

VASHON ISLAND FIRE & RESCUE BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

Minutes

Date: 06/29/2017

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Penny Farcy Training Center – large classroom

SPECIAL MEETING

1 **Present:** Camille Staczek, Chair
2 Brigitte Schran-Brown, Vice-Chair
3 David Hoffmann, Commissioner
4 Candy McCullough, Commissioner
5 Ron Turner, Commissioner
6 Charles H. Krimmert, Fire Chief
7 Susan Wolf, Minute Taker

8 **Absent:** Robert Larsen, Assistant Chief

9 **Guests:** John Staczek, Stan Voynick, Jan Milligan, Doris Paulsen, David Simmons, Peter
10 Wolf, Josh Dueweke, Janet Welt, Ron Smothermon, Daron Buxton, Jason Everett, Don Cheyette
11 and other members of the public.

12 **Amendments to the Agenda**

13 None.

14 **Public Comment and Questions**

15 Chief Krimmert:

- 16 • Over the course of the last several months he has researched and presented a series of
17 State of District overviews: staffing, facilities, fleet, how/what/why of our work and
18 financials with all their conditions and our concerns. We have a reserve of 1.1 million
19 and a small fleet fund due to some income from the ALS transition of \$136,000, which is
20 not a lot considering the cost of these vehicles. We have just opened a facilities fund,
21 which now has a small amount Medic rental income only. An equipment reserve has not
22 yet been started. Of our five fire engines, two are out of service. And another 26-year-
23 old engine is reaching that state. The other two are 16 years old.
- 24 • It is apparent the District has been focused on the day-to-day operations and not looking
25 beyond that. The Chief wanted to take an honest look at state of District and see what
26 would be the best course of action. Today we have choices: do nothing with no levy lid
27 lift. We can stall and ask for a minimum, but that's just kicking the can down the road.
28 Currently we are at 93 cents per \$1,000 assessed value. If we can get a maximum levy
29 lid lift, we would receive an additional 57 cents which would total \$1.50.
- 30 • A levy increase is not everyone's favorite thought right now, after we've been asked for
31 more taxes by the School District and Parks. A current estimate, for example, takes a

32 median house value of \$452,400 (according to the Beachcomber) would result in an
33 annual tax increase of \$258. But this decision (to file for a levy lid lift) is up to the
34 Board. The Chief is focusing more on the risk we're willing to take, then the cost.

- 35 • So the key components were staffing, fleet replacement for an aid care and engine fairly
36 quickly, facilities and the last presentation was statistics.
- 37 • A subject not talked about Tuesday night is that our firefighting capabilities are
38 unpredictable. The Deppman fire is an example of the manpower issues we experience.
39 We did save the structure and insurance will pay for the damage, but it easily could have
40 been a total loss. We are at an all-time low for volunteers, causing us to pay out some
41 overtime. Volunteers sign up when they can around their other jobs. But there are those
42 who will want part-time employment.

43 *Question/Comments from the Public:*

- 44 • How will the District pay for the part-time firefighters? Answer: Chief Krimmert stated
45 that the fee-for transport will not support the entire part-time program but it will get us
46 most of the way there. The District is also working to implement a supplemental
47 payment program like Air Care.
- 48 • What will be the cost of the membership program? The cost is \$75 per year for the entire
49 family.
- 50 • The fee for transports is \$700 transport plus \$15 per mile; total cost could be close to
51 \$1,000 depending on the distance. Patients on Medicaid will not see a bill. Whatever the
52 reimbursement is, that is what the District accepts. If you are a member, you won't be
53 billed the balance. If you are transported ALS (critical care – advanced life support),
54 your EMS levy pays for that service and you won't see a bill.
- 55 • Transfers: The District is not happy with transferring patients at the dock. It is a decision
56 mostly made due to staffing issues. The private ambulance company will bill the patient
57 in those cases. A transport to the hospital takes an aid car and a crew of two out of
58 service for an average of three hours. If there are already two aid cars off island
59 transporting patients, the remaining staff must transfer the patient at the dock, if the
60 patient is BLS (nonlife-threatening – basic life support) so that the Aid car may return to
61 the island. Sometimes they might transfer the patient if it's the last ferry of the night or
62 we are just understaffed.
- 63 • The fire district does not perform inter-facility transports; transports must be a BLS
64 emergency.
- 65 • Minimal staffing for fighting a fire is four, two in the hot zone, two outside. The District
66 is in a difficult situation. The union members are also concerned they are not safe. Two
67 career firefighters and one volunteer on duty (three) are not ideal. It's a difficult
68 situation. Of the 20 on island volunteer responders, nine are EMS, Firefighters or both.
69 Chief Krimmert stated we do have volunteers bringing tenders. We have been in the
70 good graces of both volunteers and career because they are working until exhausted and
71 coming in diligently. The chief, and assistant chief have been responding 24/7. One
72 commissioner volunteers as well. When you see a patient transfer at the dock that means
73 no staff is left on the island.
- 74 • While other Districts may develop non-emergent programs, the cost is \$500,000-
75 \$750,000 a year. EMS levy grants developed those programs, but VIFR does not have
76 that kind of revenue.

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- Transport fees are one little piece of the pie to help start paying for additional staff. For years, we have not charged anyone. We get approximately \$200,000 a year for BLS supplies from the EMS levy, but our costs are far greater.
 - This year we will be \$500,000 deficient. It would have been one million dollars but due to the medic transition and EMS coffers, almost \$500,000 (a one-time amount) was provided to us.
 - The challenge is to engage the community and inform them that when the assessed value jumps, the tax rate drops. Next year we are forecasting it will go from 93 cents (per \$1,000 assessed value) to 82 cents. To the question about an increase in revenue, the chief answered that we would only receive about \$24,000 more – not enough to make up for the deficit without a lid lift.
 - The membership, transport fees and levy are each pieces of the pie.
 - *Comment from Commissioner McCullough:* While she's in agreement with the chief on the need for more revenue, but she wants input from the lower taxing districts such as Parks. She wants to look at big picture, get input from the community and taxing districts and brainstorm financing options. Besides volunteers that respond, we also have other volunteer opportunities such as technical, graphic artists and so on. We have smart people that can figure out how to establish a foundation for equipment or whatever.
 - Strategic planning teams were convened to figure out goals but was not completed.
 - *Comment from Commissioner Schran-Brown:* In order to handle the calls, we need the right number of skilled people on vehicles we have confidence in and with the right equipment. People don't understand what it takes to do that. We have a time-starved culture which doesn't allow many people to volunteer. While she is also worried about the junior taxing districts, the fire district can't survive without more revenue. Without it there will be a loss of lives, loss of property. We have not asked for a levy increase for 25 years. Commissioner Schran-Brown also believes we need the \$1.50 levy.
 - *Chief Krimmert* noted that it is easier to vote "yes" if you're informed, it's easier to vote "no" if you're not.
 - *Comment from the public:* it seems like a choice - save a child or provide enough for parks.
 - *Chief Krimmert commented:* Parks are nice. The assessor's schedule is difficult because they won't have accurate figures for a projection until September or October, but the Board has to file by August. His best guess is that the Parks rate which is at \$49.371 cents will drop to 42 cents. At 1.50 we won't impact them, but there is a wildcard: a flood control tax of 11 cents which may impact parks. Using 2017 numbers, we could go to \$1.47 without hurting them.
 - In the Tri-cities, businesses pay a monthly utility tax to fund ambulance as well as collecting tax and transport fees. Only 8% of property tax is for fire.
 - *Comment from Commissioner Hoffmann:* The District needs personnel and to get staffing levels where we want, we need both the \$1.50 tax levy and transport fees. The District needs to balance its budget and put money in reserves which we can do if we were to be successful in raising the lid lift.
 - *Comment from the public:* It's the Commissioners' job to initiate the approach to the community, develop a program to get the word out. While the administration is working on a mailer, it was suggested we could use Survey Monkey, place short comments on Facebook, put videos in the Vashon Theatre.

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- *Comment from Commissioner McCullough:* At the Commissioner’s meeting on Tuesday, there were a couple of “aha” moments from the public. She requested the public send their ideas to the commissioners via email, phone, letters – in any form – and the District will continue to move forward.
 - *Comment from Stan Voynick:* The chief has shown integrity and recommended that the Board go for it strong. Part of the story to build credibility with the public is answering how we got here – how did we not look far enough down the road? So the public can be assured that the Board and District will not make the same mistake. How are you going to spend the money?
 - *Comment from Commissioner McCullough:* She pointed out that the chief is doing a better level of analysis (for the Board) that they have not seen before.
 - *Comment from Commissioner Staczek:* Part of the problem was that the Board was concerned about spending the community’s money and kept asking the District to tighten its belt. They worked harder, got more volunteers for a time but costs and calls kept going up and up and the gap got larger and larger. Two commissioners have served 10 years, one six, one two years and one is a new commissioner. Everything is getting a fresh and more in-depth look because the former chief retired.
 - *Comment from Commissioner McCullough:* The past six years, we had an administration that showed us a budget that we all approved, but to be honest, it took three years just to learn how to be commissioner. Then we experienced contingencies which required us to move to money around to meet current needs. In 2015, we began a strategic planning process with her, the chiefs and some community members. We were trying to move this direction long term, forming teams to develop a future picture of the district, and then politics got in the way. The medics requested moving back to King County Medic One because they needed more experience and their bosses agreed. Then the medics changed their minds and wanted to stay and the strategic teams didn’t want to answer those questions from the community.
 - *Comment from Chief Krimmert:* When he was undergoing the hiring process he came from an entirely different background, managing massive international projects and handling the money. The other candidates all said they wanted the job because it was the next logical step for their careers. As a project manager, he knew it was bad but not this bad. So the Board hired someone who can manage the District financially. Chief Larsen takes charge of ops and he’s great at it.
 - *Comment from the public:* The Board needs to take a different the path and have the courage to go for the \$1.50. Lesser districts, once they have some concrete figures and Hazel’s estimate, can better figure their outlook, but Parks will not go under.
 - The chief does not want to take something away that the voters love.
 - *Comment from Josh Dueueke:* It’s good the blinders have come off; how much did we spend on the strategic plan with what results. He doesn’t understand why the Board of Commissioners didn’t want to raise the levy when other districts consistently ask for money. His fear is that the majority crowd would like the \$1.50 but the Board doesn’t.
 - *Comment from Ron Smothermon:* Don’t say \$1.50; say it’s an increase of \$0.57 or \$0.68 cents. Then figure out how to communicate it if it doesn’t pass. If you don’t know what you’re voting for, your house could burn down and no one is available to come. Then there’s the safety of the firefighters.
 - *Comment from Doris Paulsen:* How many elderly would get to live at home if they didn’t have the fire district to respond? The District has responded to her elderly parents and they couldn’t stay in their home if the fire district wasn’t there.

171 [Commissioner Turner leaves the room]

- 172 • *Comment from Commissioner Schran-Brown:* Recently Aid55's muffler fell off.
173 Another time I got into Aid56 and it broke down on the way to the call.
- 174 • *To the question what is next:* Chief Krimmert stated his strategy to finish this month with
175 the overviews, once the commissioners decide they have to file by August 1. He wants to
176 consolidate all the public education efforts.
- 177 • *Comment from the public:* Vashon is not alone in low volunteer numbers. There is an
178 undercurrent of what does the public want – what the public wants is when they are
179 laying on the living room floor or standing outside looking at the smoke, they want the
180 fire district to come. We need to be able to answer 2-3 calls deep.
- 181 • *Comment from the Board:* We need all the support we can get. We've not asked to go
182 above \$1.50 in 1991 and it has dropped to 93 cents in 26 years.
- 183 • *Comment from the public:* Be clear about the need to raise the levy and revenue to a
184 sustainable level.
- 185 • *Chief Krimmert commented:* We need to watch that (taxes and revenues with expenses)
186 together. The community has to be part of the District.
- 187 • The question was asked how much we pay our volunteers. The answer was that back
188 when some of our paid staff volunteered, they got about \$100 a year. When the chief
189 volunteered as a Lieutenant, he was up to \$21 a point. Stan Voynick commented that he
190 earned \$10 for providing water tenders for the propane fire and it was the best \$10 he's
191 earned.
- 192 • *Comment from the public:* Make stickers and have the firefighters pass them out to kids.
193 The stickers can say, "Check us out on Facebook." Put a sign on the gator by Grannies.

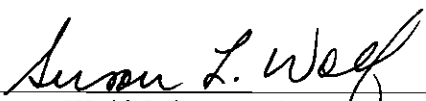
194 The Chair adjourned the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

195 *The next Regular Meeting will be on Tuesday, 07/11/17 at 6:30 p.m. at 10020 SW Bank Rd, Vashon,*
196 *EOC Room*

Approved this 11th day of July, 2017.



Camille Staczek, Chair



Susan Wolf, Minute Taker