

**South Whidbey Fire / EMS**

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***Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners***

***Friday, August 15, 2025 at 1:00pm***

**Minutes- Draft**

Join Zoom Meeting

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Meeting ID: 220 802 6387

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In Attendance: Chief Walsh, Commissioner Noblet, Commissioner Erickson, Commissioner Towers, Chief Dilley, Chief Magallon, Lt. Kalahiki, Marc Swenson.

1. **Call to Order**

Commissioner Noblet calls Special Meeting to order at 1:04pm.

1. **Approval of Agenda**

Strategic Planning

**Chairman opening remarks**

Commissioner Noblet encourages members of the Strategic Planning members to bring all ideas and goals to the meeting. No idea is too big or too small when creating a new Strategic Plan for the District. The goal is to come up with a strategic plan for the next 5 years that accomplishes what this group would like to see.

**Benchmarks /Goals:**

**Review 2020-2025 Strategic Plan**

Chief Walsh presents a 2024 Strategic Plan Summary to the committee with a color-coded key to identify objectives that are complete, in progress and ongoing. Color coding is as follows

Yellow- In progress

Blue- Ongoing (we’ve reached a goal and need to maintain)

Green- Complete

***THEME #1 – HOW DO WE SAVE MORE LIVES?***

***Strategic Initiative 1.1 – Improve Survivability for Victims of Fire, Hazardous Materials Release, Entrapment or other Crisis Incidents.***

***Objective 1.1.1*** *– Provide a minimum daily staffing level of at least five fire responders and one chief officer (six total) throughout the District.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh explains we are currently at about 80% of our staffing level goals with the addition of more positions to come in the next few years.

***Objective 1.1.3*** *– Zero civilian fire fatalities or significant injuries measured annually.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains that we haven’t had any fatalities but this could change so it will remain an ongoing objective.

***Objective 1.1.4*** *– Arrive on scene of structure fires within 14 minutes, 80% of the time.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh states we would like to see an arrival time of 10 minutes and we continue to try and reach that benchmark

***Strategic Initiative 1.2 – Improve Survivability of Patients Experiencing Acute Medical Emergencies.***

***Objective 1.2.4*** *– Participate in activities that improve bystander, hands only CPR participation.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains that we continue to provide monthly CPR classes at SWFE.

***Objective 1.2.5*** *– Explore ways we can add value to our EMS service and supplement our existing ALS service in times of overwhelming demand.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh remarks that we continue to grow in this objective. We now have a BLS Unit and have license to transport.

***Objective 1.2.6*** *– Arrive on scene of medical emergencies within 10 minutes, 80% of the time.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh explains this is similar to structure fire metric only there is no extra gear needed so it has a quicker response time.

***Objective 1.2.7*** *– Provide a minimum staffing level of at least two EMS responders for all emergency medical responses.*

Chief Walsh suggests a re-write of this objective to be clear on what this looks like when responding to medical calls. Commissioner Towers comments that he would like to see a “Capital Theme” added to the strategic plan to see how we finance objectives.

***Strategic Initiative 1.3 – Improve Firefighter/EMT Safety and Survival.***

***Objective 1.3.1*** *– Implement policies, strategies and training that limit firefighter exposure to high-risk operations.*

Chief Walsh discussed how we currently participate in L&I Injury and Illness Reduction Program. This particular objective is color coded gray and has no official status. Could be presented more as an Initiative. More to come.

***Objective 1.3.2*** *– Provide at least one qualified Safety Officer at all incidents requiring establishment of command*.

Complete. Commissioner Noblet remarked on “completed” status but could it also be considered ongoing? Chief Dilley mentioned that it’s now required for promotion and that all Lieutenants and Chiefs have a certificate of ISO. Once certified, it would be considered completed. Commissioner Erickson asks how do we set a higher standard, once an objective is completed? She would like this to be a talking point at the next meeting.

***Objective 1.3.3*** *– Develop a leadership training program for all field and command level positions.*

Complete. Chief Walsh explains that SWFE has actively been providing leadership training over the last few years.

***Objective 1.3.4*** *– Improve radio communications.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh states that we continue to invest and improve our radio communications.

***Objective 1.3.5 –*** *Provide an employee health and wellness program to better protect employees over time.*

Ongoing. Commissioner Noblet commented we re-word “over time” in the objective. Lt. Kalahiki explained how the process is done with stages of “check-ins” *over time.* Commissioner Noblet suggests a change to the objective to “Provide ongoing employee health and wellness program to better protect employees”

***Strategic Initiative 1.4 – Improve Agency Resiliency During Crisis-Level Events.***

***Objective 1.4.1*** *– Improve coordination strategies with local, state, and federal partners.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains that we’ve been hard at work over the last 6 months with local agencies and community members. SWFE hosted a Preparedness Conference last Spring and we work closely with South Whidbey Prepares and Dept of Emergency Management in coordinating our efforts.

***Objective 1.4.4*** *– Develop an emergency supply cache program.*

In Progress. We’re looking into a supply cache for SWFE and how to best disperse supplies between stations and what this process will look like moving forward.

***Objective 1.4.5*** *– Update, share, and exercise a district emergency operation plan to include the district commissioners*

In Progress. Chief Walsh states we are in the process of developing a plan. Chief Dilley explains that he has been working on this and has a skeleton foundation but needs to start the work of filling it in to develop a strategy plan.

***THEME #2: HOW DO WE MEET THE INCREASING DEMANDS OVER THE COMING YEARS?***

***Strategic Initiative 2.1 – Reduce Financial and Legal Risk/Liability to SWFE.***

***Objective 2.1.1*** *– Address fire station safety/seismic safety in current and future capital improvement plans.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh explains this is a work in progress but we are making strides forward with the upcoming new station.

***Objective 2.1.2*** *– Conduct a Standards of Cover study.*

Complete. Chief Walsh acknowledged all the research, time and dedication that newly Ret. Chief Ney put into the creating and completing this Standard of Cover. Commissioner Erickson asked how frequently this document would need to be updated. Chief Walsh stated it would be best to update as needed a year before a new Strategic Plan would be developed.

***Objective 2.1.3*** *– Enhance fire station accommodations to better meet changing staffing patterns and programs.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh understands that this objective was to ensure appropriate housing accommodations for staff. Commissioner Towers and Commissioner Noblet suggest we get an accurate picture of the districts staffing needs and financial implications on housing accommodations and to determine how we get funding for this objective. Chief Walsh states Station 32 will have sleeping quarters for quicker response times. Commissioner Noblet suggests identifying the stations and rewording to better reflect the objective 2.1.3.

***Objective 2.1.4*** *– Improve the health of the apparatus fleet to ensure reliability for response and on scene capabilities.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains we are currently working through this and have a capital facility plan and apparatus spec committee for new engine. Commissioner Erickson asks if these tie into WSRB with the age of our fleet. She also suggests to consider updating this to be a “standard” vs. the “health” of our fleet.

***Objective 2.1.6*** *– Continue the practice of reviewing all SWFE policies and procedures continuously for accuracy and provide training to all members as updates occur.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh shares that we’ve been updating as necessary and reviewing policies in recent months. We can push updates through Lexipol to district members. Commissioner Erickson asks if Archbright can assist with policy updates and Chief replied that they will review policies when given and that they also helped frame our SWFE Employee Handbook.

***Strategic Initiative 2.2 – Improve Efficiency Within the Current Budget System.***

***Objective 2.2.1*** *– Maintain Workers' Compensation costs below 3% of annual budget.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains that we have been consistent in this objective. Commissioner Towers believes we can adjust this down. He also suggests that Initiative 2.2 be re-written and adjusted. Commissioner Erickson would like to see financial tracking added to the Chiefs Report.

***Objective 2.2.2*** *– Pursue grant opportunities with a positive return on investment.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh explains that grants can be labor intensive and they don’t always have the desired outcome. Although, recently FF Diffie applied for a car seat grant and got rewarded and Lt. Kalahiki applied for a Safety grant through L&I and that too, was rewarded.

***Objective 2.2.3*** *– Develop a succession plan for all levels in the organization.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains we continue to work on this but would like to see a clear path for promotional opportunities. Commissioner Towers agrees that it does help to identify steps needed for promotion.

***Objective 2.2.4*** *– Develop a community risk reduction plan to reduce/mitigate demand for service (fall prevention, fire prevention, etc.).*

In Progress. Chief Walsh spoke about how much work is done in fire prevention training and education that SWFE currently provides. Chief Walsh recognizes that this is a good fit for the Community Health Care Paramedic Program that Commissioner Noblet suggests we look into adding to the strategic plan.

***Objective 2.2.6*** *– Explore strategies to improve recruitment and retention of personnel/percentage of turnover.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh remarks that there is always room for improvement here particularly with volunteer applicant recruitment. Commissioner Noblet suggests rewording and dropping *“turnover”* from the objective.

***Objective 2.2.8*** *– Develop a method of providing/communicating rapid organizational updates to all members.*

Complete. Commissioner Noblet suggests update objective to “Provide and communicate” and change status to Ongoing. Commissioner Erickson would like to resume her work on this objective and asks to continue meeting with the designated lead. Commissioner Noblet recognizes the need to acknowledge those who work for our district. Chief Walsh also recognizes that we need to fill in gaps with social media and share up to date information. Update status to “Ongoing”.

***Strategic Initiative 2.3 – Prepare the Agency for the Next Economic Downturn.***

***Objective 2.3.1*** *– Invest in station improvement projects that provide economic savings measured in lower ongoing maintenance or utility costs.*

Ongoing. Former Resource Chief installed energy efficient processes to reduce costs. Possibly introduce solar as a possibility moving forward.

***THEME #3: HOW DO WE BETTER MARKET OUR SERVICES AND DEMONSTRATE OUR VALUE TO OUR COMMUNITY?***

***Strategic Initiative 3.1 – Promote a Positive Agency Reputation Within the Community.***

***Objective 3.1.1 –*** *Provide rapid and accurate information on important SWFE services and activities.*

In Progress. Chief Walsh states that we a few new members who are willing to participate with getting information out to the media in a timely manner. We currently do a pretty good job at this but would like to improve in this area of communication. Update status to Ongoing.

***Objective 3.1.3 –*** *Improve community recognition of the performance, successes and challenges of SWFE.*

In progress. Chief Walsh explains that we sit somewhere around 75% on this objective but 10% is the ideal goal. New Lead contact is to be determined soon. Update status to Ongoing.

***Strategic Initiative 3.2 – Provide Downward Pressure on Fire Insurance Premium Costs Within the Community.***

***Objective 3.2.1*** *– Maintain a Washington Surveying and Rating Bureau (WSRB) - Class 6 Rating or better.*

Complete. Goal is to achieve a 4 or 5ratings. Update status to Ongoing

***Objective 3.2.2*** *– Prioritize salvage operations on emergency incidents to lower post-fire damage due to salvage and overhaul activities.*

Complete. Commissioner Towers comments that this is considered basic firefighting and can be removed from strategic plan. Create an appendix to identify completed objectives.

***Objective 3.2.3*** *– Provide fire prevention education and its impact on insurance rates to target audiences within the community (homeowners, business owners, homeowners’ associations). Ensure a robust fire prevention program.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh states that SWFE currently invests heavily in fire prevention and education. Commissioner Noblet suggests that Initiative 3.2 states SWFE provides robust fire prevention accomplished by insurance rates and education. Goal is preventing fires. Training and education breeds awareness and awareness is the benefit provided by education. Commissioner Noblet states we can word smith when we transfer to the new plan. Commissioner Erickson asks if we need a Fire Marshall and it was agreed that there should be a new objective. *3.2.4 Fire Inspection*

***Strategic Initiative 3.3 – Provide Value Beyond the 911 Call.***

***Objective 3.3.2*** *– Provide a workplace where people of all backgrounds and associations feel welcomed. Ensure a recruiting process that attracts a diverse candidate pool.*

Ongoing. Chief Walsh explains that there have been conversations about possibly providing housing. Chief Magallon added that recruiting outside the district can bring candidates with different upbringings and backgrounds that can provide diversity to the fire district.

***Objective 3.3.3 –*** *Continue to recruit members from the local community and off island for better service to the community.*

Ongoing. Commissioner Towers stated that it used to be required that a volunteer live in district. Commissioner Noblet adds that we should encourage recruits no matter location as long as they show for shifts. Commissioner Towers states this objective can possibly be removed from the initiative and to update status to complete.

**Move unmet goals to 2025-2030**

Chief Walsh will bring over all the objectives that remain “In Progress and Ongoing” to the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. This will be the working template in creating the new 2026-2030 plan. Chief Walsh mentioned he will add an appendix to the new plan that identifies completed and removed objectives.

**Consider new goals for 2025-2030 plan**

Add new objective *3.2.4 Fire Inspection* to Initiative 3.2

Commissioner Towers would like to see 3 new Themes added to the 2026-2030 plan. Financial, Capital and Training/Education. Commissioner Erickson and Commissioner Towers suggest moving any financial objectives in Initiative 2.2 to the new Financial Theme. Further discussion on going through all the in progress and ongoing objectives and moving them over to the appropriate new themes.

Chief Walsh would like us to consider how we meet the growing demands of EMS services and what that looks like moving forward. Commissioner Towers would like to see on island EMS recruiting and to consider ways we can deal with non-injury calls. Commissioner Noblet would like to adopt the Community Paramedic Program that is based primarily on needs and not necessarily 911 needs. He would like to see a plan in place in the event the hospital is unable to provide services. Chief Walsh states we have BLS license to transport and our medical unit will provide faster care from St. 31 and 36.

**Review Data**

Chief Magallon reviews NFPA17 national standards. Main focus is response times. Recommended “get out the door” EMS is 60 seconds, Fire is 80 seconds due to more gear. Travel response times vary with a variety of geographical locations such as Urban and Suburban. National standards are adaptable for stations to apply to their capabilities.

There is always room for improvement but we are doing a great job for what we have.

**Marine**

Chief Walsh explains that we currently run about 30 calls a year consistently. Rescues are also consistent. Commissioner Noblet would like to see response time and staffing data. Commissioner Erickson would like to include any updated response times now that there is staffing at station 31.

**WSRB**

Commissioner Towers would like data comparison between 6.5.4 rating for goal setting. Commissioner Erickson suggested we get maps and response times to identify gaps and see what we can do better. Chief Walsh indicates that staffing plays a role in response which relates to projected recruiting through 2030. Expand volunteer outreach on the island. Commissioner Noblet would like to see SWFE identify challenges regarding response times.

**Meeting Schedule**

Next scheduled meeting is September 26th at 1:00pm. Commissioner Erickson would like to focus on closing out 2025 plan and work on starting first draft of 2026-2030. Agenda items for Sept meeting include Vision for district and creating working template for 2026-2030 strategic plan. Commissioner Noblet would like to know the progress of station 32 and to have a back up plan if there is no land for sale to purchase. Chief Walsh explains there are a few prospects and it continues to be a work in progress.

**Conclude**

Commissioner Noblet adjourns the special meeting at 4:09 p.m.