

ALL OFFICER MEETING
Thursday, May 5, 2022
Blaine Station 61

Attendees: Fire Chief Van der Veen; Division Chief Ward; Captains Ahrenholz, Finley, McPhail, Schmidt, and Smith; Lieutenants Brown, Freeman, Hofstad, Hollander, Jensen, Jorgensen, Riehl, and Scott.

Excused: Lieutenants Esser, Nelson and Shipp

FIRE CHIEF

Rumors

"Everyone is leaving": Chief Van der Veen has received one phone call and email regarding potential resignations. He has received nothing official.

B76

Chief Van der Veen thanked everyone who has covered B76. With the Lynden Assistant Chief leaving, it is expected that the district will continue to utilize the B76 MOU judiciously until its fruition in June.

Assistant Chief Plan

During the last commissioner meeting, there was a discussion regarding hiring an assistant chief and how that may look. Chief Van der Veen is also looking outside the box to include an alternative organizational chart consisting of battalion chiefs.

The group discussed the advantages and concerns of hiring battalion chiefs.

Could sub-specialize in specific areas such as training, facilities, apparatus, tools, and equipment	Would not be able to complete their administrative work
Overall liaison between crews and training would allow training to focus on development	
Three platoons for battalion chiefs	Finances: we cannot pay junior firefighters enough to keep them and are currently five short

It was suggested to investigate other organizations who utilize battalion chiefs, such as Mukilteo.

There was a discussion regarding the current staffing crisis. The district has not received any official resignations. In addition, two members are expected to be off on maternity leave in the near future. Regardless, the addition of new members will create the need for a lot of training which will tax the already overtime burden on members.

The topic of succession planning for our current members was discussed. If battalion chiefs are utilized, there needs to be a plan focusing from the bottom up.

Chief Van der Veen has a meeting scheduled with the Board Chair to look at the budget and feasible alternatives in the near future with the hope of creating a sustainable structure that will move the department forward.

Summer Staffing Plan

Chief Van der Veen noted that there would need to be much overtime to cover vacancies, sick leave, and vacation this summer. He hopes to do his best to mitigate the impact on the members.

Labor will continue to schedule overtime, possibly up to a month in advance.

Captain Finley will be added to the overtime roster. Everyone present agreed.

There is a potential for some relief only if laterals are hired, trained, and ready for shifts.

Academy and Hiring Plans

Open positions for both new and lateral firefighters were recently posted on the National Testing Network. Other departments are also facing shortages and are hiring within the same timeframe.

Tentative Schedule based on staffing

Closes – June 17

Oral Boards – June 28

Interviews and Chiefs Interviews – July 6-7

Conditional Offer – July 15

It is expected that the district will hire up to six, although only those right for the department will be given offers regardless of the number.

Another testing process will be done relatively soon (January) to maintain a hiring list.

It is beneficial that staff continues to be involved in the current process.

Chief Van der Veen presented three possible options for training new members.

Option 1

- State Academy August 11- if can reserve spots (recently under new guidance)
- Not back until November 2

Concerns

- Utilize our members (already short-staffed)

Options 2

- Participating in a joint academy with BFD
- 11-12 weeks
- Would get IFSAC certification for NWFR members
- Would include Cpt Finley and company officer
- NWFR company officers need to have a say in training
- May bridge gap between departments in the long term (growing pains expected)

Concerns

- BFD too rigid – BFD way
- May entice our recruits to BFD

Options 3

- Hybrid NWFR in-house academy - as done once in the past

Concerns

- Only worked due to small group (2) and caliber of individuals
- Add MCO training State offers the best live-fire training
- Need time to plan to present professional program (too soon)

It was agreed that an in-house academy would need at least one year of planning.

Other Discussion Points

- Allow those without EMT credentials to interview and put through BFD EMT class (gain more applicants but also more work for crews during probationary period)
- Short term burn out

District 4 Update

Chief Van der Veen noted that the District 4 / City of Bellingham annexation process is complicated.

Chief Van der Veen and Bellingham Fire Chief Hewitt met a month ago to discuss the two pending annexations and one land acquisition. The two also discussed the sixty (60%) annexation rule. Chief Van der Veen provided pertinent information to the District 4 Board from that meeting. The situation puts District 4's planning on hold until more clarity regarding which agencies need to meet and make decisions.

District 4 Chair sent the City of Bellingham Mayor requesting a meeting with the City of Bellingham to discuss the overall impacts of annexations over the past twenty years and how the loss of AV in the urban growth area (UGA) is currently affecting WCFD4's ability to fund its operations adequately.

It was noted that fifty percent of Britton Loop Station 12 calls respond to the City of Bellingham. Lt. Scott agreed to send some additional data regarding BFD calls to Chief Van der Veen.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Upgraded Phone System

The district is in the process of installing a new phone system. The system will rely on Wi-Fi and the cloud. Some of the phones have been delivered to stations, but other than calling station to station they are not ready for use. More information will be available when the phone system is ready to go live.

The shop is focusing on lawn equipment maintenance this week.

Today, reserve engine 61 will be back in service at Britton Loop Station 12. The apparatus plaques need to be forwarded with the engine.

The roof at Birch Bay Station 63 still needs to be repaired, weather dependent.

Report any Birch Bay Station 63 HVAC system leaks asap.

There was discussion regarding the amount of surplus in the stations. Chief Ward will investigate and come up with a plan to remove surplus equipment following all regulations

The support officers still have items in a lockable room at Laurel Station 69.

The district is in the process of designating a private breast pumping area at each station, equipped with a fridge and lock.

Wiser Lake Station 70 has been sold.

Due to the amount of overtime foreseen for the summer, the district is investigating the costs of outside hose testing.

The crews will continue to conduct ladder testing.

The district is arranging lawn maintenance at Semiahmoo Station 62 and Haynie Station 65. If DNR leases Smith Road Station 13, it is expected that they will be responsible for keeping up the yard.

A tender support volunteer continues to take care of the lawns at Delta Station 68.

The mowers from Stations 62 and 65 will be relocated to other stations.

There was a discussion regarding contacting the Sheriff's Department to have their jail crew do some initial work at Britton Loop Station 12 and possibly Birch Bay Station 63. Once completed, the crews should be able to maintain the stations throughout the summer. Chief Van der Veen will investigate.

It is expected that a draft hose testing plan will be reviewed during the next captain's meeting.

TRAINING

Cpt. Finley expressed his gratitude to the forcible entry group and those who provided coverage for the instructors. Officers noted that the class was favorably received and could tell that the instructors who showed a true passion for what they taught. A letter of recognition was sent to the instructors and placed in their personnel file. Some personal equipment was damaged and is expected to be replaced—those affected need to contact training.

Upcoming Live Fire

An upcoming live-fire training with four rotations is scheduled for Monday, May 9. A roving engine will cover stations as needed. Two district incident safety officers will be paid overtime to attend. Regulations stipulate that back-up engines must be included (Ferndale and Lynden).

2nd Qtr Training

Cpt. Finley requested feedback regarding the 2nd Qtr training. It was agreed that the information was very well laid out. 3rd Qtr will be similar.

Training is in the process developing strategies and tactics and is working with Lt. Hofstad. It was requested that the captains provide information regarding the best dates for the exercise.

It was noted that BLS evaluators must also complete the required BLS training.

SCBA

Not everyone has completed their required SCBA testing. Lt. Biery is available on Friday, May 6, for anyone still needing to complete the fit test.

There was a discussion regarding if all firefighters should be issued their own air packs. Apparently, due partly to the bags in which they are stored, there has been some damage to the hose connections, which are not under warranty. After some discussion, it was agreed to investigate purchasing bigger bags. In addition, the air packs need to be cleaned better to remove carcinogens. Harness issues may be addressed during 3rd Qtr training.

More discussion is expected.

SHIFTS

A Shift

The Operative IQ_group wants to ensure that all staff has had ample time to review the updated program (rig check sheets), which is more user-friendly and should be available by the end of the year. The update does address the recent concern of not closing out the call from the previous day.

B Shift

Lt Riehl requested that the stations have backups of all cleaning supplies so that a new item is ordered when the last product is taken off the shelf.

The back-up rigs at Britton Loop Station 12 will need to mirror first out apparatus (A1202/E69). Additional engine equipment will be requested when the new engine is ordered to ensure that it will be fully equipped.

Lt. Hofstad requested an email if new antennas are needed. Please remember not to pull radios out by their antenna. A future discussion will address the possibility of ordering new pagers. There are no Motorola pagers in reserves.

A minor glitch in Image Trend will be addressed regarding transports not being marked as reviewed even though they had been reviewed.

A recent radio communications issue with Prospect is being addressed.

D Shift

Please encourage members to complete their reports in a timely fashion.

An officer task book is in the process of being developed and reviewed.

GOOD OF THE ORDER

Chief Van der Veen announced that the district plans to purchase an engine and two tenders in the near future. The details are being finalized. The tender spec has been completed and reviewed by the tender group.

The officer phones have been upgraded. The phones will no longer be able to share pictures.

Chief Van der Veen thanked the officers for what they do on a regular basis, even through the difficulties of the past couple of years. He believes the district has the right leaders in the right spot and applauds them for stepping up. He expects everyone will continue to learn and grow together moving forward. The Chief will continue to keep the lines of communication open between firefighters and the citizens we serve.

Lt Riehl noted that the correct attitude will drive the district in the right direction even with anticipated struggles ahead. Officers will make or break a department. Although there remain some morale issues, he believes the district is becoming more positive as a whole.

Next Captains Meeting: June 2

All Officer Meeting: TBD