

**SOUTH WHIDBEY
FIRE/EMS
SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD WORKSHOP
5579 Bayview Road, Langley,
Washington
July 23rd, 2020 – 7:00 PM**

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/152478637>

Minutes

Attendance via GoTo Meeting: Chairman Mestemacher, Vice Chairman Noblet, Commissioner Metz, Chief Palmer.

In Audience: FF/EMT Robbie Husom, FF/EMT Leah Kalahiki, Deputy Chief Jon Beck, Jim Short, Sherrye Wyatt, 1 unknown caller. Suzi Prentiss joined the Go-To Meeting at 7:10pm.

- I. **Call to Order.** Chairman Mestemacher called the meeting to order at 7:00p.m.

- II. **Board Workshop: Public Questions and Answers concerning the District Levy Lid Lift request.**

Chief Palmer asked the audience to please mute all microphones during the meeting. Chief Palmer then opened the floor to audience questions and comments.

Citizen Jim Short stated that the lid lift request seems like a large tax increase, and asked what the tax increase will pay for?

Chief Palmer stated that in the District's history, we have only asked for a levy increase in 2012, due to money lost in the 2008-2010 market downturn. We are asking for an increase at this time due to our aging apparatus, as well as hiring full-time firefighters. We are wearing our volunteers out as well as seeing a decline in the number of volunteers. We have hired part-time firefighters to offset volunteers being able to respond to calls during their daytime jobs, but these part-time firefighters only work day shifts, 7am-7pm. Chief Palmer's goal is to staff one engine 24/7.

Chief Palmer stated that home insurance premiums increased this year in part because of lack of staffing, and also in part because of aging apparatus. One requirement of the Washington State Rating Bureau (WSRB) is to have six full-time staff at all times. The District currently has 4 part-time Firefighters during the day, and one Duty Officer (a Chief Officer) at all times. 3 Volunteers during the day being able to respond makes up for the 6th position. During the night, when no part-time firefighters are employed, the District would need to have the equivalent of 15 volunteers able to respond to make up for the lack of full-time firefighters. The District does not have this availability with the volunteers. The goal is to staff one engine 24/7, to give the volunteers some relief, and to be better staffed for response for the District's citizens.

Chief Palmer stated that we also got a hit on our aging fleet of apparatus. The WSRP requires Districts to replace their apparatus every 15 years to maintain their current rating. Based on the maintenance program that Chief Beck has put together, our oldest fire apparatus is 23 years old and is working well, but unfortunately that worked against us during our rating audit with the WSRB.

Chief Palmer stated that of the 30 cents per one thousand dollars assessed, approximately 23 cents of that levied amount will go to staffing costs; the remaining 7 cents will go toward the Capital Fund for apparatus purchases.

Chief Palmer received a phone call today from another citizen with questions regarding the new station and why it was needed. He explained that this building has been in the process to be built since 2008. Ideally, we would have saved the money to fund the station, but that has not been possible. Instead, the District went out for a Bond so that we did not have to raise taxes. We borrowed the money and we can ask for a lesser levy amount for staffing. Formerly, we had no bedrooms available, and because of the new station, we have 12.

Citizen Jim Smith asked - how do we compare with other communities as far as size and budget?

Chief Palmer stated that Camano Fire District is at the maximum levied rate of \$1.50 per one thousand dollars of assessed value, plus an EMS levy. SWFE has the second lowest levied rate in Island County. There are seven other Counties in Washington State that compare in size, appraised valuation, population, and of these seven, we have the lowest levied rate.

Sherrye Wyatt stated that she has had the unique privilege of having to call 9-1-1 and having SWFE arrive, and you cannot put a price on this emergency service when you need it.

There were no additional questions or comments from the public.

Commissioner Metz commented that he saw that North Whidbey Fire/EMS is asking for a 15 cent levy lid lift at the November General Election.

Commissioner Noblet commented that both he and his wife have needed emergency services, and SWFE crews arrived first and they were extremely component. He stated there are so many reasons why the District needs this levy, despite the current economy.

Chairman Mestemacher stated that it was his understanding that this meeting was going to be an informal meeting with no quorum. Chief Palmer requested that if Board members would like to modify meetings, to make a request to the Board Chair and the Chair will call the meeting.

Commissioner Noblet commented that while he was not supposed to originally attend the meeting, he felt it important to hear what citizens' questions were and wanted to be involved.

III. **Conclude.** Commissioner Mestemacher concluded the meeting at 7:29pm.

Sarah Pedersen,
District Secretary