

Vashon Island Fire & Rescue

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Quarter Master Yacht Club 23428 Vashon Hwy SW

Commissioner Retreat

February 24, 2008

Board of Commissioner Retreat

Commissioner Hoffmann called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. Commissioners present were Hoffmann, Turner, Sommers, Philip and Nielsen.

Greg Prothman introduced himself, Chief Smith from North Kitsap Fire & Rescue, which is a combination department, and Sonya Linquist a member of the Normandy Park City Council.

Mr. Prothman addressed the expectations for the performance of the Board. He addressed the history of Vashon Island Fire & Rescue (VIFR) and stated that in the last 8 ½ years the District has had four Fire Chiefs and many more Assistant Fire Chiefs. This is a sign that something is not working. He has heard things both internally and externally on why this is the case.

Mr. Prothman stated that VIFR has had a long successful history of volunteers. He asked Chief Kirk to share some of the District's history on volunteerism. Chief Kirk said that as far back as 1984 the Beachcomber ran an article on the problems the District had with getting volunteers. A resident firefighter program was started in about 1991. In 1995 some of the volunteers started lobbying the Commissioners to hire some paid firefighters. In 2001 the Commissioners hired the first full time paid firefighters.

Mr. Prothman asked what the status of volunteer participation was during 1986 to 1995. Chief Kirk said that in general the number of active volunteers was declining even though there were a good numbers of volunteers on the list. Assistant Chief Kranjceovich said that there were several benchmarks that effected volunteer participation but that in 1996 there about 30 to 45 active volunteers. Assistant Chief Kranjceovich stated the following benchmarks; 1987 the Fire District assumed operating the ambulance service that had been previously operated by the Firefighters Association; 1991 to 1992 the resident firefighter program started and

volunteers felt that they didn't need to respond as much; and in 2001 the Fire District hired the first paid firefighters.

Mr. Prothman shared that through his interviews he learned that the volunteers feel disenfranchised and unsupported which may be an underlying issue of some of the problems the District is having with keeping volunteers.

Commissioner Turner stated that the problem with retaining volunteers is a management issue. Chief Kirk said that he recently read an article in Firehouse magazine and it said that volunteers leave because of leadership issues.

Commissioner Nielsen said that there was another element. The District has always had very vocal critics on the outside who have had a big impact on the public perception of the Fire District.

Mr. Prothman said that many times people run for Commissioner when they are hot under the collar over an issue. Once that issue is resolved you are lumped together with people you may not like very much on the Board. He asked the question; how do you disagree with a colleague?

Commissioner Sommers said that she has had major issues with Commissioner Nielsen and Turner at different times.

Commissioner Hoffmann said that many volunteers feel uncomfortable asking the paid staff a question for help because they feel they are intruding on the paid staff's time.

Mr. Prothamn said that his perception is that there are sides and factions, he doesn't hear as a district we can not survive without paid staff and volunteers alike. This is the corporate culture at VIFR.

Commissioner Sommers said that one big issue is training for volunteers.

Chief Smith from North Kitsap Fire & Rescue said years ago the Commissioners use to run the Fire District, but today Commissioners should drive policies and set the standards. VIFR is going through a growing and changing time both in the Fire District and in general on Vashon Island.

All present agreed that Vashon Island Fire & Rescue is a combination department, meaning the District has volunteers and career firefighters that work together.

Mr. Prothman said that he found an absence in VIFR of middle management. The middle management for the firefighters would keep them accountable.

Mr. Prothman said it will take about two months to produce final candidates to the Board of Commissioners from the time the original advertisement goes out.

Mr. Prothman asked the Board what their goals were for the next year. He went on to stress the importance of setting annual goals for the Fire District and the Fire Chief.

Mr. Prothman thanked the Commissioners and other attendees for taking the time to discuss these issues.

Commissioner Nielsen moved to adjourn the meeting. All Commissioners voted in favor. The meeting ended at 10:48 AM.