

**SOUTH WHIDBEY FIRE/EMS  
REGULAR MEETING  
5535 Cameron Road, Freeland, Washington  
March 15, 2012– 5:30 P.M.**

**Minutes**

**In Attendance:**

Chairman Kenon Simmons  
Commissioner Mike Helland  
Commissioner Bob Elliot  
Chief Rusty Palmer

**In Audience:** AC Busch, DC Beck, DC Cotton, Div. Chief Shields, Captain Mason, Wayne Morrison, Bob Walters, Ben Watanabe, Lynne Hunsucker, John Hyde, Allison Tapert, Betty Freeman, Mike O.

- I. Call to Order – Chairman Simmons called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.
- II. Approval of Agenda – Commissioner Helland moved to approve the agenda; motion carried.
- III. Public Input – Chairman Simmons requested all Levy questions and input be addressed during the Levy discussion. A question was raised about the purpose of the meeting immediately before the Regular Commissioners meeting. Chairman Simmons explained that it is the Board of Volunteer Firefighters meeting for FF pension, medical bills, and other business related to the Volunteers in the District.
- IV. Consent Agenda - All matters listed within the Consent Agenda have been distributed to each member of South Whidbey Fire/EMS's Board of Commissioners for reading and study. They are considered to be routine, and will be enacted by one motion of the Commissioners with no separate discussion. If separate discussion is desired, that item may be removed from the Consent Agenda and placed on the Regular Agenda by request.
  - a. Approval of Minutes
    - i. Regular Meeting February 9, 2012
    - ii. Special Meeting February 13, 2012
    - iii. Special Meeting February 23, 2012
  - b. Finance Officer's Reports –
  - c. Monthly Vouchers –
    - i. Payroll Warrants – \$80,036.12
    - ii. Vendor Warrants - \$132,657.95
  - d. Chief's Report
  - e. Resolution 2012-07 – canceling warrantCommissioner Elliot moved to approve the consent agenda; motion carried.
- V. Unfinished Business –
  - a. Lid Lift Discussion – Chairman Simmons opened the floor to the public for questions or comments about the potential Levy Lift.
    - Q. Wayne Morrison – What is the current Levy rate?  
A. Chief Palmer - \$.61/1000
    - Q. Wayne Morrison – What is the source of the Fire District's revenues?  
A. Chief Palmer – Property taxes based on assessed values, the Fire District is a junior taxing District and all taxes are collected and distributed by Island County.
    - Q. Wayne Morrison – What is the geographic area of South Whidbey Fire/EMS?

A. Chief Palmer – Everything south of Mutiny Bay Road and Hwy 525 to include Freeland, Langley and Clinton.

Q. Mike O. – Based on the numbers from handout about the Levy Lift, can we provide the base figures for the current budget year for comparison.

A. Chief Palmer – Yes, we can provide them after the meeting for you to review.

Q. John Hyde – If the Levy fails will the District go back for a lower rate in the future?

A. Chairman Simmons – Based on the current timeline for financial need of the District, it is a possibility.

Q. John Hyde – How much of the budget comes from the ‘Special Levy’?

A. Chairman Simmons – The District only has one levy rate currently at \$.61, the increase in consideration is \$.15 to total \$.76. All of the District budget is based on that rate.

Q. John Hyde – Why can’t we merge with Central Whidbey Fire/Rescue?

A. Chairman Simmons – We could potentially merge into one department, however, their current levy rate is \$1.34.

C. Bob Walters – Opposes the potential levy increase due to his personal experiences in the corporate world and the term ‘feeding the beast’. It is unreasonable to continue to raise taxes in an economic economy like we currently have rather than cut back on costs by reducing the large amount of facilities and equipment the District currently owns. According to statistics South Whidbey Fire/EMS is in the top 10% of Districts of equal size, based on population, for equipment and facilities. Other areas of the County are in need such as the School District, Whidbey General Hospital, Island County Public Works. The District should consider a merger with Central Whidbey Fire/Rescue or reduce the number of facilities we currently operate to reduce costs. He also stated he believes the Board should reconsider a Citizen Advisory Board to give input on the District from a Tax Payer prospective.

C. Chairman Simmons – Suggested the statistics are mainly based on population and that the 66 miles of geography that South Whidbey Fire/EMS covers is much larger than most Districts with similar populations. The large geographic area requires more facilities and equipment to respond within NFPA standards. The voters need to decide if they want to support other areas of the County or continue to have the same Fire/EMS services. The District currently responds to an average of 5 calls per day, all Volunteer responders.

C. Bob Walters – NFPA standards are to respond within 3 minutes of a call.

C. Chairman Simmons – Yes, the stations are spaced accordingly.

C. Bob Walters – The population is less than 500 per square mile. The current standard is 6 people in 14 minutes.

C. Commissioner Helland – The average age of the population on South Whidbey must be considered for response time. 80% of the calls are medical calls.

Q. Bob Walters – Then why not reduce Fire equipment and facilities and focus more on EMS response needs?

C. Captain Mason – supports the levy as a tax payer and a responder. He knows how hard it is to respond on a call from an unstaffed station that relies on Volunteers to leave their house or job and get to the station before responding to the call. Having less facilities to respond from would only increase response times.

C. Allison Tapert – Commented on the current state of the economy and the tax payers being asked to increase taxes by most of the tax supported entities in the County. The District should consider lowering the amount of the levy being considered. The Port and Parks District's entire budget is as much as the amount of the increase from the potential levy.

C. Chairman Simmons – The District has not had a levy increase on the ballot in approximately 20 years. Rather than asking for more tax dollars the budget was reduced by cutting equipment and expenses to balance the revenue as it decreased. The current financial situation is going to hit a breaking point of more expenses than revenue in 2014. This will require more cuts in equipment, facilities and essentially the services the District provides the citizens of South Whidbey.

Q. Wayne Morrison – Does the District have any Debt?

A. Chairman Simmons – No, all equipment and facilities have been paid for with cash by saving 25% of revenues in the Capital Reserve over the years. The current financial situation reduces the amount of savings to the current 20% level which will continue to decrease with future expenses.

C. Commissioner Helland – The Board is asking the Tax Payers to decide what level of service they want from their Fire/EMS department.

Q. Wayne Morrison – Does the District have any surplus property for sale?

A. Chairman Simmons – Not currently, two pieces of property on Thompson road were removed from the market rather than being sold for half of the original purchase price.

C. Chief Palmer – The Tax Payers should consider the budget items that are grant related in specific. Many of the large budget items are related to a grant and will not be purchased unless the grant is funded.

Q. Bob Walters – How many Volunteer Fire Fighters does the District have?

A. Chief Palmer – 84, including five full time employees.

Q. Betty Freeman – If the levy doesn't pass what will the District cut from the budget to balance it?

A. Chairman Simmons – We won't know exactly what will be cut until we look at the budget next year. We will attempt to keep service at the highest level possible. The current cuts have been in fire prevention education for the public, several vehicles including fire apparatus have been decommissioned and not replaced, and other equipment needed to do our job effectively. More cuts may include reduced staff and Volunteers, 2 MERVS instead of the current 3, and more cuts to equipment and apparatus or facilities to

balance the budget.

C. Chief Palmer – The primary goal of the levy is to keep the Volunteers, the alternative is a paid department like Central Whidbey and even greater financial need than we currently have.

Q. Betty Freeman – What is the cost to train one Volunteer?

A. Chief Palmer - \$4500 approximately, includes equipment and academy expenses.

Q. Betty Freeman – What facility is next for replacement?

A. Chief Palmer – Bayview is next, but is currently on hold due to budget constraints. We are currently working on upgrading the facilities for energy efficiency and longevity.

Q. Why does the District and the hospital both show up on a call? Why are the facilities not combined?

A. Chairman Simmons – It's not easy to combine government, but is a great idea in theory.

C. Chief Palmer – We are currently working with ICOM on unnecessary dispatching.

C. Gary Gabelein – The District doesn't charge service fees for going out on a call. The insurance rates are going up due to the new standards from the NFPA for response times.

Q. John Hyde – What is the AFG grant for?

A. Chief Palmer – It is a communications grant to improve our radio simulcast frequency; half of the grant is for South Whidbey Fire/EMS and half is for Camano Fire. The current system is inadequate; the grant money will allow us to increase the strength of the system and the possibility of a tower at station 31 in the future.

Q. When will the Board make a decision on the Levy?

A. Chief Palmer – it needs to be decided by the June Regular Commissioners meeting.

Q. AC Busch - What is the cost per household for the \$.15 increase?

A. Chief Palmer – For a \$300,000 assessed value the increase is \$3.75 monthly or \$45.00 annually.

Chairman Simmons closed the discussion about the Levy rate increase. All future questions or comments can be directed to Chief Palmer for discussion.

VI. New Business –

- a. Bid Contract for Survey of Station 31 – Chief Palmer presented the winning bid from TMI Land Surveying out of Freeland for \$2400.00 and requested the board approve and sign the contract. Commissioner Helland moved to approve the contract; motion carried.
- b. Chief Palmer gave the results of the Bid for the Rescue Box Conversion; one bid was received and rejected as it was \$40,000 over budget for the project. The staff is currently discussing alternative options.

VII. Announcements –

- a. Chief Palmer announced the All District Meeting on March 27, 2012 from 6-9pm at the SWHS.
- b. Chief Palmer announced that the BIAS software installation has been completed and the process to move the accounting information from Quickbooks has begun.

VIII. Varia – none

IX. Executive Session – The Board, Chief Palmer and District Secretary Rehberg entered the session at 6:50pm to

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discuss two personnel performance matters. The session ended at 6:57pm.

- X. Action taken as result of Executive Session –
  - a. Chief Palmer requested a motion to authorize a 5% increase for Cindy Rehberg after completing her one year probationary period on March 1<sup>st</sup>; stating that it was funded in the 2012 budget. Commissioner Helland moved to approve the increase; motion carried.
  - b. Chief Palmer requested the Board terminate Alex Kampion as a member due to lack of participation. Commissioner Helland moved to terminate Alex Kampion; motion carried.
- XI. Adjournment – 7:00pm

Cindy Rehberg  
District Secretary