



Clark County Fire & Rescue Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting Minutes

August 10, 2016

Workshop called to order by Commissioner Babcock at 10:02 a.m.

Present: CCF&R Commissioners Jon Babcock, Bob Johnson, Larry, Bartel, Dave Town, Jerry Kolke. District 2 Commissioners Ken Ayers and Dave Lester. Chief John Nohr. Division Chief Mike Jackson. Recording Secretary Kathy Streissguth.

PHILOSOPHY

Chief Nohr shared he understood there was a lack of Board interaction in budget development in the past. The goal of the workshop is to provide broad philosophies on the chief's position regarding the development of budgets. Revenue sources will be projected conservatively – lower side. Expenditures, planned and otherwise, will be projected the same – high side. Desire to ensure there is plenty of revenue to cover projected expenditures. Preference toward avoiding spending cuts or other alternative to make it through the last months of the year. Shutting down programs is not a good planning strategy. Chief Nohr requested feedback on the Board's expectations. Commissioner Babcock stated he was not happy that the District hasn't set money aside for reserves in the past. Granted, the recession made that difficult, but there didn't appear to be a desire to put money away for the future. We need to plan against leaner times as well as station remodels and new construction. There was a distinct lack of communication in the development of the budget. Chief Nohr advised that reserve funds are important to cushion the ups and downs in the economy. He has asked staff to determine the best practices used by other fire districts regarding reserve funds. Commissioner Bartel agreed on the budgeting approach of low on revenues and high on expenses. He is supportive of setting funds aside for future purchases under a capital replacement plan. He expressed concern that we are developing a budget without a plan. Chief Nohr agreed that it's a challenge to develop the Strategic Plan at the same time as the budget, but we are in a unique situation. Basically starting over. Commissioner Bartel commented we need to keep in mind the budget may need to be adjusted in January dependent on the direction of the Strategic Plan.

BACKGROUND

Reviewed the history of CCF&R. Chief Nohr gathered background information from a number of sources on how we got where we are today. We shouldn't let history dictate the future, but it's still important to know the history in order to avoid pitfalls and understand current situations. Reviewed the impacts of the recession and how CCF&R managed the decreases in revenue. We are still working to get out from under that. Added the Woodland Clark 2 contract in 2013. The loss of Battle Ground hit the budget again for 2016. Advised that all the banked capacity will be utilized in 2017. Moving forward with the hope that the economy has stabilized. Following years will be subject to the 101% limitation. Chief Nohr expressed thanks to everyone who helped to educate the Clark 2 voters. The merger proposition passed. We should be able to more easily project future revenues. Advised that the

major reworking of the 2016 budget the end of last year may not have accurately captured the necessary changes. He wishes to have a budget that reasonably reflects actual revenue and expenditures.

2016 BUDGET YEAR DATE

Streissguth reviewed the Staff report on budget data. Property taxes increasing again since the low in 2013. Grant income is down as all existing grants are complete. The major revenue sources only come in at certain times of the year. Cash flow affects the timing of expenditures and operating cash reserves. The summer months may have higher expenditures due to employee leave and wildland operations. Discussed the status of the overtime budget. Reviewed the procedures in place to manage OT and the philosophy of company officers. Historically the district has set up processes to manage OT (part time program and labor agreements). In 7 months the established OT budget is overspent. Adequate funds were not allocated. Will need to look at the future – what really needs to be in the OT budget. Long and short term sick leave, vacations, FMLA – all may impact the OT budget. Can't cancel people's vacation, but still need to maintain minimum staffing levels. DVC Jackson stated that it was difficult to calculate the impacts of staffing with the loss of the Battle Ground contract. Chief Nohr advised that the impacts of the contract loss has been difficult to manage from an overall budgeting standpoint. Noted that the remaining senior personnel have higher leave banks available than those who were laid off. The ability to forecast the future has been challenging due to the volatile changes the District has faced over the past several years. There is a lack of consistency in our history to aid in budget development.

FUTURE

Chief Nohr discussed the impacts of the Clark 2 merger. Will help in the calculation of future tax revenue and projections of service. Other revenue streams include the Cowlitz Tribe contract. Credit given to the Board for working with the Tribe to finalize the contract. CCF&R will receive \$140K in 2017 and \$210K in 2018. Commissioner Bartel advised to work with the \$210K figure for future years until the contract is renegotiated. There are several options to be discussed with the Tribe for future contracts. The casino will increase development around the site and along the Discovery Corridor (I-5). The Cities of La Center and Ridgefield should each see growth. Expect we're in store for quite a bit of development over the next several years. Chief Nohr advised he and DVC Jackson attended a Woodland Chamber meeting and we should expect a lot of development in the Woodland area as well. The Port of Ridgefield is continuing planning for the overpass into the Port. They are anticipating a lot of development in the area, but the details are vague per Commission Babcock. Discussion followed on the number of large housing complexes coming to the Ridgefield area in the near future. Commissioner Bartel concurred that there is a huge potential for development and revenue growth in the CCF&R service area. Chief Nohr commented on the future issue of adequate coverage should the City of Battle Ground continue to annex into CCF&R. We currently have to drive through the City to get to areas currently served. If the City were annex west down 219th that will impact the District. Chief Nohr will come to the Board to discuss options for mitigating those impacts. Overall the future looks good. Discussed the lag time between new construction and the receipt of tax

revenues. Commissioner Bartel stated that need to serve is now, but the funds to cover those services don't come in until later.

REVENUE STREAMS

Discussed the known revenue streams – property taxes and contracts. Chief Nohr advised that the City of Woodland Council is very pleased with the service provided by CCF&R. The improved level of service is very visible to them. Commissioner Bartel reiterated the importance of maintaining positive relationships with our contract agencies. DVC Jackson stated that sharing information about the Cities with the crews helps in this process. The crews attend council meetings on a semi-regular basis. They are visible and engaged.

Discussed grant opportunities. We have committed to participate in a regional SCBA grant with a number of other Clark County fire departments. There is a 10% match requirement. Chief Nohr solicited the Board's opinion on grants. Commissioner Bartel advised he is hesitant on labor grant, but supportive if there are enough dedicated funds to continue the program beyond the end of the grant. Commissioner Babcock agreed that it's tempting to get a SAFER grant to cover those understaffed areas of the district, but we need to make sure we have funds to keep the people at the end of the grant. Need to really look at the numbers to see if it can be supported. Chief Nohr agreed and would continue to be conservative in estimates. Will be careful to not bite off more than can be chewed – the funds have to be there. Also have to factor in the requirements and match commitments.

Discussed potential EMS revenue streams. There are some extended EMS response times in the District. CCF&R is a large district with several accessibility challenges. Getting enough people on scene to handle incidents is a challenge. Frequently waiting on ambulances, which ties up the crews. The Vancouver contract impacts our ability to get an ambulance on scene in a timely manner. The outer areas of the District are waiting for service. Future topics of discussion may include providing transport and an EMS levy. Clark 6 just passed their EMS levy renewal with a strong percentage. It's used to put paramedics on engines. If we were to ask for an EMS levy, what would be the additional service(s) provided? Will be a topic of discussion for the Strategic Plan. The passage of the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) bill in April may provide for an additional revenue stream. Will need to review the associated costs. Advised that AMR is meeting the terms of their contract, but not sure the contract is the best service for northern Clark County. Discussed EMS transport subscription fees. Chief Nohr reminded everyone that we are hit with guilt by association - fire departments, whether responsible or not, bear the brunt of adverse feelings over long ambulance response times and big bills. DVC Jackson commented on the impacts on unit availability when ambulance response is delayed. Battle Ground is recognized as an urban area, so they get better coverage. Vancouver and most of District 6 are well covered. AMR is not required to maintain the 12 minute time in CC&FR and most of District 3. The Vancouver contract has put pressure on AMR and forces them to be busier with the cars they have. They are relying on NCEMS and Camas to cover when they hit level zero. Commissioner Bartel stated that we also need to include lid lift guidelines into the Strategic Plan. Discussed Clark 6's successes with levy approvals. Voter fatigue may be a concern.

Discussed the RFA. The City of Woodland has scheduled a meeting on August 15 to review and approve the timeline proposed by the RFA Planning Committee. An RFA will tie us closer to Woodland. Option to include an EMS levy as a part of the RFA. All desire to avoid going back to the voters too many times. DVC Jackson initiated discussion on the options to improve ambulance service in the northern area. A partnership? A contract? Starting our own transport service? Will need to review the costs. No interest to change the EMS service boundaries.

Discussed bonded debt options. Commissioner Babcock asked where are we at with bonded debt. There are only two bonds outstanding; one voted and one non-voted. Chief Nohr asked what the Board's philosophy is regarding debt. Always borrow, never borrow, sometimes borrow? Non-voted debt is paid with funds committed from the general fund. Recommended going to the voters for funds if there is a specific need to be addressed that benefits the entire district. Chief Nohr's philosophy is to minimize debt where possible.

Commissioner Babcock asked about the possibility of impact fees in the cities or the District. May be a source of revenue for capital improvements and replacement. When brought up for discussion in the past, the city council members didn't want to be the ones to increase taxes so it wasn't supported. We may be missing an opportunity. The downtown Ridgefield station is not a viable option for the long term. It's too small and not earthquake rated. It will need to be replaced.

CHALLENGES

There are three (3) main issues. Staffing, EMS response and capital improvement/replacement. Discussed concern over the lack of adequate staffing coverage for the Station 22 response area. Noted the recent string of significant crashes in the area. Several big calls in a lightly protected area. Service in the District was affected by the loss of Station 27. The results of the WSRB report will drive internal planning. Staffing for the most part is people in stations, but there are also other staffing positions missing. There is no longer anyone available on a daily basis for minor facility repairs and maintenance. In a budget crunch the first things to go are facilities maintenance, which creates other issues. Putting off the roof replacement too long will have you replacing it at an inconvenient time as well as dealing with the water damage. Have been extending life of existing equipment and facilities for some time. The stations are getting older. Station 26 is not being used in the same manner – it's a huge station for a single crew. Long term it may be necessary to build a more appropriately sized station to serve the Station 26 area. A station is needed in the SW end of the District – possibly somewhere along Hillhurst Road. Station 21 is well situated for central response. Will continue monitoring growth and responses in all areas of the district to keep an eye to the need for future stations. Most of the District's apparatus are older and will need to be replaced. Will need to address a timeline and how they will be replaced.

PROGRAMS

Reviewed the current operational programs provided. Cadets, EMS, Marine, Prevention, Public Education, Technical Rescue (TRT), Volunteers and Wildland Mobilization. Requested the Board take the opportunity to think on the programs and where they fit into the District plan.

The Cadet program is important in that it ties us into the community and provides for future volunteers. Also the guidance of a structured program is beneficial to the kids. There are scheduling issues as well as wear and tear on equipment and facilities, but there are many intangible benefits to the program.

The EMS program provides BLS every day. There is a higher cost for consistent ALS service. When transport service is slow ALS becomes more important.

Discussed grant opportunities to support the Marine Program. Free equipment with ongoing operational costs. Personnel costs include coverage while they are out of service during calls and drills.

DVC Dawdy is the District's prevention officer. There is a societal expectation to prevent emergency calls by the emergency service agencies. Develop the program to connect with our communities to mitigate call volume.

We have three personnel assigned the County TRT. There are costs associated with ongoing training and supplies. The team may be called anywhere in the county. Training is brought back to share with other members of the department.

The Volunteer Program is an important part of District operations. DVC Dawdy has been working to maintain the program following the loss of the Volunteer Coordinator at the end of the SAFER grant. Who should the program be assigned to long term and what are the expectations. Advised we picked up 5 new volunteers this year (cadet to volunteer transfers). They may become residents or responders. Discussed the challenges for volunteers to maintain all the training requirements. Commissioner Babcock commented he hadn't received a response on what it actually costs per person for a volunteer. Chief Nohr estimated between \$10-\$12K based on figures compiled by DVC Dawdy. Commissioner Babcock asked if the cost is worth the benefit. Retention is a huge issue. Chief Nohr advised the focus is moving to support volunteers as opposed to combat volunteers. We have a number of active long term support volunteers. Commissioner Babcock agreed that the value is in the support volunteers. Historically we train and lose new volunteers quite rapidly. They can be a drain on department resources. Maintain a traditional volunteer pool has become very challenging as people rarely work in the community they live in and their leisure time is valuable.

Discussed participation in Wildland mobilizations. Is the value worth the cost? Revenue meets or exceeds direct expenditures, but there are many hidden costs such as staff time to manage billing and wear and tear on District equipment. Commissioner Bartel also pointed out possible impacts to programs that aren't managed when people are gone for weeks at a time. Chief Nohr will be working on a policy at the end of the season on how we manage Wildland Mob in the future. Will need to review the season and the impacts to the District.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Reviewed the strategic planning timeline proposed by Chief Nohr. Stressed the importance of having a workable plan to provide a framework for moving forward. Discussed the length of the Plan. Five years is common, but three years may be

good for us at this time as things change so often. CCF&R is a highly functioning department with great infrastructure. We have great people. The Board should be proud of the firefighters and staff who are able to get a lot done with limited resources. It's easy to point to what the firefighters accomplish, but the administrative staff gets a phenomenal amount of work done. Captain Rommel is putting out a lot of training to the point where the crews are about ready to cry "Uncle!" Questions have been asked: why are doing what we're doing? We should keep doing the things we do well for the right reasons and look to change those things that we're just doing because. Chief Nohr has revisited the doing well / not doing well questions for current feedback. Also polling other agencies and community members on their perception of CCF&R.

Moving forward Chief Nohr would like to have a Strategic Plan in place for the January board meeting. He will work with staff to develop the invite list. Wants to have a large planning committee. The full board, city representation (Woodland, La Center and Ridgefield), the School Districts, partner agencies (such as the MPD and law enforcement), internal representation. Going to be a bigger group than you might normally see. Want people who are supportive of the fire service as well as those that aren't. Will rely on the Division Chiefs for their community contacts. Will have a participation list for review at the August 24 meeting for review. Expecting to hold three sessions: September 28, October 17-18 (possible 2 day) and November 7. Plan to create a small achievable Strategic Plan. Identify three to five big things to be accomplished in the next few years. Ideally we would have the plan in place before budget development, but the current situation creates challenges with the time frame. Plan before budget will occur in future years.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you to the Board in helping the District move forward. Today was an information session. In future program details and costs will be provided. Today's discussion merely covered philosophies. Commissioner Bartel expressed his appreciation of the opportunity to be more involved in the budget process.

Asked the Clark 2 Board members about their ability to attend the August 24 CCF&R meeting. Commissioner Lester is unable to attend that day. They will hold their regular August 18 meeting for adoption of the concurrent merger resolution. CCF&R may be able to continue the afternoon's regular meeting to August 18 to conduct joint business with Clark 2. The Board will make a decision at the regular meeting.

No further discussion. Workshop adjourned at 12:08 p.m.



Attest, John Nohr
Fire Chief/District Secretary