

VASHON ISLAND FIRE & RESCUE BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

Minutes

Date: 07/06/2017

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 Robert Larsen, Assistant Chief
8 Susan Wolf, Minute Taker

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

10 **Guests:** John Staczek, Ron and Barbara Smothermon, Annaleigh Foyt, Susan Puz, Andy
11 Johnson, Patti & Mike Kirk, Scott Harvey, Doug Ostrom, Alice Larson, Rick Wallace, Jim Dorsey,
12 Doris Paulsen, Bob McMahon, Gary English, Josh Dueweke and other members of the public and
13 District.

14 **Discussion about District Finances and Revenue Sources**

15 The Chair announced this meeting was for the public to ask questions, make statements and give the
16 District an opportunity to explain the status of the fire district. She asked that those speaking please
17 state their names for the record and limit statements to three minutes.

18 • Is the Board unsure of voting for the 57 cents personally or if not, do you have to determine
19 whether to go for full amount?

20 *A Board Member:* Going for the 57 cent increase was the right choice, but it would be up to voters
21 to support that. If the public doesn't support the increase, the \$1.38 would not leave the District in a
22 good position, considering the services the District offers and the risk the community is willing to
23 take. Then (if the vote failed) they'd have to take another look at the levy.

24 • As a taxpayer and park board member, a friendly suggestion was offered. Both the parks and
25 school went for the gusto and lost, then won at a lessor amount. With the state budget which
26 passed an increase in the property tax and the increase of school bond that the public did
27 support, this person would support an increase that will not hinder the parks district from its
28 50 cents. \$1.38 (levy) provides some money for deferred maintenance. The Parks has no
29 money for deferred maintenance and theirs is really high. Nothing has been seen in the
30 newspapers that we're without an aid car; no deaths, no significant fires burning. The \$1.38
31 is not perfect, but it's not the end of the game for the District. Why doesn't the District ask
32 for that, demonstrate the District can be responsible, then come back and get the engine and
33 ambulance?

- 34 • The Parks, Schools and Fire Districts could meet and plan together for future needs and
35 levies.
- 36 • With the uncertainty with the county, if the District's takes the full \$1.50 and the county
37 takes some, Parks is crushed. The District would still have some increase at \$1.38.
- 38 • The Board has been very concerned about other entities, has a track record of not asking for a
39 levy increase which shows the District is very conscious of the Parks District.

40 *A Board Member:* It's not fat when all four of our aid cars are off the island at the same time and we
41 pray no more calls come in. We don't have enough staff to fight a fire. We are having repeated
42 Zone One call backs.

- 43 • Why doesn't the District go for half the increase with \$1.38?

44 *Chief Krimmert:* We are fortunate to have four aid cars operational. If we lose one in an accident
45 now we're in an unpredictable response situation. With a modest budget increase of 3% if it climbs
46 higher, we're not in a good situation and neither is the taxpayer. The new school tax from Olympia
47 is difficult when we need an engine which is a half million dollars. We can't afford one with a level
48 that only allows us to stabilize.

- 49 • The District can go for capital assets with a bond.

- 50 • There hierarchies in importance, but the District has to spell out what it wants – be specific.

51 *Chief Krimmert:* We've been running a long time run on very minimal revenues. Any reserves are
52 well below the minimum cost of any emergency vehicle. Necessary equipment, such as the air packs
53 to fight fire, cost \$345,000. We were very fortunate to get a grant, otherwise the District would have
54 no firefighting capability. But we have to reinvest (to purchase more when these expire). We have
55 nine individual buildings with deferred maintenance costs of \$300,000.

56 To the question of how we would pay for additional staff, the chief replied that the transport fees
57 would begin to pay for additional staff on duty. Under the recovery scenario, there would be seven
58 on staff 24/7. That's three career, four part-time and volunteers. So if we do nothing and our tax
59 rate goes from \$0.93 to \$0.82, we'll be starting layoffs. The volunteer core fluctuates.

- 60 • One couple has been coming to commissioners meetings for two and one-half months. He
61 appreciates the Parks feeling the pinch and the public from the school facilities fees. They
62 have not been long on the island. He encouraged the Board not to wait until someone dies;
63 for instance an old man in a house fire screaming to be saved and no one arrives or can go
64 into the fire. He and his wife want the District to be staffed, safer and that's what we're
65 talking about: staffing our fire department and saving lives. The School District wanted a
66 new track but they should have had a budget for 40 years to save for that eventuality and not
67 ask for millions. He appreciates the District's desire to work with everyone else, but if Parks
68 catch on fire or a bus turns over the Fire District trumps all of that. He wants them to have
69 state-of-the-art equipment on the island. He was amazed to see fireworks sold on the island.
70 He thought there would be large signs up, fireworks not allowed. He was very worried over
71 the Fourth of July if brush caught fire from the fireworks. He supports the maximum. It's
72 critical if only three of the five fire engines work. If someone calls 9-1-1 someone has to
73 answer.

74 *Board Member:* We're different from other districts having not raised taxes for 26 years. That was
75 our error. Now we have to look for three years of operating funds which buys us an engine and
76 nothing else. We have to be realistic.

- 77 • A Vashon retired firefighter of 34 years totally applauded the previous Board member's
78 statements. Her husband is still active. She encouraged the Board to go for the higher
79 amount. The amount of stress (on a spouse) of having only two people for a fire call - going
80 in is not allowed. The aid side is totally different and important. She knows firsthand; she
81 wants aid cars in top condition and staffed.
- 82 • A member of the Park board stated there is a difference between an operating and capital
83 budget. Levies are for operations and bonds are for capital expenses and major repairs with a
84 long life. He didn't know how the District was going to accomplish what they wanted
85 without going for a bond. It's difficult to get grants and donations. Given the shortfalls and
86 the amount of major repairs (the Parks District needs) they're now looking for a bond in the
87 future without going the levy route. He encouraged, since the Board is talking about aid cars
88 and engines, to get up to speed with bonds.

89 *Chief Krimmert:* If the Board went for a bond for an engine and for apparatus on a replacement
90 schedule, we'd have to do it every year to reach our aspirational goals. But with the levy, building
91 our capital reserves, we can wait to go for bond for something like a new station, which is a big
92 ticket item. We want to fund these from the levy. The District has 23 vehicles, with most for
93 responding to emergencies. We'd have to have something every year. As a new fire chief, he
94 admitted he didn't know much about bonds.

- 95 • A Disaster Preparedness president stated what is missing from this argument is the actual
96 stacking would be under figuring the new assessments with the 2017 tax rate. It's not an
97 issue at \$1.50 and parks at 50 cents. He's not against parks, but before "crying wolf," we
98 need good information whether the District goes for \$1.50 or \$1.45. He'd hate to think of not
99 having resources we need. Within the first five minutes after earthquake, we're done - out of
100 resources. And the worse thing is you can't know when it's going to happen. You don't
101 schedule a predictable moment like a heart attack and he's a heart patient. It's helpful to get
102 an estimate as soon as possible on what the \$5.90 breakdown would be with the likely 2018
103 tax revenue.
- 104 • This member of the public spent 18 years going to every fire commissioner meeting. She
105 agreed to participate in a needs assessment to learn what the citizens wanted and plan
106 accordingly. She's a researcher and said she wouldn't participate if the District had a
107 preconceived notion what (the District) wanted (the public) to say. The needs assessment
108 didn't happen and today here we are. It's like Chicken Little crying, "The sky is falling,"
109 we're \$400,000 in the hole. She didn't see any major stats showing the actual call volume,
110 where they went and type of call. The good news is that our healthcare situation has settled
111 down and we have a healthcare system more than willing to work with the fire district; which
112 is a positive. There's been no negative change. From what she's hearing, the Board is
113 saying Hank Lipe was a bad fire chief. Now the commissioners are saying we're at a \$1.2
114 million deficit. The real agenda is: we want money. All talk about fire which is only 10-
115 20% while aid is 80%-90%. We've had fires, but folks showed up. There's been no sudden
116 increase in population. It seems to her, why do we need to go \$1.38? She wants to know if
117 capital is needed, why do we need those buildings, like the north end and south end? The
118 District is not doing anything out of those stations. She asked if the District had added four
119 part-time staff. She accused the District of running off the private ambulance service. Now
120 the District is saying they have to have seven on staff 24/7. This is not Seattle. She looked at
121 our stats from 2009 to 2013. She stated if the District has equipment that needs replacement,
122 the District needs bonds.

123 *Chief Krimmert:* He did not invent the age of the trucks. We have experienced a smaller and
124 smaller cadre of volunteers, increasing number of times we have experienced 2-3 tones at once.
125 Your Chief and Assistant Chief are working 24/7, which is not sustainable. Perhaps the information
126 is not getting out, but we are not inventing or changing the roles. While raising capital through
127 bonds is something we could schedule, next year's bond will not help us now with our many needs.

128 *A Board Member:* Things have changed. A Zone Call Back means there are two crews off the
129 island and if we get another call, there's no one to respond. Last year (2016) we had 30 Zone One
130 call backs all year. We had 35 the first three months of this year.

131 *A Board Member:* Something has changed: when the medics left, we lost firefighters. We have
132 responders for the aid calls, but we lost firefighters. We did get some money from the county's ALS
133 fund, but we're short of local volunteers to fill out those slots.

134 • What's changed is that we have a new administration with roots on Vashon that are also
135 working all the time. This employee of the fire District has respect for both past and current
136 administrations. If there were "blinders" on, they are now off. The difference is that we've
137 moved our medic program and lost resources coming in. We've lost individuals that worked
138 Recruitment and Retention and lost most of our residents (firefighters/EMTs). Our
139 demographics are that people have to work more hours, we're getting older. Some of the
140 changes, frankly, would go this way even if we didn't have this or that happened. Not having
141 structures lost to fire and deaths is due to luck and lottery, good leadership and training.
142 We're doing the most we can do with the sucking the marrow out of every volunteer. Just
143 think about two people showing up at that fire and we can hear someone's scream or see
144 them in a window; we can go in under rescue mode. That's below the standard (safety
145 protocol) and we risk a lot to save a lot. When you hire a firefighter, they are not cheap and
146 he's partial to them. For 26 years we haven't asked for more. We're not looking to rob
147 people's pocket, but we're just treading water.

148 • What timeline the District is looking at going forward?

149 *Chief Krimmert:* We are looking at the November ballot, filing by August 1 and getting people to
150 understand why.

151 • What loses (ballot initiatives) is what can you defend? What is the District looking for? A
152 major push requires a lot more effort. Whatever the District decides, put a bunch of
153 committees together on the island.

154 • How many engines do you need? Do you need five engines?

155 *Chief Krimmert:* Two of our engines are 37 and 39 years old. After 16 years, they should not be
156 primary. We have been managing with three. Our goal is to replace the oldest of the three.

157 • The District could rotate them if you had five good vehicles and used them less on an annual
158 basis. But it could be done on a bond, and ask less than the \$1.38. This person does the
159 financing for Parks and would be glad to run the numbers with the chief.

160 *Chief Krimmert* thanked him.

161 • This person's husband is an on-island volunteer. He does it because he loves it, but it scares
162 her, especially to find out there's a rescue mode because her husband would totally do that.
163 Makes her nervous, but she is willing to vote for whatever the Board proposes; levy or a
164 bond. If it loses, she could no longer be a supportive wife.

165 • The District needs to stress this is a 57 cent increase, not \$1.50.

166 • How much of your budget is for personnel?

167 *Chief Krimmert:* 72% of the budget is for people - virtually all the fire district personnel.

168 • In the fire district budgets this Disaster Preparedness person has studied, the levy bankrolls
169 money for revenue for operational capex, bankrolls buying vital equipment, without which
170 we can't get people to the scene. Normally, every fire district that he knows about either
171 uses levy money to bankroll against vehicle wear and tear to replace vehicles or they get a
172 loan and make the payments out of operating expenses.

173 • Every dollar the fire district gets comes out every other department's budget. A new levy
174 over the next couple years would put Parks below 50 cents. If King County increases their
175 assessment the park district will be affected. It makes difference how it impacts other
176 governmental units.

177 • All junior taxing districts have the \$5.90 cap and other districts have similar situations:
178 parks, sewer districts, hospital districts. There's nothing unique about the fire districts.
179 Whether levy monies are used for operating funds or setting aside operational funds for
180 staffing or equipment – there's nothing in state law to prohibit it.

181 *Chief Krimmert:* Our equipment budget is zero. Without the grant, we could not fight fires.

182 • Some districts get a loan for an engine and pay it off out of the operating budget.

183 • It's possible to get bonds and amortize a loan over a period of time to finance the equipment.

184 *Chief Krimmert:* The problem is we have a denigration of the entire fleet. Bonds are for how many
185 years? And we'd need the levy to pay off the loan.

186 • This member of the public is a retired Seattle firefighter. He served three years as a
187 volunteer; 30 years with the Seattle Fire Department. He feels for the people - hats off to the
188 volunteers. He was scared when he started and still scared after 20 years fighting fire, and
189 not only that but of medical concerns like needle sticks. There's been a lot of discussion -
190 ideally go for a bond and if you do a levy, he suggests concentrating on how to frame it; go
191 for what can you sell. In 2004, Seattle put together a levy of \$2.50 which amounted to \$3.12
192 million. It wasn't what Seattle wanted, but it was what the chief could sell. The District has
193 to be able to answer this lady's (Alice Larson's) numbers.

194 • A member of the public thanked this team and said they put your heart, soul, and lives out for
195 the community. She was a VP for an 80 billion dollar corporation. As far as home values,
196 how many homes could brokers sell if there were no fire district? That's what she and her
197 husband bought their home here considering. That's the cost of not doing anything. The
198 community needs to come together and they are happy here. The Board, chief and members
199 are working long hours and are dedicated; thank you.

200 • In 2015, Chief Lipe and Chief Brown met to study the statistics and we met in groups. We
201 figured (with a new volunteer scheduling program) we could run 2.5 aid calls. Each
202 transport would take three hours, and for the third or half, we would call a Zone One call
203 back. We're still in that situation, and call volumes are leveling off. We don't know what's
204 in the future, but additional staff helps us to run three calls or more.

205 • If you can defend data, it will sell much better.

206 *A Board Member:* Somehow we need to disseminate information to the island that besides dealing
207 with aid and fires calls, we also have 95% of our shoreline here at risk for landslide, according to the
208 USGS.

209 *Chief Krimmert:* My job is to educate the Board. A \$1.50 lost levy is no good to us. Challenges
210 make me want to do more.

- 211 • Please improve your website; he can't find the minutes.
- 212 • All the minutes for the past three years are there, under "Board of Commissioners."
- 213 • You need a button that says "Minutes."
- 214 • We have no budget for a better website.
- 215 • I'm willing to help and I agree you need more money.
- 216 • Not because the District is greedy but they are trying to be responsible.
- 217 • A lady has two sons who are firefighters here and the chief's not greedy.
- 218 • The school board was greedy when they first tried; pushed hard the second time for a lesser
219 amount and won. Now that the state has passed their budget, that will raise our taxes.
- 220 • This person supports Chief Krimmert; he's not making any of this up. Both Chiefs have
221 communicated this real need. In his short, four-year-bit working with VIFR, on the first
222 shift, it was he and Chief Lipe alone at the station for over two hours until someone else
223 returned to the station. That's where the data differs. He's in support of the need to make it
224 clear enough to people.

225 *A Board Member:* It's not all been happy prior to having a career staff. He was working at the
226 grocery store with a buddy who was a volunteer. The tones went out two times and he kept saying
227 someone else would get it and finally on the third tone, he responded. The call was two blocks away
228 and the patient was David's grandmother's significant other. He died; not every story had a happy
229 ending before we had a career staff. Some people haven't been lucky.

230 *A Board Member:* We've had more clusters of calls; 2-3 calls at a time when she's been on shift at
231 the fire station.

- 232 • Did you hire four more?

233 *Chief Krimmert:* No, not hired yet. We have our career staff, a few volunteers, but we do not have
234 our part-time. We have a state mandate of a two-man minimum for transports. We hope to
235 supplement our staff from the transport fees and subscription fees.

236 *A Board Member:* Everything costs: equipment, bunker gear, training. We're hoping those
237 subscription fees come in to supplement those costs.

- 238 • How many times has Parks asked for money from the community?
- 239 • Does anyone know how much the fire district would have if they'd kept it up the whole time?

240 *A/C Larsen:* The District would have had 19 million dollars, if we'd been at \$1.50 the whole time.

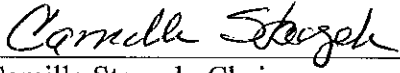
241 The Chair asked if there were any further comments or questions. Hearing none, she thanked
242 everyone for coming.

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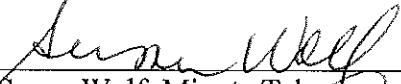
244 The Chair then adjourned the meeting at 8:18 p.m.

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

Approved this 25 day of July, 2017.



Camille Staczek, Chair



Susan Wolf, Minute Taker