

**SOUTH WHIDBEY
FIRE/EMS
REGULAR MEETING
5579 Bayview Road, Langley,
Washington
March 12th, 2020 – 5:30 PM**

Minutes

Attendance: Chairman Mestemacher (via phone), Vice Chairman Noblet, Commissioner Metz, Chief Palmer.
In Audience: Deputy Chief Jon Beck, Deputy Chief Terry Ney, FF/EMT Robbie Husom, FF/EMT LT. Leah Kalahiki and family, FF/EMT Sean McDougald, FF/EMT Chris Turner, FF/EMT Andrew Agnew, FF Jon Gabelein, FF/EMT Rebekah Pomeroy, Michael Cotton, Gary Gabelein, Vicki Lange. Sherrye Wyatt arrived at 5:55pm. FF/EMT Barry Pomeroy arrived at 6:23pm.

- I. **Call to Order.** Vice Chairman Noblet called the meeting to order at 5:31p.m.
- II. **Pledge of Allegiance.**
- III. **Approval of Agenda.** No motion was made.
- IV. **Public Input.** –

Craig Cyr expressed appreciation to the Board and staff for constructing an ordinance to pass the ban on fireworks within the City of Langley.

- V. **Consent Agenda** - All matters listed within the Consent Agenda have been distributed to each member of South Whidbey Fire/EMS's Board of Commissioners for reading and study. They are considered to be routine, and will be enacted by one motion of the Commissioners with no separate discussion. If separate discussion is desired, that item may be removed from the Consent Agenda and placed on the Regular Agenda by request.
 - a. Approval of Minutes
 - i. Regular Meeting on February 13th, 2020
 - ii. Special Meeting on February 24th, 2020
 - b. Finance Officer's Reports –
 - c. Monthly Vouchers— \$216,109.74

Commissioner Metz made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda; Vice Chairman Noblet seconded.

- VI. **Unfinished Business** –
 - a. **Bayview Fire Station Update.** Chief Palmer stated that we are very close to being done with the building. We recently discovered water puddling in the basement; Valdez came out and found a conduit coming from the upper training grounds into the basement that was not capped. It was fixed today. Vice Chairman Noblet asked if we were still looking into an acoustic system for the training room; Chief Palmer stated that the architect is still checking into which of two systems would allow for installation around the sprinkler system.

We are waiting on L&I to issue a retainage release certification, which will take another 30-60 days to receive. Once received, the District will provide the final retainage check to Valdez Construction.

- b. Policy Amendment - Policy 101 Board of Fire Commissioners Section 101.13.2 Expenses, offered for second reading.** Chief Palmer read the potential policy change aloud. Vice Chairmen stated that the policy change will help protect the District against lost funds by no-shows, and hold Commissioners accountable to their commitments.

Commissioner Metz made a motion to approve the amendment as written; Chairman Mestemacher second. Motion carried unanimously.

- c. Discussion about information communications.** Chief Palmer asked the Board for preference on how he and the District Secretary communicate with Board members. The Board members were satisfied with email being the primary form of communication. Vice Chairman Noblet would like a phone call if a last-minute email is being sent.
- d. Assign alternate member to ICOM Board.** After some discussion between the Board members regarding schedules, Vice Chairman Noblet will be the alternate member to the ICOM Board.

VII. New Business –

- a. Resolution 2020-06 Closing 2019 Budget.** Chief Palmer explained that every year we record final fund balances in a resolution. Vice Chairman Noblet made a motion to approve Resolution 2020-06; Commissioner Metz seconded. Motion carried.
- b. Resolution 2020-07 Finalizing 2020 Budget.** Commissioner Metz made a motion to approve Resolution 2020-07; Chairman Mestemacher seconded. Motion carried.
- c. Resolution 2020-08 Warrant Cancellation.** Commissioner Metz made a motion to approve Resolution 2020-08, Chairman Mestemacher seconded. Motion carried.
- d. COVID-19 Response planning update.** Chief Palmer stated that we are monitoring what’s going on in the region on nearly an hourly basis. We have passed around a “pandemic plan” to all District members. Chief Palmer has also been working on a financial crisis plan for the past six months. Island County has 4 confirmed cases of the novel virus, and we have received notification today that South Whidbey School District will be closed until April 24th. We are making greater efforts to sanitize all surfaces, and Chief Beck has done a great job at locating critically needed supplies for the District.

Vice Chairman Noblet thanked the first responders in taking a great risk while responding to calls.

- e. Public Hearing - Proposed Levy Increase.**

Chief Palmer recommended to the Board a thirty cent lid lift, raising the total levy to ninety-five cents per \$1000 assessed property value. .23 (twenty three cents) of this will go to staffing, .7 (seven cents) would go to aging apparatus replacement. Chief Palmer presented a PowerPoint highlighting the following:

- 2020 anticipated revenues
- Levy rate change from 1990-2020
- Levy rate by Island County District
- 2012-2020 Operational expenses
- Comparison of AV, CPI and allowed annual increase to taxation
- 2003-2019 Grant history
- Population within the District

- Average age of District population in 2019
- 1990-2019 Call volume history
- Call volume and number of responders
- Levy increase revenue projection
- Levy increase impact to property owners
- SWFE apparatus replacement date
- Potential staffing plan

Chief Palmer stated that the District does have one apparatus chassis in the budget for this year. When asked about what inspections the current apparatus goes through, Chief Beck stated that all apparatus have a full 1911 inspection performed, which takes 1-3 days each to perform a bumper-to-bumper inspection. Last year they were sent to Flying Wrench in Kingston, WA, as it is challenging to find a local vendor to perform these.

Vice Chairman Noblet opened the floor to public input.

Chief Palmer presented a printed email from a local resident to the Board. It states that the resident will not vote for a .30 cent lid lift, but would vote for a .15 cent lid lift.

Citizen Rebekah Pomeroy - Mrs. Pomeroy, a volunteer firefighter of SWFE, stated that she recommends the District request the max levy. Mrs. Pomeroy works for a Fire District off-island. She would like citizens to understand that EMS levies are only benefiting the hospital, not fire Districts. When we speak to friends and neighbors in the community, we need to reiterate what the funds will actually go to. Being in the fire service, she understands actual costs of fire Districts. To outfit a firefighter, the initial cost is around \$5,000.00.

Citizen Dave Hardesty - Mr. Hardesty stated that he doesn't believe the District is asking for enough money. He asks if the proposed lid lift is enough to affect our rating with WSRP? What is the return on the levy lid lift investment?

Mr. Hardesty read the strategic plan on the website. Mr. Hardesty asks - how are we going to hire more people when the last time we hired more firefighters, we lost half of our volunteers? It is Mr. Hardesty's opinion that the District ask for more than a thirty cent lid lift, so that we do not have to ask for another lid lift in 5-6 years. He stated that we haven't replaced apparatus in quite a while, and the District should ask for more to cover those expenses.

Chief Palmer replied to Mr. Hardesty stating that one of the reasons for the dock in insurance rating was that the District does not own a ladder truck. If a ladder truck was purchased, it would have to have its own firefighter shift 24/7. The total investment would cost upwards of \$3 million, including personnel.

Chief Palmer also stated that we did lose about 30% of our volunteers during the recession in 2008. Since 2011, we have recruited 112 volunteers, and have kept about 41. A major factor in lack of volunteers within the District is the age group that resides here.

Chief Palmer also wanted to be sure the audience understood that the term "the max" means a levy lid lift of \$1.50 per \$1000 assessed property tax value; we are currently at .65 (sixty-five) cents per thousand assessed. "The max" would mean more than double our current levy rate.

Citizen Allan Murray - Mr. Murray stated that he has worked at Snohomish County before retirement, and previously worked with several fire inspectors. Ladder trucks are more used in urban areas and the justification for ladder trucks would be due to higher concentration of larger buildings. Mr. Murray stated that Chief Palmer did a good job and explaining the District's needs, and would like to ask Chief Palmer if it is our goal to become a solely career department?

Chief Palmer replied stating no, he would like to maintain a combination department with volunteer staffing, and that volunteers still provide great resources.

Citizen Barry Pomeroy - Mr. Pomeroy works on the mainland and has 28 years of firefighting/EMS experience, and is a volunteer at SWFE. Mr. Pomeroy stated that the slides indicate that we are hoping to have 24/7 staffing, does this include weekends?

Chief Palmer stated that is likely.

Mr. Pomeroy stated that he would like to see an engine staff of four firefighters continue. His concern is “second out” cases, where a second emergency call comes in while the crew is already out on a call. Mr. Pomeroy would like the District to consider additional staffing above the four person crew. Mr. Pomeroy would also encourage the District to take a look at the cost of living on South Whidbey and what it costs to keep a family here.

Citizen Gary Gabelein - Mr. Gabelein is a former volunteer, and when he started, there were 100 firefighters on the roster. Mr. Gabelein would like to discuss manpower; during his tenure at the District, a volunteer’s full-time job would let them leave to respond to calls, and that just doesn’t happen anymore. Mr. Gabelein stated that a firefighter’s worst nightmare is dragging someone out of a fire because they did not respond in time, and the only way to save lives is to have paid career staff. You cannot put a dollar sign on lives.

Vice Chairman Noblet asked for any additional public input. Public input is closed.

Chief Palmer stated that the public input was some really great information received, and thanked the audience. Vice Chairman Noblet asked Chief Palmer when the drop dead date to be on the August primary election ballot; Chief Palmer said May 8th.

Commissioner Metz stated that he appreciates all of the feedback, as well as the time that Chief Palmer spent putting together the presentation, and we have some time to deliberate how much of a lid lift we would like to request.

Vice Chairman Noblet stated that there have been some concerns about the District wanting to convert to having career firefighters only with no volunteers, but that would not happen. He would like to see more options before committing to a lid lift amount.

Chief Palmer notified the Board that he would like to have a decision made by the first week of April, as to give time to our attorney to draft the appropriate resolution for the lid lift.

- f. **Resolution 2020-09 Levy Lid Lift.** After some discussion, the Board will be tabling Resolution 2020-09 Levy Lid Lift.

VIII. **Announcements:** None.

IX. **Comments from Commissioners:** None.

X. **Executive Session:** None.

XI. **Action taken as result of Executive Session:** None.

XII. **Conclude.** Vice Chairman Noblet concluded the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

Sarah Pedersen,
District Secretary