

South Whidbey Fire/EMS
SPECIAL MEETING

Strategic Planning Retreat
Saratoga Inn
201 Cascade Ave., Langley, WA
November 11, 2017

MINUTES

In Attendance: Chairman Kenon Simmons
Commissioner Bob Elliot
Commissioner Frank Mestemacher
Commissioner-Elect Adrienne Hawley
Chief Rusty Palmer

- I. Call to Order – The Strategic Planning Retreat for South Whidbey Fire/EMS was called to order by Board Chair Kenon Simmons at 08:37.
- II. Commissioner-Elect Hawley was congratulated on her election and welcomed.
- III. The Agenda was approved.
- IV. The District’s Vision, Mission and Values Statements were reviewed. No changes were recommended.
- V. The development of a new Strategic Plan was discussed. Funds to contract a company to assist with the strategic planning process were approved in the 2018 budget. The type of process we will create was discussed. It was agreed that committed participation by the public and volunteers was essential in creating the plan and its success. The type of stakeholders we wished to participate were discussed. The Chief requested that the RFP be developed and opened in December to allow for approval of a contract in early 2018. All agreed. The Chief will develop the RFP.
- VI. The District’s Policies & Procedures were discussed. It has been the policy of the District to allow an open ending date for medical leave. The Chief discussed a number of instances where members were on medical leave for a number of years and did not return. Those individuals lost their EMT certifications and were gone long enough that they would be required to complete a new fire/EMT academy. The Chief

recommend that a 90 day limit be placed on Medical Leave (to pattern the Family Medical Leave Act). A clause will be added to allow that to be extended based upon extenuating circumstances. The Chief will offer the amendment at the December meeting.

- VII. The Chief updated the Board on the status of the Bayview fire station project. Carletti Architects are working on the final details for the building permit and are also working on the Bid documents. Once we receive the building permit, the project will be sent for costing. Once we receive the projected costs, the plans will be reviewed to make amendments for cost savings. We hope to commence construction before mid-year 2018. The potential rise in cost of materials and labor due to the recent natural disasters was discussed.

The Chief updated the Board on management of the Bond. We currently are investing \$4M of the funds and earning approximately \$3600 per month in interest. We have our first principal payment due in December. In the future, the interest payment will be in June of every year, and the principal in December.

- VIII. The Chief voiced his desire to systematically raise the wages of our part-time firefighters. His concern is that, while our wages and benefits are well above other fire districts, our firefighters are not far above what is considered a minimum/living wage. It is the Chief's belief that once we have full-time firefighters, our wages would rise significantly. His intent is to ensure that our part-time firefighters are proportionally compensated to full-time staff. The skills, knowledge, abilities, and risk are no different for part-time staff and full-time staff.

The Chief updated the Board on the part-time firefighter program. The program is functioning as intended and daytime coverage is improved. Response times have dropped during the day. The Chief believes the program is making a difference and will continue to monitor the program and make improvements as necessary.

The Board discussed the question of timing for a small number of full-time firefighters in the future. With current pressure on volunteers from the increasing call volume, the Chief believes that the need for some full-time staff is coming quicker than perhaps desired by some. The budget impact for such employees will be significant and the Chief suggested we plan now in order to be ready should the need

arise. It was agreed that once the Bayview fire station is complete that the opportunity to house a full-time crew will be available.

- IX. The Volunteer Staffed Engine (VSE) program was discussed. The Chief advised that while it is generally successful, it is a challenge for many of the volunteers. There still remains those periods when only one firefighter responds in an engine. Furthermore, apparatus are responding across the District instead of the closest engine as some volunteers rely on the staffed engine to take the calls. Because of the VSE, most volunteers are meeting the participation standard, which is an advantage for them. The Chief advised that staff and volunteers are working on a number of different scheduling strategies to find one that helps the volunteers meet their requirements.

The Chief advised the Board that he continues to look for affordable medical plans that would allow volunteers to participate in our health insurance program by creating a volunteer health group. He will approach the other fire districts to see if they are interested in forming a larger volunteer medical insurance group.

- X. The Board and Chief reviewed the fund balances for the Capital, Reserve, Contingency, and Bond funds. The division of funds was discussed. The purpose of the Capital Fund, Reserve Fund, and Contingency Fund was discussed. The District will work to ensure targeted fund balances are met as soon as possible. Future impacts to each fund were discussed.

The Board discussed the Facilities Plan Schedule and the Apparatus Plan Schedule for repair and replacement of facilities and apparatus.

- XI. A general discussion of future funding needs took place. Much of the results of the new Strategic Plan and how it relates to current capital and operational needs will impact future funding.

Within the 2018 budget is a grant request for radio equipment. Should the grant not be successful, the equipment will not be purchased.

The potential need for a future levy lid lift was discussed. The Bayview project was funded through a councilmanic bond that did not require a request to taxpayers to

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raise taxes. The District last asked taxpayers to raise the levy in 2012. It was discussed that should a levy lift be requested that it would be for the purpose of funding services only and not infrastructure. More discussion will take place in coming months.

The Chief discussed the merits and risks of a SAFER grant to assist with funding full-time firefighters should that be the direction of the District. The Chief will gather details about the program and forward those to the Board in the future.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:34.

Respectfully submitted,

H.L. "Rusty" Palmer
Fire Chief, EFO