher: \$117,404.16

Chief Van der Veen noted that the revenue report was incomplete due to the current hiring process, Covid uptick, and staff workload.

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

FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

Vice-Chairman Crawford attended the Whatcom County Fire Commissioner's Association (WCFCA) Meeting held on Wednesday, July 13, 2022. Discussions included BLS Levy, combo dispatch issues, and FARS updates. The Board continues to search for a president.

Chairman Ansell met with Dave Ralston to discuss upcoming labor contract preparations. Dave Ralston will officially contract with the district effective August 1, 2022, to assist with the labor contract process. An official letter will be sent to Local 106NW accepting their offer to enter into negotiations around August 1, 2022. The hope is to begin negotiations in late August or early September with a completion goal before December 31, 2022.

LEGAL ISSUES

None

IAFF LOCAL 106 MONTHLY REPORT

Although Local 106NW Representative Scott Brown was unable to attend the meeting, he reached out to thank the Board for their recent six percent employee raise. In addition, all members are excited about the five candidates who recently received conditional offers.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

District 4 Annexation Update: Chief Van der Veen noted that due to the EMS Levy disruption, there had been no additional action between the City of Bellingham and District 4. The City has been focused on salvaging the EMS levy.

Chief Van der Veen revealed that the development company that owns property around the Britton Loop area recently sent an annexation notification meeting to the wrong address. Chief Van der Veen did not receive the letter until after the meeting. The meeting information indicated that the significant annexation that includes the Britton Loop Station, is moving forward and would significantly reduce District 4's revenue.

Chairman Ansell reiterated his stance of not entering a long-term relationship with District 4.

Smith Rd. Station 13 is now occupied by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which recently signed a lease with District 4. DNR is housing their administration along with two engines seven days a week at Station 13.

Firefighter Recruitment Update: Chief Van der Veen announced that one lateral and four entry-level firefighters were given conditional offers. They participated in a speed, panel, and chief's interview. If all conditions are met, they are expected to begin the onboarding process on August 1 or August 3, 2022. The entry-level firefighters will be leaving to attend the North Bend State Fire Academy on August 10, 2022.

Chief Van der Veen noted that all the recruits are outstanding individuals.

In addition, five candidates have been added to the hiring list. If these candidates remain on the list and are not hired elsewhere, they will be reinterviewed during a new hiring process anticipated for early January 2023.

City of Blaine Development Letter: Chief Van der Veen noted that Chairman Ansell's letter written on behalf of the Board noting their concerns about future planning developments was received by the City of Blaine. There has been no reply at this time.

Chief Van der Veen, Deputy Fire Marshal Nielsen, Interim City of Blaine Manager Dave Wilbrecht, and Planning Director Stacie Pratschner attended a seminar by Attorney Jon

Sitkin. Attorney Jon Sitkin worked with former NWFR Fire Chief Tom Fields to craft the original mitigation language and represented the district during litigation that was ultimately settled by the Supreme Court. Attorney Sitkin provided information regarding mitigation and the authority of each entity (city/fire district). Both sides must provide the service they were created for; infrastructure and fire service. If either side does not fulfill their commitment to the community, they will ultimately face legal issues.

Attorney Sitkin encouraged the district to extend its current capital facilities plan to align with the City's (2024) and work together on moving forward. It was also suggested that the plans align with the county's plan, although that would be harder to accomplish. It is anticipated that there could be a future discussion regarding splitting the cost of the joint undertaking.

In addition, Chief Van der Veen indicated that it might benefit all entities to also work with a Birch Bay Community sub-committee.

Chief Van der Veen suggested that Attorney Jon Sitkin attend a special Board meeting to review his presentation and answer any questions, including "*Where do we go from here?*"

Chairman Ansell suggested inviting Interim City Manager Wilbrecht and other vital key participants. Chief Van der Veen will explore the most suitable date in September.

Deputy Fire Marshal Update: Although not in attendance, Deputy Fire Marshal Nielsen provided written documentation regarding upcoming housing developments and fire prevention updates.

- East Blaine development Ridge at Harbor Hills is moving forward.
- Two new water reservoirs are being engineered to provide water storage for the Grandis Pond and East Harbor Hills developments.
- East Harbor Hills is on hold while a new soil study is completed.
- The district has collected mitigation fees and signed concurrency letters for 34 out of 74 lots in Division 1 Horizons at Semiahmoo.
- A public hearing has been scheduled for the Lincoln Mes development on July 28, 2022.
- Fire prevention inspection software is in the final stages. Once complete, the crews can begin using the iPads on the engines to perform annual engine company inspections (ECIP) and collect valuable pre-fire information on the business in the City of Blaine.

County EMS Levy Update: Chief Van der Veen provided an update on the proposed EMS Levy plan. Initially, the levy rate was set and approved at \$.295, however, the County amended its motion in June to reduce the levy amount to \$.199 and added adversity, equity, and inclusion language for fire agency recruitment and hiring processes. The amendment was approved without an explanation or discussion with other agencies.

Chief Van der Veen noted that a study had been completed using the \$.295 levy rate, not the \$.199 rate.

A County Fire Chiefs meeting was held following the levy rate adjustment to develop an outreach plan. In addition, various chiefs met with county counselors to clarify the diversity language and explain the levy rate reduction decision. The Chiefs explained the \$.295 levy rate and provided information regarding the fire district property tax one percent limitation.

Ultimately the levy rate was returned to \$.295, and the additional diversity language remained in the document. The County must vote on the EMS levy again, and once approved, the City of Bellingham will vote to permit the levy to be provided a place on the August ballot. The deadline for filing is August 2, 2022.

Vice-Chairman Crawford stated that, in his opinion, both City and County Council have demonstrated poor leadership and is expecting an uphill battle concerning the EMS levy approval by the voters. Chairman Ansell agreed and noted it is unfortunate that the Council has not honestly educated the public about the consequences of the levy not passing.

Chairman Ansell and Chief Van der Veen stated that if the EMS levy fails, there will ultimately be no ALS medic service or community paramedics in the county.

NEW BUSINESS

Resolution 2022- 07 Surplus Phones and Phone System: Chief Ward provided information regarding the surplus phone and phone system. These phones are still widely used by other agencies and can be sold via public auction.

MOTION: Commissioner Fischer moved to approve Resolution 2022-07 Surplus Phones and Phone System as presented. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Crawford and approved 4-0.

Fire Commissioner Announcement: Chairman Ansell announced that after twenty-plus years, Commissioner Bosman had tenured his resignation, effective July 31, 2022. Chairman Ansell read the letter submitted by Commissioner Bosman.

"Please accept this as formal notification that I am resigning my position as fire commissioner with North Whatcom Fire and Rescue, effective July 31, 2022.

I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of the merger of the City of Blaine Fire Department with Fire Districts 3 and 13, ultimately forming what is now North Whatcom Fire and Rescue. Though challenging at times, it has been a pleasure helping North Whatcom Fire and Rescue evolve even as the fire service has continued to change.

After twenty-plus years of service, I feel the time is right to step aside and allow a new board member to continue serving the public with new energy.

My timing was also influenced by total confidence in the current leadership and staff of North Whatcom Fire and Rescue.

I wish North Whatcom Fire and Rescue all the best in the years to come."

The Board thanked Commissioner Bosman for his twenty-plus years of valuable service and commitment to the fire district. He is well respected, and the community owes him a debt of gratitude.

Commissioner Bosman will be recognized during the August Board meeting along with former Commissioner McPhail who retired in 2020.

There was a discussion regarding advertising for the upcoming fire commissioner vacancy. An advertisement will be placed in local newspapers and on the district website around August 1, 2022. Although the district has ninety days to fill the position, Chairman Ansell hopes to fill the position within thirty days.

Vice-Chairman Crawford and Commissioner McMurray are expected to interview the applicants following the deadline and then make a recommendation to the Board.

Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau (WSRB) Visit: Chief Van der Veen provided information about the recent onsite meeting with a WSRB representative. A WSRB customer service representative also attended the meeting and requested feedback about the process.

The district provided additional information, including personnel, apparatus, and future expansion. Since the district has two reserve engines, the other apparatus's age is no longer counted in the overall report. Since the newly ordered tenders are not ready, they will not count in the district's favor at this time.

It is anticipated that it may take a month to receive the results and updated rating. Chief Van der Veen expects the rating to drop in certain areas, ultimately affecting current insurance ratings.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Bellingham Herald article re: County EMS Levy
- Commissioner Rich Bosman re: Board resignation
- To Blaine City Council and City Manager re: Upcoming residential developments
- Semiahmoo Residents Position Paper re: Development concerns
- The Responder: District newsletter, July issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **August Board Meeting Attendance Query:** All Commissioners in attendance, with the exception of Vice-Chairman Crawford, are expected to attend the August 18 meeting in person at Odell Station 61.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- District 4 Annexation
- City of Blaine Development
- Deputy Fire Marshal
- County EMS Levy
- Fire Commissioner Interview Process
- Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB)

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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 12:03 p.m. for approximately fifteen minutes until 12:18 p.m. Chief Van der Veen and Chief Ward remained for the executive session. Action is not expected to be taken.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chairman Ansell called the regular meeting back into open session at 12:19 p.m. Action will not be taken.

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business, Chairman Ansell moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:20 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chairman Crawford and approved 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Jennie Sand, Board Secretary

ATTEST:

Bruce Ansell, Chairman

John Crawford, Vice-Chairman

Scott Fischer, Commissioner

Kimberly McMurray, Commissioner

Jason Van der Veen, Fire Chief