

**City of Bellingham – Fire District 8
Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee
Meeting 3**

Date: Wednesday August 9, 2017

Time: 3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Location: Bellingham City Hall - Mayor's Boardroom

Proposed Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes June 26, 2017 meeting and July 17, 2017 meeting.
2. Review of proposed charter and operating rules for Committee - Chief Hewett (15 min.)
3. Additional information on current conditions - Capt. Kays (25 mins)
4. Identifying problem statement & criteria - Chief Hewett (45 mins)
5. Timeline and meeting schedules - Capt. Pethick & Chief Hewett (15 mins)
6. Next Agenda/Date (10 min.)
7. Closing Comments/Adjourn

The Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee meeting was called to order by Bellingham City Council Member Terry Bornemann at 3:02 P.M. The meeting was held in the Mayor's Boardroom at Bellingham City Hall, 210 Lottie Street, Bellingham.

1. Welcome and introductions (5 min.)

Present: Bill Hewett, COB Assistant Fire Chief
Kelli Linville, COB Mayor
Rob Neher, Fire District 8 Commissioner
Monea Kerr, COB Mayor's Office
David Lehmann, Fire District 8 Commissioner
Tim Kays, COB Fire Captain
Terry Bornemann, Bellingham City Council
Michael Lillquist, Bellingham City Council
Roger Buswell, Fire District 8 Commissioner
Dave Pethick, Fire Captain, IAFF L106 VP
Kristi Clift, COB Admin Services Manager
Andy Asbjornsen, COB Accounting Manager
Rob Kinitzele, COB Assistant Fire Chief
Todd Lagestee, Citizen
Bill Newbold, COB Fire Chief

2. Approval of Minutes June 26, 2017 meeting and July 17, 2017 meeting.

The minutes from the June 26, 2017 and July 17, 2017 meetings were unanimously approved.

3. Review of proposed charter and operating rules for Committee - Chief Hewett (15 min.)

Bill Hewett, City of Bellingham Assistant Fire Chief, introduced the updated draft charter, which was revised after last meeting by Chief Hewett and Brian Heinrich, COB Deputy Administrator. This version focuses on the role of the planning committee as developing a plan for the RFA and includes updated language such as “proposes, develops, provides, etc.” It is a two-fold document stating what the mission of the committee is and how it will work together to accomplish goals. While there aren’t many changes, a more comprehensive approach to the mission of trying to see if an RFA would be feasible were taken.

- COB Mayor Kelli Linville stated that it is important to know everything the committee needs to plan for, such as how much an RFA would cost, statistics, assets transferred to an RFA, investments the City will be making, etc. early on in the planning process. An informed planning committee will have an easier planning process.
- Chief Hewett stated that per the RCW, the planning committee’s role is to create a plan, while the Fire Department staff’s role is to provide the details needed to create said plan. This will occur through looking at questions such as: What is our desired level of service? What assets will be transferred and which will not? What about liabilities and pensions? Who is going to own the apparatus and stations?
- Councilmember Michael Lillquist stated that there is one large change in the proposed charter draft that he especially appreciates, which is that the planning committee’s first job is to determine feasibility. Any acceptable plan will have certain features because it met the planning committee’s criteria. He stated that it is very important to have this specific feature.
- Mayor Linville stated that feasibility is important and that developing a plan will aid in deciding if an RFA is possible operationally. She asked: What if the planning committee works through a plan and an insurmountable obstacle comes in the way?
- Chief Hewett stated that if there ever is an issue that the planning committee cannot solve, it will dissolve and stop the planning process. If it is not determined feasible, the planning process ends.
- Councilmember Terry Bornemann stated that if the commissioners or council decides it is not feasible, the planning committee will either come back to the drawing board or stop planning.
- Chief Hewett stated that if a plan is developed, it still has to be vetted by the fire commissioners and council members before then going to the ballot to be voted on by the public.

The draft proposed charter and operating rules were unanimously approved by the planning committee.

4. Additional information on current conditions - Capt. Kays (25 mins)

City of Bellingham Fire Captain Tim Kays gave a presentation providing additional information on the current conditions of the City of Bellingham Fire Department and Fire District 8.

- Captain Kays tried to answer questions that came up in the last meeting, showing a map of the 2 territories and apparatuses the planning committee is looking at: City of Bellingham and Fire District 8.
- The Fire Department uses a tiered system with the following goals:
 - Minimize out of service time
 - Get back in service as soon as possible
 - Clear or free up unneeded secondary units to respond to other emergencies
 - Maximize the time a unit stays in its primary response area – ownership
- Captain Kays spoke about the percentage of total missed calls by territory. The Fire Departments are shooting for a goal of 10-15%, but in a perfect world it would be 0% missed calls. For example, if there were 10 calls in that area and the total missed calls is at 40%, you are missing 4 calls in that area.
 - Percentage of total missed calls by territory:
 - E1- 37.39%
 - E2- 13.62%
 - E3- 21.87%
 - E4- 17.79%
 - E5- 38.39%
 - E6- 15.18%
 - E31- 53.32%
 - E34- 13.94%
- Why is this happening?
 - Call volume rising
 - Increase requirements for training
 - RCW's, WAC, NFPA Standards
 - Distance to training facility/lack of centralized training facility
 - Aging fleet
 - Mechanical failures
 - Area growth – population/density/size
- Chief Newbold said that if the Fire Department goes outside of the 10-15% range consistently, there is an issue that needs to be fixed.
- Captain Kays spoke about covering other unit's territories:
 - E1- 863 calls
 - E2- 189 calls
 - E3- 526 calls
 - E4- 364 calls
 - E5- 739 calls
 - E6- 268 calls
 - E31- 247 calls
 - E34- 39 calls
- He also explained acuity levels:

- Omega (lowest - wound infection, sunburn, calls that shouldn't be 911 calls)
 - Alpha (sick patient, flu like symptoms, can be more serious)
 - Bravo (when someone falls, may respond code red but probably not)
 - Charlie (seizures, diabetic)
 - Delta (choking, chest pain, repertory issues)
 - Echo (massive trauma) = emergent calls (code red)
 - Charlie, Delta and Echo include lights and sirens.
 - Every active fire ends up in the Charlie, Delta, or Echo areas. Controlled burns are lower acuity levels.
- 4-minute response time to Charlie-Echo calls by territory:
 - E1- 79.53%
 - E2- 71.61%
 - E3- 76.86%
 - E4- 57.36%
 - E5- 85.88%
 - E6- 60.98%
- 4-minute response time to Charlie-Echo in another response area:
 - E1- 42.48%
 - E2- 28.53%
 - E3- 40.44%
 - E4- 65.10%
 - E5- 39.71%
 - E6- 53.21%
- Chief Hewett said that the Fire Department is spending an equivalent of \$1.855 per \$1,000 of the general fund right now. District 8 is spending \$1.94 per \$1,000 for current level of service equivalent rates.
- Chief Newbold said that as the population grows, the Fire Department has to look at the relocation of existing fire stations or build new ones. He asked: should a singular firehouse become a dual house so that there are multiple units coming out of that station? This is how we analyze the fire response model.

5. Identifying problem statement & criteria - Chief Hewett (45 mins)

Chief Hewett presented the problem statement and criteria.

- There are several issues facing the Fire Department:
 - Facilities:
 - 3 that need replacement
 - 3 in need of remodel
 - 2 in need of updating
 - Apparatus:
 - \$2.2 million in immediate needs
 - In the next 5 years, 2 engines will need replacing costing \$1.9 million

- Level of service:
 - The City is hitting its response goal 72% of the time
 - The County is hitting its response goal 87% of the time
 - The stated issues are:
 - Capital, service, ability to provide training and specific outreach, inadequate staffing to handle training, life safety inspections and public education.
- Chief Hewett worked with Rick Sepler, COB Planning and Community Development Director, on a problem statement. This is the question that the planning committee is trying to answer:
 - Would a Regional Fire Authority serve our communities needs into the future and be financially sustainable?
 - Option 1 – Form a RFA
 - Growth within the area and of the area itself through annexation and additional consolidations in the future
 - Ability to achieve our stated level of service
 - Ability to maintain our fleet and facilities
 - Ability to accommodate growth
 - Option 2 - Continue services as they are today
 - Adjust stated level of service to reflect what we are capable of
 - Inability to deal with the impacts of annexations within available revenues
 - Continued degradation of facilities and rolling stock
 - Continue to work together and function as one department without actually being one entity
- Chief Hewett said that the Bellingham Fire District has already gone as far east as the department can go without providing more services. The financial impacts of any more annexations will be greater than the benefit of what those annexations would provide.
- Councilmember Lillquist asked if there was a missing option. He asked: Can we continue working how we are, draw heavier from the general fund and make the current model work? If the answer is no, he said, then we need to fix it.
- Chief Hewett said that they could look to see if there is revenue for an additional Maintenance and Operations (M & O) levy or seek additional funds in other ways if an RFA were to be deemed not feasible.
- Councilmember Bornemann said that with our current budget we would already be drawing more money from the general fund. We don't have money in the budget to continue doing that, he said. If we continue as we are, we would need to continue drawing more funds.
- Chief Hewett said that the two options are to form an RFA and not to form an RFA. The purpose of the presentation is to outline that there is an inherent problem that needs to be fixed.
- Councilmember Bornemann said that the job of the planning committee is to figure out

how to go about this process.

- Chief Hewett said that District 8 is doing okay operationally, but capital issues are out of reach of fixing on their own.
 - Collectively, the two organizations have issues that have gotten to the point of needing change.
- Mayor Linville asked if standards, such as level of service, would change as well.
- Chief Hewett stated that if an RFA were to be formed, the board would adopt what they want as a level of service. National standards detail different levels of service based on rural, urban and suburban landscapes. It would be suggested to the RFA to classify by type of area for different levels of service.
- Mayor Linville stated that within our RFA, levels of service would be consistent.
- Chief Hewett stated that the City of Bellingham Fire Department has 6 stations for the same area that 2 District 8 stations cover.
- Chief Hewett said that if we just take property tax, there would be no room to grow. The Fire Benefit Charge provides more room to grow in the future. He did not include finances in this presentation because a funding model needs to be decided on.
- Councilmember Lillquist asked that the planning committee keep in mind questions like: Is an RFA better than our current model? Is it the best way to solve our issues?
- Chief Hewett stated that the job of the planning committee is to develop a plan and answer the problem statement. The committee may ultimately develop a plan that meets our needs and criteria, is sustainable, etc. but could be a plan you don't support because you see a different option. Councilmembers can help to develop the plan but they don't have to vote yes on it.

6. Timeline and meeting schedules - Capt. Pethick & Chief Hewett (15 mins)

Captain Dave Pethick introduced the timeline of the planning committee. He stated that because the planning committee could dissolve at any time due to lack of feasibility, talking about timelines of the next election cycles is important so that the committee is aware of the fiscal implications when voting.

- If the committee decides that the RFA should be on the August 2018 primary election ballot, the RFA plan would be delivered to jurisdictions on March 30, 2018, the last day to file would be May 11, 2018, ballots would be mailed on July 20, 2018, and tax collection would begin in January 2019.
- If the committee decides to take another 3 months and aim for the November general election ballot, the RFA plan would be delivered to jurisdictions on June 26, 2018 the last day to file is August 7, 2018, the ballots would go out on October 19, 2018 and tax collection would begin January 2020.
- Chief Hewett explained that originally a 6 month planning process was envisioned for the planning committee, based off of previous RFA planning committee examples. Once planning began, this time schedule proved to be unrealistic.

- Looking at the Lynnwood model, Chief Hewett wants to have a finished draft RFA plan so that open houses can then occur to provide the opportunity for the public to provide feedback and for the organizations to explain the draft.
- Chief Hewett proposed that the planning committee, starting in September, schedules a meeting every non-council Monday. He proposed this knowing that everyone will not be able to join every meeting but would like a more regular schedule to aid in the planning process.
- Councilmember Bornemann was in favor of meeting on non-council Mondays.
- Councilmember Lillquist was also in favor of meeting on non-council Mondays
 - September and October would require a lot of heavy lifting and November and December would require more public process, he said.
 - This also allows for a couple of months of retuning and revising if needed.
 - The public doesn't want more meetings, he said, they want input early on and having open houses at the end of this year will make for a busy fall.
- Chief Hewett stated that there is a need to have a preliminary plan, allow for input and public interaction, hold public hearings for city council, and have the fire department there to reflect the input of the public in the plan.
- Mayor Linville stated that people will pay more attention closer to the date of voting.
- Chief Hewett stated that he and Chief Newbold will be presenting to the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Committee in October, as well as conducting outreach efforts to neighborhoods and the Lummi Indian Business Council.
 - These presentations and outreach efforts will aim to answer the question of what an RFA is and what it means to form one.
 - He hopes to provide this information to the public early on so that when the draft RFA plan is finished, the focus can be on what the plan actually entails.
- Councilmember Bornemann stated that the Fire staff have to put this information together and asked: Does this work with your staff in getting the materials to us? The planning committee reads, asks questions and approves the plan but the heavy work comes from the staff in putting it together, he said.
- Chief Newbold said that the work plan is daunting but doable. Will there be other things that come up that we have to address? Yes, but the nature of this kind of work is that momentum is helpful for us, he said.
- Chief Hewett said that he doesn't want to start this regular meeting schedule until September so that the planning committee can get started and have time to prep before jumping in.
- Chief Newbold said that it gives the fire department confidence that there are numerous respectable agencies that have already gone through this process in Washington such as Renton Regional Fire Authority. These provide examples to learn from, opportunity for change and time to make the Bellingham proposed plan better. This gives Chief Newbold confidence of what can and cannot be done.
- Councilmember Lillquist asked: What was the other agency's problems?
- Chief Newbold said that Renton and District 25 are almost exactly the same as

Bellingham and District 8 and that the issue papers, charter and structure of the plan is based off of their example. Snohomish County and Lynnwood are the ones who have gone through this process most recently, but their finances are different.

- Captain Kays said that he sat down with the City of Arlington, which is going through the RFA process for a second time. Their first was in 2008. This time around, they are bringing 3 entities together so their planning committee is 9 people, not 6. Their initial problems stemmed from 3 different labor groups who had not been previously operating together fighting over things like what patch they would wear or who would be in administrative positions. He said that an advantage for Bellingham and Fire District 8 is that many of these problems have already been solved, such as their administrations already work together, they are driving and operating on the same apparatus, wear the same uniform and patch, and are trained in the same way.
- Chief Newbold said that Renton had a similar beginning and that their stepping stones in place with their relationship was similar to what the City of Bellingham has done with their commissioners, mayor and council.
- Councilmember Bornemann asked if presentations could be printed out and contact info for committee members could be shared.
- Chief Hewett said that he could put those together as well as a list of the planning committee meeting dates until the end of the year. He encouraged the planning committee to check out BellinghamRFA.org for meeting materials and presentations.

7. Next Agenda/Date (10 min.)

See above.

8. Closing Comments/Adjourn

- Councilmember Lillquist said that he wanted to make sure that his approach in style was clear – he is skeptical and takes a “show me” approach to all issues. He said that if the planning committee makes sure they go outside of what is being brought up specifically for the purpose of the planning committee meetings and question assumptions, it will be better off in the long run. He likes to take an approach of positive skepticism.
- Mayor Linville wants to make sure that the planning committee are the first ones to talk about what someone else might bring up later on down the line. If certain aspects of the plan are confusing, they need to be explained early on for better understanding. The materials that are put out there for the public reflect the conversations happening in this meeting, so explaining as much as possible early on is important, she said.

The RFA planning committee adjourned at 4:35pm.

Recorded by Monea Kerr, Planning Committee Secretary