

Vashon Island Fire & Rescue

Board of Commissioners

Special Meeting

December 15, 2005

Commissioner Sommers called the meeting to order at 7:33 PM. Commissioners present were Sommers, Nielsen, Hoffmann and Turner. Commissioner Sommers announced that handouts from past public meetings were available on the table. The meeting was a briefing and question and answer period on the Inspiration Point property. Next Tuesday will be the public comment meeting.

Chief Wilson went through a chronological summary on the Burton Station project. The project was part of the 2000 strategic plan that outlined a responsibility to maintain serviceable facilities for the apparatus and to improve response times to as many portions of the Island as possible.

Facilities Manager, Bob Larsen, brought the problems of the Burton Station to the attention of the Commissioners. The Board asked for a seismic and engineering study for the current Burton Station to see what it would take to seismically retrofit the building and do other repairs.

After these studies were done the District started looking at other properties. VIFR approached the Vashon School District about the availability of the old Burton School property. The School District chose not to permit its use. Bob Larsen did some research on the Internet and searched for alternative locations based on previous studies. A property at 266th was evaluated by an architect; it was determined that it was not big enough. Then the District evaluated the Trillium property and an offer was made but fell through.

During this time the District held a series of three public hearings, at Camp Burton, the South-End Community Center and the Burton Church. At the second hearing someone told the District about a property near Inspiration Point. The Commissioners authorized Chief Wilson to make an offer on the Inspiration Point property. The property is just under 7.5 acres has highway frontage and with the help of Wil Spencer, a fire service planning expert, it was discovered that the property was at the center of the targeted area for timely responses to the area of the Island from Judd Creek Bridge south to Tahlequah.

Through VIFR's Architect the District engaged a Traffic Engineer, Geo-Tech, and civil engineer to determine if there were any "fatal flaws" on the property. Each of these professionals submitted a preliminary report. The Board reviewed these reports and it was determined that there were no "fatal flaws" and voted to drop the contingency included in the initial offer.

The most serious problem was from the Traffic Engineer who expressed a concern for the lack of clear-line-of-sight as it exists now in both directions on Vashon Highway. The

Traffic Engineer in her report listed several potential mitigations for the clear-line-of-sight that would be easy to achieve.

Based on the mitigations presented by the Traffic Engineer the District authorized the final geo-tech engineer survey. The preliminary report arrived this morning. The report validated the original speculations that there will be no problems with surface water management, building foundation or seismic stability.

Chief Wilson asked the Commissioners if they had any questions. Commissioner Sommers asked the Realtor what would the consequence be for the Fire District if the sale did not go through? J.R. Crawford stated that the District would lose the \$10,000 earnest money. Chief Wilson summed up other money spent that includes \$27,614 professional services fees, \$14,615 in legal fees that have been paid. Other outstanding costs that have not been billed are \$12,000 for the geo-tech survey, and up to \$5,000 for a land survey.

Commissioner Turner asked if any of these expenses would hold over to another site. Chief Wilson stated that most of these are site specific. Commissioner Turner asked if there was an estimated price on a new station? Chief Wilson stated that Frank Lawhead, the Architect, gave the District an estimate range of \$110 to \$250 a square foot.

Commissioner Sommers opened questions up to the public.

Dave Straube – I have a March 16, 2004 memo from the Chief that says that the ideal station location is between Quartermaster Drive just north of Judd Creek to Burton Drive where the Burton Station is located. The memo backs that claim up with some call statistics. When Mr. Straube made a public request in August of this year for the Burton Station replacement criteria this memo came up. When the Inspiration Point property was discovered after being for sale for some time the new ideal location criteria was extended two and half miles further south to include the Inspiration Point property. What emergency service analysis has happened that shows this is an ideal location?

Chief Wilson answered that there are two philosophies that the Board was informed of and from that made a conscious decision. One philosophy includes a station that is staffed with resident firefighters and the other philosophy is a station where volunteers response from home. Those two locations reflect the two different philosophies.

Cindy Ferrucci asked if the location at Inspiration Point would be the model where people sleep at the station either resident or paid firefighters.

Chief Wilson answered, “Yes.”

Cindy Ferrucci asked if the structure for the new station would include retention ponds, paved roads and land reshaping? What do you see as the aesthetic appearance of the area when the project is done?

Chief Wilson answered that the District's preliminary discussions with the architect included a plan with minimal impact on the land. We plan to replace the trees we cut down. In the landscaping plans we have considered the noise problems. The land shaping that would occur is for the building itself. We learned from the geo-tech that the project will include one retention pond not two. The realtor, JR Crawford, responded that regulations don't allow for much tree removal.

Liz Straube asked for further explanation of the exit strategies for the Inspiration Point property. If the number one choice is to obtain a line-of-sight easement what is your next choice. Chief Wilson answered that obtaining a sight easement would be the least expense. Liz Straube asked, what would happen if you don't get the easement? Chief Wilson answered that that would make the project unaffordable. The next best alternative would be a left turn lane onto the property.

John Blair asked when were site considerations made available for the public? Chief Wilson said that it was available at the Lewis Hall public hearing. John Blair clarified that these considerations came out after there was an offer on the property.

Alice Larson had two questions. One; Are you allowed to tell us the purchase price of the property? Chief Wilson answered \$237,500. Second; I have attended most meetings can you tell me when the Board specifically voted to buy the property? Chief Wilson answered that he did not know the specific date but that the Board did vote on buying the property through passing a resolution.

Rick Frye asked if there were plans to house firefighters from a grant at the new station. Commissioner Nielsen answered that if the District accepts the grant will we house the firefighters at the new station but we have not accepted the grant yet.

Jim Whitney wanted to talk about planning for the future, let's look at the next five years and plan for the future.

Daron Buxton addressed the Duty Crew Firefighting Program and said that he could staff Dockton and Burton with volunteers today if we had the facilities. Having the new station benefits your families because response times would improve.

Wil Spencer said that site selection standards have been around for 45 years and these standards don't fit the Burton School property. One reason we can look forward to three stations on Vashon is because Craig Harmeling set up a certified water tanker system. Commissioner Sommers asked Mr. Spencer to supply the criteria to the Commissioners and the public for further review.

Jason Everett stated that he was a longtime islander and paid firefighter. We currently have five stations. If this new station were built would we see a consolidation of the other stations? Chief Wilson stated if the new station will come under the five mile rule for insurance purposes other stations could be consolidated.

Commissioner Sommers stated that she as a member of the public and a Commissioner and will evaluate the situation for Disaster preparedness.

Dave Straube commented that this presentation started with a statement that the engineering studies have shown the existing Burton Station to be seismically unsound. What would happen if we fixed the current Burton Station? Chief Wilson went over the process that would fix the crack and commented that the permit process would trigger required updates.

Wil Spencer asked if you didn't do the new station what would you do to cover the South-end? Chief Wilson said that the south-end station will be maintained.

David Straube stated that his question was not answered, how much will it cost to fix the Burton Station? Chief Wilson responded that the cost to fix the Burton Station is estimated to be between \$145,000 and \$225,000 just for the retrofit not other needed updates.

Cindy Ferrucci stated that the cost of building the new station was presented earlier in the meeting. What would be the cost of operating the new station and the closure of the two old stations? Chief Wilson said if the new station were staffed with volunteers there would be no cost increase. If the new station were staffed with resident firefighters it would approximately be the cost of a house for a family of four.

Cindy Ferrucci asked if the new station would be more expensive to maintain? Chief Wilson diverted the question to Bob Larsen. Bob Larsen asked the question, if it was cheaper to keep fixing up your old house or to building a new house?

Rick Frye suggested that on the ADA (American Disability Act) issue we may be able to get a variance. We need to remember that none of the outlying stations are used much because the District does not retain volunteers.

Bob Larsen stated that he specifically asked the question about an ADA variance and the County representative said that this will be a government building and the District will need to be ADA compliant.

Jim Whitney asked each Commissioner to look at the future. We know statistically that our response volumes are rising. With that idea what are your thoughts, with or without the new station, to meet that increase?

Commissioner Turner said my goal is to find out what is going on here and than come up with a solution. I want to work with the community and do the best job with the resources we have.

Commissioner Hoffmann stated that a 40% increase over the last several years is significant. The growth we have on Vashon come to about 50 to 100 new homes a year. As these get built there are less and less buildable lots. It's important for me to look at

what it's going to cost the taxpayer to hire paid staff for the station. Commissioner Hoffmann's idea for aid calls was to have volunteers staff mobile units in remote areas. He stated that response time is very important to him.

Commissioner Nielsen stated that he ran his campaign on supporting paid firefighters. We can't have firefighters sleeping in ambulances. We need to build this new station to give firefighters a place to respond from for both volunteer and paid staff. It's important to me to get a station where we can house firefighters.

Commissioner Sommers answered Jim Whitney's question that she didn't have enough information to make a decision. She asked what kinds of calls are included in the increase? How many false alarms, fire calls, EMS calls are in the increased numbers. How will volunteers work into the equation? She just visited Bainbridge where things are done very differently and would like to look at a broader range of solutions.

Dennis Saunders asked what has changed that makes us need a new station? The retrofit could be done for a lot less. I don't see the growth. I don't see the number of calls changing. What do we see in the future that we need such a large facility for?

JR Crawford, the Realtor answered that Vashon is seeing gentrification even though there has only been a population increase of 400. We are also seeing an aging population.

Dave Straube said; let's say we are seeing a growing increase of calls from aging population, and some of these other issues, why has the fire department not been up front with the public to get the community to rally around them? Instead of just springing this thing and saying we need a new station here.

Commissioner Nielsen responded to Mr. Straube that they have been out there and that now that it's in your neighborhood it has become important to you. I have been guilty of this just like everybody else.

David Straube asked why when he made a public request asking for documents justifying criteria and site criteria for the new station quite often I got the response "no document exists."

Chief Wilson stated that VIFR has been compiling statistics all along. There is one in tonight's handouts that you have compare 2003 and 2004. We have statistics for other years that track the increasing calls for service. Major components in planning the new station include the Strategic Plan objective to reduce response times. What VIFR learned comparing 2000 and 2005 was that response times had dropped from 9.9 minutes to 4.99 minutes per call in the Station 55 primary response area.

Jolene Lamb would like a specific formula for calculating statistics on the increased call volume figured. She would like dispatch assisted calls that were not included in the past looked at to see how they are counted today.

Commissioner Sommers asked Assistant Chief Fowler to compile information on calls that were considered Dispatch assisted calls. Commissioner Sommers asked if the 40% increase in call volume was a deciding factor in making a decision on the Inspirational Point property?

Commissioner Nielsen said that if we have had 1000 or 1800 calls we are not making up numbers. We still have an unsafe building. Numbers of calls are not a deciding factor for me. Let's think about staff time that goes into this and think about the hours that have been spent on the land.

John Blair asked if the break down on call statistics include calls for structure fires, aid calls, and other kinds of fires. Chief Wilson responded by saying that the ratio is 4:1 aid to fire calls.

Jenny Bredice asked if you look in the notes from the Aug 16th meeting it states that there are 25% of the 1400 calls on the south-end. That's one call a day.

Assistant Chief Fowler said that it is taking the paid staff at least twelve to fourteen minutes to get to the south-end.

Cindy Ferrucci asked if we know that the water is adequate at the Inspiration Point property and what impact would this have on the surrounding wells? Chief Wilson answered yes and went over the different water sources in the area.

Commissioner Nielsen stated that he doesn't think the impact would be any more than for a family of four.

JR Crawford, the realtor, stated that as a professional I helped pick the property. The property has fulfilled all requirements including, size of lot, septic, the location of the well and the neighbors. There are not a lot of sites that would meet the specifications you need for a fire station.

Jolene Lamb questioned the reasons for building a new station that are not being investigated. I was part of the strategic planning process, why are we not looking at the part that states we need more medical responders?

Chief Wilson replied that the District has looked into more medical responders. This particular project is focusing on the Strategic Plan objectives of the current condition of the Burton Station and improving response times. We keep the EMS kits out in the field with volunteers.

Liz Straube asked why we need a fire station for one call a day?

Commissioner Turner asked how we were going to pay for the station? Are we going to have to go to the public to raise taxes?

Chief Wilson replied that the District will probably have to raise taxes to pay for station construction. Earlier in the year the Commissioners had a workshop on options for raising these funds.

Lea Wilson asked, that in all the properties we looked at, was there another site that was better? Has there been any other property that has been brought to the attention of the Commissioners?

Doug Hoffman stated he was leaning toward retrofitting the Burton station. There is going to be a traffic light no matter where the station is. The property that is about 14.3 acres may be cheaper to build on than the Inspiration Point property. Why haven't you looked at that property? The Chief answered that we have not looked at that property, what we like about the Inspiration Point property is that it already had a well and septic system.

Commissioner Sommers went over the format for the public hearing at December 20, 2005 Commissioner meeting. A decision will be made at this meeting.

Commissioner Turner would like to open the Burton Station on Saturday to show the public the condition of the Burton Station. The Burton Station will open from Noon to Two PM on Saturday for the public to do a walk through.

Commissioner Hoffmann moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Turner seconded the motion. All Commissioners voted in favor the meeting ended at 9:39 PM.