

**Whatcom County Fire District #21
Whatcom County Fire District #4
Station 12 – Bellingham
4142 Britton Loop Bellingham WA 98226
2:00 pm
September 17, 2013
Special Meeting Minutes
Planning Retreat**

A special meeting/planning retreat of the Board of Commissioners of Whatcom County Fire District #21 (dba North Whatcom Fire and Rescue) and Whatcom County Fire District #4 was held on Tuesday, September 17, 2013 at Britton Loop Station 12 at 2:00 p.m. Those who attended were NWFR Chairman Bill Salter, Vice-Chairman Dean Whitney, Commissioners Rich Bosman, Roger Hawley and Larry McPhail; Whatcom County Fire District #4 Chairman Mary Beth Neal and Commissioner Harry Andrews, District #4 Board Secretary Kris Parks; Chief Ron Anderson; Division Chiefs John Swobody and Henry Hollander; Business Manager Benita Williams; Administrative Assistant Jennie Sand; Labor Representative Mike Schmidt. Commissioner Ness was excused from the meeting.

INTRODUCTIONS

Chief Anderson welcomed the attendees. The yearly retreat has been scheduled as per the Inter-local Agreement for Fire and Emergency Medical Services.

8.2 Joint Annual Planning Retreat.” ...both Boards of Fire Commissioners shall participate in a planning retreat for the purpose of Identifying any operational concerns from the past operational period, and to conduct operational planning, capital improvement planning, and financial planning for the next operational period. The joint Boards annual planning retreat shall occur prior to September 30th. ”

Chief Anderson further noted that this retreat provided an opportunity to begin planning for the upcoming year. It was agreed that a retreat date for 2014 would be chosen along with the regularly scheduled fire commissioners meetings and that an evening or weekend time slot should be selected to accommodate our volunteer members.

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES STATEMENT

The group reviewed the Mission, Vision and Values statements and no changes were recommended.

RETREAT PURPOSE

Chief Anderson reviewed the purpose for the retreat and noted that things that were relevant last year may not be for the coming year.

- To discuss our future and where we want to go as an organization
- Build teamwork and develop cohesiveness
- Set goals and define expectations
- Provide direction to our staff
- Adapt or Modify previous goals as our leadership and/or political environment changes

CUSTOMER SURVEYS

Jennie reviewed the process of how customer surveys are distributed and how the information is tracked and utilized by the district. Any customers wishing a “call back” are sent to Lieutenant Jorgensen who contacts the customer and then follows up with the appropriate firefighters and captain. The final results are also documented and tracked. Comments both positive and negative are posted on the NWFR Extranet and a few are posted in the district newsletter and annual report. Jennie noted that most comments as well as “call backs” are positive.

The group discussed various ways to further publicize the customer comments.

- Add a ticker to the website
- Provide the training division with any negative comments to evaluate
- Invite those who had a positive experience with the district to share their story at upcoming town hall meetings
- Track the ratings monthly and provide a chart or graph to show results

2012 RETREAT REVIEW

Chief Anderson provided an update of the 2012 retreat:

Inter-local Agreement: At a Joint Commissioner meeting held on May 16, 2012 it was agreed that both the contract payments for 2014 and 2015 would be 25% of the budget minus any District #4 revenues. Chief Swobody will be in charge of separating out each department’s transports. If the EMS levy does not pass District 4 will be unable to pay 25% and the district will reduce the number of firefighters who work at Britton Loop Station 12.

Chief Anderson provided information and delivered updates of the mill levy comparisons, SAFER grant and bond payments. District 21 has reached their \$1.50 mill levy max while District 4 is at \$1.32. Property values have fallen since 2010, and the combined districts are collecting \$225,000 less than in 2011. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant which brought in an additional \$340,000 in yearly revenue to assist with firefighter salaries and benefits has now ended.

Chief Anderson asked the NWFR Commissioners to consider paying off the Station 71 remodel bond (\$185,000) at the end of 2013 which would free up \$70,000 of additional funds per year. District 4 has reduced their bond payments by \$60,000.

All collected mitigation fees need to be tracked so they can be utilized before their deadline. A detailed record of how much was collected, when and for what project needs to be kept by the district.

District 4			
Tax Year	District 4 Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
1995	\$ 484,910,624	\$ 727,365	1.50000
1996	\$ 511,960,936	\$ 767,941	1.50000
1997	\$ 513,619,708	\$ 770,429	1.50000
1998	\$ 577,420,933	\$ 845,465	1.46421
1999	\$ 516,744,029	\$ 775,116	1.50000
2000	\$ 537,282,649	\$ 805,923	1.50000
2001	\$ 554,695,516	\$ 832,043	1.50000
2002	\$ 618,583,001	\$ 886,140	1.43253
2003	\$ 621,552,703	\$ 916,473	1.47449
2004	\$ 669,451,665	\$ 977,984	1.46087
2005	\$ 710,801,281	\$ 1,054,037	1.48288
2006	\$ 1,052,564,176	\$ 1,124,885	1.06871
2007	\$ 1,091,157,339	\$ 1,177,877	1.07948
2008	\$ 1,186,819,592	\$ 1,222,112	1.02974
2009	\$ 1,213,942,826	\$ 1,263,304	1.04066
2010	\$ 1,236,770,856	\$ 1,291,116	1.04394
2011	\$ 1,203,903,152	\$ 1,316,121	1.09321
2012	\$ 1,198,872,361	\$ 1,333,681	1.11245
2013	\$ 1,196,549,840	\$ 1,361,749	1.13809
2014		\$ 1,375,366	

District 21			
Tax Year	District 21 Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
1995			
1996			
1997			
1998			
1999			
2000	\$ 641,849,631	\$ 1,675,694	1.26107
2001	\$ 1,353,954,616	\$ 1,776,070	1.13117
2002	\$ 1,388,236,279	\$ 1,830,822	1.13188
2003	\$ 1,465,509,544	\$ 2,055,591	1.14026
2004	\$ 1,552,167,687	\$ 2,143,907	1.13812
2005	\$ 2,060,714,210	\$ 2,930,775	1.14222
2006	\$ 2,170,052,698	\$ 3,116,528	1.14361
2007	\$ 3,618,050,770	\$ 4,968,632	1.37329
2008	\$ 3,941,045,013	\$ 5,220,978	1.32477
2009	\$ 4,003,531,394	\$ 5,162,114	1.28939
2010	\$ 4,038,474,500	\$ 5,272,793	1.30564
2011	\$ 3,705,268,457	\$ 5,375,067	1.45065
2012	\$ 3,612,366,885	\$ 5,224,618	1.44631
2013	\$ 3,562,281,339	\$ 5,149,856	1.44566
2014		\$ 5,150,000	

District 4 Combined Property & Bond Levies 2012			
Tax Year	Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
2012	\$ 1,198,872,361	\$ 1,333,681	1.11245
2012	\$ 1,323,277,166	\$ 245,000	0.18514
	Total	\$ 1,578,681	1.29759

District 21 Combined Property & Bond Levies 2012			
Tax Year	Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
2012	\$ 3,612,366,885	\$ 5,224,618.00	1.44631
2012	\$ 3,632,266,781	\$ 195,000.00	0.05368
	Total	\$ 5,419,618.00	1.49999

District 4 Combined Property & Bond Levies 2013			
Tax Year	Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
2013	\$ 1,196,549,840	\$ 1,361,791	1.13809
2013	\$ 1,323,154,193	\$ 245,000	0.18516
	Total	\$ 1,606,791	1.32325

District 21 Combined Property & Bond Levies 2013			
Tax Year	Assessed Valuation	Levy Amount	Rate
2013	\$ 3,562,281,339	\$ 5,149,857.00	1.44631
2013	\$ 3,588,690,003	\$ 195,000.00	0.05368
	Total	\$ 5,344,857.00	1.49999

District 21 Bonds	<u>Principle</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
• Purchase Andgar Property	415,000	121,975	117,130
• Remodel Sta. 71 (Lynden)	185,000	68,000	70,085
• 3-Engines & Ladder Truck	1,311,523	<u>242,335</u>	<u>242,335</u>
	Total	432,310	429,550
District 4 Bonds	<u>Principle</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>
• Station 12 Campus	1,380,000	222,820*	222,820*
• 2006 Dash Pumper	-0-	60,211	-0-
• 2006 Dash Balloon Pmt due Sept.		142,033	30,925
• 2009 Pierce Wildland Engine	-0-	<u>34,975</u>	<u>-0-</u>
	Total	460,039	253,745

* Denotes Tax Payer approved Bonds

Station Signage: All NWFR have been modified to showcase the NWFR logo and station numbers. Signs have also been strategically placed around the District 4 area alerting the community to when they were entering the District 4 response area.

Facilities Inventory: It was agreed to sell Custer Station 64 and Lynden Station 71. The district has signed with realtor Jeff Johnson of Windemere.

TRAINING

Captain Noonchester reviewed the process for how a volunteer is accepted into the department.

- Interest card
- Informative group meeting
- Written test
- Physical agility course
- Oral board interview
- Background investigation
- Drug screening
- Driver abstract
- Offer and commitment

Captain Noonchester noted that in 2013, out of the 128 interest cards that had been turned in, 57 attended the informational meeting, 24 took the written test, 20 passed the test, and at the end of the process 7 potential members made the final cut.

These volunteers will have a choice of which recruit academy (4 months beginning in September) and EMT training (220 hours beginning in January 2014) to attend. During their probationary year all volunteers will be stationed at Britton Loop Station 12. In addition, all volunteers will be assigned to a specific shift and provided a mentor. Following their probationary year the volunteers will be allowed to work at various stations on a variety of shifts.

Volunteers are also required to make a time and financial commitment to the district. They will be required to pay one half of their training up front which will be reimbursed after 12 months of service. Chief Anderson further noted that although North Whatcom Fire and Rescue is the first department to follow this process, other departments are expected to follow suit.

FACILITIES / VOLUNTEERS

Chief Anderson reviewed the discussion the group had in 2012 regarding the ISO rating and unmanned volunteer stations. Since the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau assigns ratings to stations based on the number of firefighters (not EMS) that respond from a station and not the response time, the goal had been to assign both career and volunteers to stations based on their home addresses.

At this time the district is in the process of collaborating with the City of Lynden to assign six qualified volunteers who live in the Northwood Station 72 area within a five mile radius to respond to calls from both agencies. Volunteers assigned to Northwood Station 72 will be responsible for the upkeep of the building, equipment as well as yard maintenance. Chief Anderson expects to see similar results with the seven other volunteer stations sometime in the future.

Chief Anderson requested input regarding how to get recruit firefighters operating out of the volunteer stations. Due to the square miles of the response area Chief Anderson noted that the district cannot operate on the four fulltime career fire stations alone and volunteer participation is crucial. Regardless of the many foreseeable challenges, Chief Anderson's objective is to return the district to the spirit of volunteering by facilitating a program which allows volunteers to utilize pagers and respond from home. There was additional discussion regarding enticing volunteers to live in and respond from Semiahmoo Station 62 and Smith Rd. Station 13. In addition, the full time career firefighters may be responsible for training volunteers responding from volunteer stations nearest their location in the near future.

Chief Anderson discussed various reasons why individuals volunteer:

- Career
- Self-fulfilling, gratifying, rewarding
- Sense of community and pride
- Prestige, stature, standing, notoriety

Other questions that Chief Anderson posed to the group included:

- What can we do better to engage our current volunteers?
- How do we entice more volunteers to join our ranks?

INJURIES AND ILLNESS

Kelly Freeman reported on the districts' injury and illnesses. There were thirteen injuries, one illness and two exposures documented so far in 2013.

Kelly noted that the three cancer illnesses the district has dealt with in the past two years are linked directly to firefighting. Kelly added that the district has had a very low

number of injuries when compared to other agencies. Kelly reviewed firefighter cancer facts with the group.

Kelly reviewed various reasons as to why firefighters get cancer:

- Firefighters working in overhaul without an SCBA
- Proudly wearing dirty and contaminated turnout gear and helmets
- Diesel exhaust, a recognized carcinogen, still contaminates many fire stations, apparatus bays as well as living, sleeping and eating quarters
- Many firefighters have only one set of gear which means they are re-contaminated from previous fires
- Bunker gear is stored in apparatus bays where it is bathed in diesel exhaust
- Bunker gear goes unwashed for months even after significant fires
- Transferring contaminated gear in personal vehicles

Kelly noted that the 2012 overtime costs due to two illnesses could have easily reached \$49,000. This included only surgery preparation, surgery and recovery sick dates but not any follow up physician visits. This district did an amazing job of covering overtime by utilizing sick time, acting officers, browning down stations and utilizing the training captain and as a result, little overtime was incurred.

Kelly reviewed how labor and industries cost rate hikes occur. Overall Kelly noted that NWFR has lower rates however due to the recent illnesses rates are expected to climb significantly in 2015-2017.

Kelly reiterated that as a whole the district will provide additional education, screenings, awareness and prevention. A positive place to start includes:

- Diesel exhaust capture systems – Birch Bay Station 63 in dire need (NFPA 1500 chapter 9)
- Extractors– bunker gear cleaning – can be expensive to retrofit older stations (Laurel Station 69 and Britton Loop Station 12 have older, smaller extractors)
- Consistent station cleaning – Apparatus decontamination
- Cancer awareness training - will become part of quarterly training

Kelly encouraged the group to watch “The Game Changer” a video about cancer in the fire service, currently available on You Tube

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7_nJDErPg

Chief Anderson reported on a study that followed firefighters’ cancer rates over a thirty year time span. Even though the fire service hires the healthiest and fittest firefighters, they were dying at twice the rate of the general public (cancer deaths). The results were attributed to the carcinogens that firefighters are exposed to during a fire.

2013 BUDGET

Benita presented the reconciled budget vs. the actual information from January to August 2013.

Benita reviewed the Capital Projects expenditures for 2013

- Budgeted - \$107,800.00
- Year to date expenditures - \$81,994.71
- Non-budgeted/approved by commissioners capital expenditures - \$56,000.00 (Laurel Station 69 upgrade)
- Year to date expenditures of non-budgeted capital expenditures - \$57,892.95 (total spent on Laurel Station 69 upgrade)

Chief Anderson reviewed the approved capital projects expenditures that have yet to be completed in 2013:

- 12 sets of bunker gear - \$22,000.00
- Replace tower stairs at Birch Bay Station 63

Benita reviewed the list of known increased expenses for 2014

- Labor and Industries - \$15,738.18
- Step up wages – firefighters/lieutenant - \$22,732.11
- Dispatch fees - \$27,500.00
- Healthcare – unknown at this time

Benita reviewed the reconciled fund balances as of August 2013.

Given the limited funding we are facing and the rising expenses in 2014, Chief Anderson pointed out that the district will need to continue to be fiscally frugal.

OPERATIONS

Chief Swobody provided his personal fire service background information and gave an overview of his responsibilities as the division chief of operations.

Chief Swobody provided a demonstration of how all of the scheduling software functions.

Chief Swobody discussed how he connects with both career and volunteer personnel on a daily basis. Some of his daily office tasks include dealing with the public as well as working closely with all other divisions. Chief Swobody is responsible for the yearly operations budget. He meets with a multitude of capital project committees before bringing the needs to the Fire Chief and the Board. Chief Swobody works with a plethora of organizations and attends multiple meetings on a daily basis.

Chief Swobody reviewed some of the events that the district is involved with including the Northwest Washington Lynden fair, Lynden Safety Fair, Lynden Tractor Show, Birch Bay Polar Bear Swim, football games, holiday events, parades and the Blaine and Birch Bay 4th of July events.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT/FIRE MARSHAL

Chief Hollander provided an overview of his responsibilities as division chief of support services and fire marshal.

Chief Hollander educated the group on the districts network. Two main frame computers, one located at Laurel Station 69 and Britton Loop Station 12 are mirror images of each other that the district accesses automatically if there is a power outage.

Chief Hollander explained that fiber cable consists of a glass tube connecting two locations with no breaks that provides unlimited speed and bandwidth. Fiber provides department integrity and system security. There are five stations connected with fiber cables. In addition, the telephone, alarm and video system are also run through the fiber cable.

Chief Hollander noted that all software programs require annual licensing, and constant updates to be effective. The Support Services division is also in charge of the two district websites, face book pages and NWFR's twitter account.

Chief Hollander oversees the district maintenance shop which consists of two full time mechanics and one part time apprentice. Both mechanics have multiple accreditations that no other mechanics have in Whatcom County. The shop is responsible for servicing a number of apparatus as well as other district equipment.

Chief Hollander reviewed the many responsibilities that go along with the upkeep of the districts' facilities. Currently, the district holds two rental agreements with the Semiahmoo Resort Association and the Whatcom County Sheriff's department. Five video monitoring cameras have been positioned at the career stations to assist with the managing of thirteen stations from one location. Chief Hollander would like to see more monitors added in the future.

Chief Hollander reviewed the updated computer request form. Items ranging from office supplies, uniforms or maintenance can be requested from the districts' extranet website.

Chief Hollander is in charge of the numerous means of communicating within and outside the district including the telephone system, pagers, cell phones, data cards and multiple types of radios.

Chief Hollander reviewed some committees that he is part of or attends on a regular basis.

In closing, Chief Hollander provided a brief demonstration of the automatic vehicle locator (AVL) mobile map. AVLs are located in all district first-out rigs. Fire District 7 and the City of Lynden fire department vehicles can also be located on our district's AVL. In addition, rural water sources and hydrants are indicated on the maps.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

It was agreed to move the retreat date back to a Saturday in September so more members could attend and pick the retreat date earlier in the year so everyone would have sufficient advance notice.

Chief Anderson stated that is important as an organization to take time once a year to look back see where we've been and where we're headed in the upcoming year making

sure that everyone is on the same page. The organization continues to look at ways to be fiscally responsible and save money while maintain quality fire and rescue services.

Chairman Neal appreciated the effort everyone contributed to the retreat and enjoyed the more streamlined format.

NWFR Chairman Salter thanked the presenters and Chief Anderson for being fiscally responsible over the past year.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

ATTEST:

Mary Beth Neal, Chairwoman

Kris Parks, Board Secretary