

**Whatcom County Fire District #4
Whatcom County Fire District #21
Station 61 – Blaine
9408 Odell Street, Blaine WA 98230
1:00 pm
April 18, 2019
Joint Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting**

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Bosman called the joint Whatcom County Fire District #21 and Whatcom County Fire District #4 Board of Fire Commissioners meeting for April 18, 2019 to order at 1:03 p.m. at Station 61 – 9408 Odell Street, Blaine, WA 98230.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Attendees: Chairman Rich Bosman; Vice-Chairman Bruce Ansell; Commissioners Larry McPhail, Dean Berkeley and John Crawford; Interim Fire Chief Joe Noonchester; Division Chiefs Henry Hollander and Jason Van der Veen; Attorney Rich Davis.

District 4 attendees: Chairwoman Mary Beth Neal and Commissioner Harry Andrews
District 4 Commissioner Anna Mellilo arrived at 1:06 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

1. Meeting Minutes
 - a) March 21, 2019
Staff Reports – Chiefs / Operations / Training / Technical Support
2. Financial Report / Revenue
 - a) Total Revenue – March \$398,394.69
 - b) Total Expenditures – April \$717,455.57
3. Voucher / Payroll / Benefits
 - a) NWFR Employees Direct Deposit Payroll: \$294,249.16
 - b) Non-Direct Payroll: \$110.36
 - c) Benefits Voucher: \$352,298.08
 - d) Monthly Expenditure Vouchers: \$65,458.51
 - e) Capital Projects Voucher: \$2,308.30
 - f) Capital Projects Facilities Voucher: \$5,339.46

Vice-Chairman Ansell requested additional information regarding the City of Bellingham auto aid response monthly report (number, transports and response times) for Britton Loop Station 12.

Chief Van der Veen noted that Laurel Station 69 also responds into the City of Bellingham.

Vice-Chairman Ansell requested information regarding the number of times the Bellingham Fire Department responds into District 21's area.

Chief Van der Veen will continue to work on providing a more detailed and germane report.

Chief Van der Veen reported that as a result of the auto aid agreement, (area just north of Smith Rd. through District 4's area) the district is meeting the NFPA requirements for the number of firefighters on scene at a structure fire, for the first time ever.

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

NWFR FIRE COMMISSIONER MONTHLY REPORTS

- **Train Derailment Exercise Meeting:** Commissioner Berkeley attended and reported on an upcoming train derailment exercise which will take place on October 14, 2019. The exercise will include a train derailment and hazardous release which will include multiple agencies on both sides of the border.
- **Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Meeting:** Vice-Chairman Ansell recently met with retired Fire Chief Redding of Snohomish County Fire District 1, who provided valuable information and experience regarding RFAs.

Chief Redding noted that the district should ask three questions before moving forward with exploring an RFA.

- What is the cost savings to the district?
- What is the cost containment between involved agencies?
- Will a RFA provide value added service?

Other suggestions from Chief Redding include:

- The fewer parties at the table initially, the more focused the group. (3 people each agency)
- Keep a log of all questions and respond to all.
- Involve city officials that may be involved (Ferndale / Blaine)
- Hire a RFA consultant
 - Karen Reid was recommended
 - Vice-Chairman Ansell will follow up

While eager to share his knowledge, Chief Redding is not interested in sitting on a RFA committee at this time.

IAFF LOCAL 106 MONTHLY REPORT

- Lt. Leslee Smith reported that the Benevolent Committee recently presented six \$500 scholarships to area high school seniors. Two recipients were from Blaine, one of which is Commissioner McPhail's granddaughter. Congratulations to all the students.

LEGAL ISSUES

- Nothing to report.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- **Master Plan:** Chief Noonchester reported that the district has sent out three and received one Request for Qualifications (RFQ) from consulting agencies as requested by the Board during the March 21 meeting. The RFQ was sent out on April 1 with a deadline of April 30.

All RFQs will be reviewed before a final decision is made. Chief Noonchester will provide a conclusion.

- **Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA):** Chief Van der Veen noted that the Scott SCBA manufacturer is coming out with a 2018 update, most likely in the fall, which will affect costs. At this time, the SCBA committee will continue to refine the bid spec. Chief Van der Veen expects to have more information in the next couple of months.
- **Ground Emergency Medical Transportation Program (GEMT) Update:** Chief Noonchester noted that the district did receive notification that the first reimbursement (*for partial year only*) is expected sometime in April. Chief Noonchester is not aware of the amount of the reimbursement. Chief Noonchester will update the Board as soon as the reimbursement is received.

NEW BUSINESS

- **Interlocal Agreement for Fire and Emergency Services:** Chief Noonchester presented a slide show regarding the past, present and possible future of the consolidation between the districts.

Contract for Services (2011)

- Blended staffing both line and administration
- Blended resources including tools, equipment and buildings
- Budgets have been integrated over past eight years
- Future planning has been as one agency

Milestones

- Created a new staffing model – from days to 24 hours (D4)

- Eliminated apparatus debt (D4)
- Developed a class “A” burn tower operations / policy and procedure
- Permanent EMS levy (D4)
- Upgraded several safety systems at Station 12 including the SCBA filling station
- Sold an easement at Station 13
- City of Bellingham annexed the Trickle Creek area – received three years mitigation (D4)
- Two fire chiefs and an interim fire chief
- New Fire Commissioners and Board Chair
- Automatic aid agreement with the City of Bellingham
- NWFR increased staffing to three person engine company at Station 12
- City of Bellingham annexed more of their urban growth area (UGA) – received three years of mitigation (D4)

Current Agreements

- D4 / D21 Interlocal agreement for services (2011)
- Interlocal agreement for use of the training facility in exchange for Bakerview / James Street coverage (City of Bellingham)
- Automatic aid agreement with the City of Bellingham
- Mitigation agreement with the City of Bellingham – terminates in 2023

Next Steps

Chief Noonchester urged both Boards to discuss the next steps which may or may not include a full merger, separation of the districts, RFA, D4 join another agency, levy lid lifts by either district and additional funding sources.

Crossroads

Chief Noonchester noted that the mitigation payments by the City of Bellingham terminate in 2023. Both districts will need to consider terminating the automatic agreement with the City of Bellingham or reducing staffing at Station 12 to two.

Chief Noonchester noted that the remaining District 4 area within the City of Bellingham’s UGA is all residential and not as highly sought after.

Commissioners from both D21 and D4 reviewed and discussed the current inter-local agreement for fire and emergency services as required.

District 4 Chairwoman Neal noted that the initial contract for services was signed in 2011 and updated in 2015. District 4 currently pays twenty five percent of the D21 annual budget (changes year to year). The agreement auto renews in five year increments unless contested by either Board.

Due to the dwindling tax base (annexations) District 4 Chairwoman Neal noted that in the future D4 may not be able to make the payments. Currently the Bellingham Fire Department is utilizing the Britton Loop Station 12 training

grounds free of charge, in trade for responding to the Bakerview / James St area. The agreement will expire in 2019 and D4 may be able to charge its use in the future.

There was discussion regarding what might happen if D4 cannot make the contract payment once the City of Bellingham no longer pays the district mitigation fees in 2023 and the D21's budget continues to escalate. The D4 Board is considering ways to bring in more revenue. At this time District 4 is able to make the contract for services payment for 2019 without dipping into reserves.

There was discussion regarding how the twenty five percent payment was initially agreed upon. Vice-Chairman Ansell noted that the payment makes sense considering that D21 has three and D4 one career station. Each station has the same personnel, on duty officers, a fire chief and administrative support. District 4 Commissioner Mellilo noted since the recent annexations, D4 is comprised of all residential, while D21 has some commercial, giving them the ability to collect more tax dollars. Suggestions include recalculating the payment percentage, investigating forming a RFA, selling the Smith Rd Station 13 and/or Agate Bay Station 11.

There was discussion how and why North Whatcom Fire and Rescue was originally formed by Districts 3, 13, Point Roberts (eventually dropped out) and the City of Blaine (primarily volunteer fire departments). The departments were receiving so many calls that the current volunteers were unable to respond, so the departments came together out of necessity and to improve services. Once formed, the first nine career firefighters were hired.

Both Boards discussed if a future RFA is right for both D4 and D21, either together or with other agencies. It was agreed that a master plan conducted sometime this year will identify what is best for both districts together or separately.

A copy of the agreement will be sent to legal to update and make certain parts clearer before having both Boards re-sign the agreement.

- **Volunteer / Volunteer Resident Program:** Commissioner Crawford relayed an email from a potential volunteer who was interested in the districts' volunteer and resident programs. The potential volunteer was told via email that the district no longer had either program. Commissioner Crawford will forward the email to Chief Noonchester who will conduct an investigation and provide updated information before the next meeting.

Chief Noonchester noted that recently the district set up a brand new resident program at Semiahmoo Station 62. Several individuals were interested in the program but dropped out suddenly, leaving the program currently without

volunteers. Some of the drawbacks with the program include the distance from fire service programs, specifically at Skagit College.

Chief Hollander noted that the previous resident program (6 or 7 years), included four residents who resided at Semiahmoo Station 62 for approximately eight months. One by one the residents were hired as career firefighters either by the district or other agency. In addition, the program takes a considerable amount of staff time to manage.

- **Resolution 2019-03 Surplus Mobile Data Computers:** Chief Hollander noted that these computers that were placed in all first out apparatus were replaced by newer computers via a grant. The mobile data computers have no cash value and will be recycled.

MOTION: Vice-Chairman Ansell moved to approve Resolution 2019-03 Surplus Mobile Data Computers. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Berkeley and approved 5-0.

- **Resolution 2019-04 Surplus Ford Tender:** Chief Van der Veen noted that the cost to repair the tender is as much as the entire tender maintenance budget for the year. The tender will be sold via the public surplus auction website. Currently the district has an additional seven tenders to serve the district.

MOTION: Commissioner Berkeley moved to approve Resolution 2019-04 Surplus Ford Tender. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Crawford and approved 5-0.

- **Levy Lid Lift:** after spending time at both the assessor's and auditor's office this week, Chief Noonchester provided information regarding finding alternative funding sources for the district.
 - A levy lid lift would continue to maintain the current level of service for the community.
 - Need simple majority to pass
 - In 2018 the district levy was at \$1.31 per \$1,000. The max levy rate is \$1.50, which would add approximately \$800,000 to the D21 revenue.
 - To keep election costs down, the auditor recommends the district utilizes the general rather than the primary election.
 - Chief Noonchester hopes to widen the gap between the operations and staffing expenses as well as provide better services to the community and enhance some of the current programs.
 - Primary election deadline is May 10 (\$30,000 - \$40,000 estimated election costs)
 - General election deadline is August 6 (\$2,000 - \$4,000 estimated election costs)

Vice-Chairman Ansell cautioned the Board regarding running a levy lid lift alongside the County EMS levy, noting that in his opinion, the district would not be as successful.

Chairman Bosman noted that a completed master plan should indicate whether the district moves forward with a levy lid lift, making it easier to sell it to constituents. In addition, if the district waits until next year, they may also know the D4 Boards' intentions regarding a continued consolidation, RFA or merger.

Attorney Rich Davis stated that the district would need a simple majority to pass a levy lid lift.

Chief Hollander further noted that during D4's EMS levy a consultant was hired to provide recommendations to successfully pass the levy.

The Board agreed to think about moving forward with a levy lid lift.

Vice-Chairman Ansell further noted that the Board should keep in mind that the district will be receiving reimbursement through GEMT.

In addition, Chief Noonchester noted that the County is committed to updating the aging communications system through the county. Each individual district will be expected to pay some sort of payment, which is yet to be determined.

POLICIES & PROCEDURE

- **0500.0007 Travel Expense:** Chief Noonchester noted that the district is changing their per diem rates to match the states' annual rates.

Current rates

- Breakfast - \$14.00
- Lunch - \$16.00
- Dinner - \$25.00

MOTION: Commissioner Crawford moved to approve Policy 0500.0007 Travel Expense. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Berkeley and approved 5-0.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Northern Light Article re: TriVan
- Email from Danuta Morrison re: CPR classes
- From Richard Smith re: Thank you for services
- From J. T. Miller re: Thank you for services
- The Responder: District newsletter, April issue

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **May Board Meeting Attendance Query:** All Commissioners are expected to attend the May 16 meeting with the exception of Commissioner Crawford who is unsure at this time.
- **Meet and Greet:** A district and community Meet and Greet will be held at Odell Station 61 in Blaine on Monday, April 29 from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. to welcome the newly hired Fire Marshal Herschel Rostov.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- None

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

- Oath of Office
- Interlocal Agreement for Fire and Emergency Services
- Master Plan
- Ground Emergency Medical Transportation Program (GEMT)
- Levy Lid Lift
- Firefighter Resignation
- Entry Level Firefighter Process

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Following a five minute break Chairman Bosman 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.”*

at 2:35 p.m. for approximately ten minutes until 2:46 p.m. Interim Fire Chief Joe Noonchester, Division Chiefs Henry Hollander, Jason Van der Veen, District 4 Commissioners Mary Beth Neal, Harry Andrews and Anna Mellilo and Attorney Rich Davis remained for the executive session.

MEETING RECONVENED

Chairman Bosman called the regular meeting back into open session at 2:46 p.m. Action will be taken as a result of the executive session.

- **Fire Marshal Working Agreement:** Chairman Bosman noted that there will be some changes to the proposed chief / fire marshal contract.

MOTION: Chairman Bosman moved to approve the Fire Marshal Working Agreement subject to legal review and suggested changes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McPhail and approved 3-0.

SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: There being no further business Commissioner Crawford moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:54 p.m. The motion was seconded by Vice- Chairman Ansell and approved 5-0.

Submitted by: Jennie Sand, Recording Secretary

ATTEST:

Mary Beth Neal, Chairman

Anna Melillo, Commissioner

Harry Andrews, Commissioner

Kris Parks, Board Secretary