

**City of Bellingham – Fire District 8  
Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee  
Meeting 15**

Date: **Monday, April 30, 2018**

Time: 3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

Location: Bellingham City Hall - Mayor's Boardroom

Proposed Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes from March 19, 2018
2. Update on Inter-Local Agreement / Outstanding Issues - Peter Ruffato
3. Service Sustainability/Improvement Plan - Bill Newbold
4. Next Steps/Future Meeting Schedule - Bill Hewett
5. Closing Comments/Adjourn

The Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee meeting was called to order by Bellingham City Councilmember Terry Bornemann at 3:03 P.M. The meeting was held in the Mayor's Boardroom at Bellingham City Hall, 210 Lottie Street, Bellingham.

**Present:** Kelli Linville, COB Mayor  
Bill Hewett, Assistant Fire Chief  
Bill Newbold, Fire Chief  
Terry Borneman, Bellingham City Council  
Roger Buswell, Fire District 8 Commissioner  
Brian Henshaw, COB Finance Director  
Brian Heinrich, COB Deputy Administrator  
Rick Sepler, COB Planning and Community Development Director  
Peter Ruffatto, COB Attorney  
Marty Mulholland, IT Director  
David Lehman, Fire District 8 Commissioner  
Monea Kerr, COB Mayor's Office  
Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council  
Dave Pethick, Fire Captain, IAFF L106 VP

1. Approval of Minutes March 19, 2018

The March 19, 2018 minutes were unanimously approved.

## 2. Update on Inter-Local Agreement / Outstanding

City Attorney Peter Ruffato gave an update on the Inter-Local Agreement (ILA). He said following the last planning committee meeting, we are trying to memorialize where we ended up for the purpose of not knowing when we will return to the ILA. We are trying to identify outstanding issues and the status of the ILA. In the packet there is a document that is an attempt to pull together different key points. Some have been decided and others have not. If we do go back and try to finalize an ILA, we wanted to have a check-list of ideas and issues. It is organized by different departments, but we didn't reach out to HR, Public Works or Planning.

Mayor Kelli said if at points along the way we get together to talk about some of these things, is there some way to put them into agree/don't agree categories so we know which areas we still need to work through?

City Attorney Ruffatto said I could envision a table or something.

Mayor Kelli said we need something that would help us to see which issues we need to address.

City Attorney Ruffatto said instead of fine tuning language, we could get everyone together to see if we agree.

Mayor Kelli said we could have some context through wordsmithing.

Chief Bill Newbold said as I read through the information that Legal, Finance and IT put together, I have recognized items that need to be discussed in a tabular format. What time frame does this enter? It seemed that this is work that could be done.

COB IT Director Marty Mulholland said I tried to group mine with what should be in the plan vs. the ILA. This is preserving those concepts so they are reported if it returns again.

Mayor Kelli said it doesn't seem like it would be helpful to do today. If there was a way to put a table together, that would be ideal. We haven't set additional meetings right now but people could look at it individually.

Councilmember Bornemann said next time we meet, we can ask any questions we have at that point. We will bring this back as an agenda item. City Attorney Ruffatto will come back with a table.

## 3. Service Sustainability/Improvement Plan – Bill Newbold

Chief Newbold presented the draft Service Sustainability/Improvement Plan. He said he looked back at the minutes and his take away was that he would come prepared having looked at certain service and functions with a prioritization of functions over the next four years. A lot of the discussion previously included full time employees for BLS cars, annexation, inspections, etc. He put together a couple scenarios to look at and did not attach dollar amounts purposefully to prioritize functionary items over monetary items. The City's budget will be carried over to the

City Council. From the District standpoint and City standpoint, which of these functions are the highest priority?

Chief Newbold took some of these services and laid them out trying to target a biennium. It will facilitate discussion in developing the City's budget and recognizes capacity that we would have in the Fire Department. We have a function capacity that we can hire and train people and this appreciates the ability to do that. At the bottom of each one of these, it shows attrition. That is besides the attrition that will continue to happen in the Fire Department. From 2013-18 we had 28 people in the Fire Department experience attrition, which is about six persons a year. To understand our age profile in the Fire Department - in 2018 we have 20% of personnel (of 139 uniformed) who are at or above retirement age. In 2020 that will be 27% of personnel at or above retirement age. At the next biennium, we would have 38% at or above retirement age. Grey text indicates numbers I expect to fluctuate, likely higher. This helps to balance the practicality of onboarding new people. I would like to suggest that not any one of these is a package all alone. Hopefully we will elicit discussion amongst elected officials on this.

Mayor Kelli said having just been talking about level of service with department heads, one of the things to consider is the effect that hiring a certain number of people has on different departments like HR, which requires adequate staffing to get people hired in a timely fashion. As we go through these, we should look at the Fire Department separately from District 8. In the budgeting process, we have to look at the effects of hiring personnel, such as training, academy, etc.

Chief Newbold said out of the tiered priorities, the first tier is internal and external. The training captain positions includes a volunteer recruitment coordinator. An internal training captain would allow us to meet the training needs we have today and to be able to bring on additional hiring. The first tier allows us to be able to accomplish the second tier, which is service, sustainability and enhancements.

Scenario A hires those positions up front to build the capacity to bring on other folks as the number of call volume increases and response times increase, etc. This includes two dedicated BLS units at the end of the second biennium. An academy of nine people at a time is a sweet spot for the Fire Department and City to handle. An academy of twelve people is a stretch, but it's doable. In 2019, it is proposed that two academies are held - one in the spring and another in the fall. In 2020, 2021 and 2022 there would be an academy of 9 each year. In the second biennium, we could run two academies depending on the rate of attrition. In 2019, you will see 18 additional FTE personnel. What functions and positions come first with that number of personnel? The phasing of firefighters over the course of annexation is important to consider. District 4 and District 8 are in need of fire inspectors. This is aside from the RFA discussion, but we still took those needs into account.

Scenario B keeps it within the same two bienniums, but spreads out BLS car additions between 2020 and 2022. This scenario delays training and volunteer coordinators and limits flexibility due to attrition. This puts us right at the cap and limits flexibility on attrition for four years. There are other alternatives to hiring, such as bringing in laterals from another fire department or

sending personnel to another fire training facility. Local orientation would still have to take place. All of these are based on Bellingham running our own academy as we always have. That would imply that we are down on attrition and pulling employees to train would be a double whammy.

Scenario C is based off Scenario A, but delays BLS units until years four and six. It does provide flexibility based on attrition. People would be hired and in academy by the end of February or the beginning of March. They would experience academy, onboarding and rookie training until the one-year probation period is over.

Programmatic and equipment costs can be found on the right of the document. We talked in the RFA planning process about including facilities maintenance and replacing fleet. The Fire Department is just one of those that has outstanding needs. There are other considerations that will impact these budget proposals, such as if we bring on a fifth medic unit in the county. Even if the funding is given to us, it still has an impact on hiring, finance, etc. There are nine personnel needed to be able to staff an additional aid car. We will know more over the next two years what it's going to look like. Two engines, one ladder truck, and a couple refurbished engines are needed. It will affect the fleet replacement program for all of the City Departments.

Mayor Kelli said I'd be really interested in learning about replacing equipment. As the conversation goes forward, what alternatives would be available? It's important to reconfigure how we do things in order to increase services within our existing revenues. We are not going to talk about the cost from the City or District 8, but when we add significant staffing, etc. the cost goes up. Would we each be paying our fair share? District 8 has a levy coming to us, and then would the City pick up the difference?

Chief Newbold said we are in a two-year contract with District 8. The training captain would have a focus on recruitment and retention. We would discuss with the Fire District 8 Commissioners on how that would fit into the budget. It wouldn't be one hundred percent in the district.

Mayor Kelli said I was talking about shared cost, as in the cost of the system and how we pay for it.

Councilmember Lilliquist said I gravitate towards Scenario B. It is not quite as accelerated as Scenario A. It might be the riskiest scenario. It looks modest, but might be the least likely to survive in reality.

Chief Newbold said it is the most desirable in a spread out financial standpoint, but it is risky. Scenario A has a spike up front, but it puts you in the position to have some uncertainty down the road.

Mayor Kelli said we've decided that we are buying this in one of three scenarios, but we haven't talked about priorities as far as these positions or services go. That would give the City some idea about what we would be proposing in our budget, not dollar wise but in the essential functions we need to see soon. Does District 8 have a priority on these things?

Fire District 8 Commissioner Roger Buswell said we would love to have some way to work with volunteer recruitment, which is our biggest concern. But a lot of it falls on the Bellingham Fire Department.

Mayor Kelli asked: As it affects you and your volunteers or regular firefighters, do you as commissioners have a priority for importance?

Commissioner Buswell said our big goal is to retain some volunteers and get them trained. We just sit back and hope that we get the training from the City.

Mayor Kelli asked: What about the BLS units in the scenario that Chief Newbold described in doing them differently? Is that important to you?

Commissioner Buswell said we've been doing that for quite a while.

Mayor Kelli said this is more of the dedicated BLS units. Is that more important than the training?

Assistant Chief Bill Hewett said what you're asking for is a tough meld. When we walk through what's going on, the additional training captain is to help everybody. The fire inspector is a very City-specific position. Because of jurisdiction issues, that doesn't affect District 8. BLS aid cars will help system-wide, but in the City where we aren't meeting response times is where they will be employed. The cross staff model still works. We want to change from a cross staff to a dedicated model to help out those stations that run 3,000 calls a year.

Mayor Kelli said we want to bring every department in the City to where they want to be with their staffing, but we can't do that with every department in the next budget. We can try, but we can't accomplish it for each and every department.

Councilmember Bornemann said we have decided that our economy is doing well enough that we don't need a levy. What do we need for you to be able to meet our expected level of service? We decided that we don't need to go forward with a levy to be able to do that. So I need to know what we need to do to get us up to the level of service that is expected of us.

Chief Newbold said all three of these scenarios address the first tier right away. Scenarios C and B put added service of BLS aid cars later on. Both B and C and part of A put those tier one components right up front. The difference with scenario A is it puts those tiers up right away.

Fire Captain Dave Pethick said the RFA bill got very expensive in the first year of the Fire Benefit Charge and was very uncomfortable to move forward with. It's important to remember that we are slipping on our response times right now. Growth over time is going to keep pressure on units and response times. If we could get two BLS aid cars tomorrow, community growth would still continue. If we continue to lose on our response times and first due units for fire or EMS, that 4-6 minute response time could mean life or death. We are fooling ourselves if we continue to slip. EMS needs to get there quicker to save lives.

Finance Director Henshaw said we all need to remember that we forecasted not that a levy wasn't needed, but that at the current level of service, we can fund it. These are all incremental

increases, not that they aren't needed. Funding has to happen after we decide what level of service is needed and we haven't gotten to that point yet. We haven't decided what our priorities are. What would you pick if we had to pick one? Scenario A is an increase to the entire General Fund. We have never done an incremental increase to the General Fund. The funding aspect has to come after we figure out the rest of the City's need. There are a whole bunch of things between these scenarios and where we are today.

Councilmember Bornemann said our current level of service is based on response times. Maybe we need to have a conversation about how we want to have better response times. If we are looking at current level of service, is it what we are currently providing or what we should be doing?

Mayor Kelli said if response times are the priority that everyone has, then that should be the first thing we look at. It's important to note as we prioritize what we need to do for all of public safety. An alternative would be to upgrade existing rigs rather than buying new ones. That's why I was interested in the priorities of the things we wanted to add.

Chief Newbold said all of these elements affect our service today. Call volume has increased 20 percent over the last 5 years and has slowed response times to critical calls. The way you address that is with additional resources. We can go through an analysis of relocating fire stations, but I think they are located well. BLS units and personnel directly affect our response time. A training captain is an investment that will pay for itself. We have training needs aside from bringing on additional personnel. There are legal and statutory requirements that we aren't meeting. Bringing on a training captain to bring up our level of service is an investment in that process. There is work right now that is inimically being done with regard to our fire inspections. We haven't had a critical fall out with that, but there are businesses we aren't able to inspect or get into based on capacity. Much of the fire inspectors' time is spent on new buildings. The facts are there by the numbers.

Councilmember Lilliquist said I would like to put the fire inspector position aside because we need it for our own reasons, not staffing levels. The training captain position should come earlier than others should because training is important for personnel. There is no way I can look at these without seeing the need in funding. By 2020 we should have a funding mechanism for fire services. None of these are going to be plausible and we have to solve the funding puzzle before anything else.

Mayor Kelli said there are multiple paths to the goal. It could be looking at options for how things are done so service levels don't dip or forming some sort of contract for service with District 4. The benefit that we got when we went into partnership with District 8 is more people for more territory. It might be the easiest, most simple and best way to do it. Do we need a specific training captain or are there other options for training personnel? We can send them somewhere else and then have them get a local update when they come back. In terms of the fire inspector, we created capacity now by having the Planning Department take a line of business off of the Fire Department, although there are certain ones that the Fire Department needed to do. There are different ways to phase in services than the ones presented here. That's why I'm

focusing on what people need to do, not how or how much it's going to cost. Is everything equally as important? We always want to improve public safety no matter what. What are the options and alternatives for doing this?

Fire District 8 Commissioner Buswell said Mt. Baker plywood had four trucks that would show up with four people. We had to do what we could with what we had back then. The bottom line is if the Bellingham Fire Department is going to make their level of service response, you need more people on the ground. You need some BLS units to get to the aid calls. Back in the early days of Medic One, they were chasing aid calls in the county. Now we that we have a good BLS system in the county, maybe it's time for Bellingham to get their own BLS system, but it's going to take more people.

Assistant Chief Hewett said from a district standpoint, the volunteer coordinator position pays for itself to some extent. We are going through the recruitment process right now and we have 8 people signed up with 20 slots to fill. Every time we don't get those slots filled, we have to pay a career member overtime. This is a district-specific issue. It has an overall effect across the board. What is the average citizen getting out of this? BLS is giving them an improved service.

Mayor Kelli asked: What's the difference now?

Chief Newbold said for example, right now if Station 3 has a BLS call that comes in, the crew of three people at that station are going to take both the engine and aid car. If it's a transport, they will put the person in the BLS rig and take them to the hospital. That equates to a 30-45 minute out of service time doing the transport, so when another call comes in, another crew and apparatus would need to respond. In the improved service scenario, dedicated aid cars would be located in the highest density areas. They would improve the response time in those areas and there would be a five people crew in that area. This kind of resource management is popular in Puget Sound areas. Rather than creating a whole new station and crew, you would now have two crews at one existing station.

Councilmember Lilliquist said it's a simplification, but the pitch to the public is that we need to have dedicated BLS service to mitigate pulling other crews from their stations.

Mayor Kelli said the important part to me is that it's becoming clearer what the core issues that we need to deal with from District 8's perspective are.

Chief Newbold said the training function is the number of hours and training requirements that we have for our number of personnel currently in the Fire Department, which exceeds the annual work hours of our training captains. They have developed training groups and have parceled out various training functions for different training groups that exceed their regular hours of work. They volunteer their time to step forward to plan, develop lesson plans and be able to give that training. They even come in on their days off to train. Training is both a legal and a professional requirement. There aren't enough people willing to step forward to commit to the necessary hours of training. From a math standpoint, additional resources is a way of doing this. We cannot meet our requirements with the number of hours we have. It's a known level of risk. When you

are in a scenario where training functions must get done and we are not meeting those additional needs, we have to ask people to volunteer their time. This affects families and work schedules.

Mayor Kelli asked: Are we not meeting our response time on fire calls?

Chief Newbold said we have evidence that we don't meet the fire response times. That's why we talk about percentiles and fractiles. Sometimes we will meet response times and other times we will not. As the number of responses continues to increase, our response times continue to decrease. Cities will differ depending on if they use travel time in their response time calculation. Response time includes time of call, processing that call, turn out time, and response times. We can choose to adopt something different than the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Finance Director Henshaw said if we chose to use different metrics, what cities use the 4 minute response time?

Chief Newbold said all cities in King County do. We use a 4 minute travel time, not response time. It depends on how we define it, but RCW requires that we report it. If I wanted to say response time instead, I would pull the same NFPA response time that all the other cities in western Washington use. Some include a 90 second response time.

Councilmember Bornemann said ours is the same as all of these others based on NFPA standards.

Mayor Kelli asked: How do we compare to other cities that have the same standard as us?

Chief Newbold said we can pull other annual reports and see how we compare. These levels of service are set based on fire growth, and tissue death based on medical and scientific basis set by a professional service standard. We are not better than average.

Councilmember Bornemann asked: How are we in relationship to how we were? It's important to ask.

Mayor Kelli said it is important because response times are a matter of life and death.

Fire District 8 Commissioner Buswell said before we had computers at the station, there were just sirens. People would be woken up in the middle of the night, have to get on the rig and get going to put out the fire. If you have a crew at the station, you can meet any response time you need, but if there is nobody at the station, they don't have the bodies to go out and put out the fire.

Captain Pethick said drive times are going down. It's important to look at other fire departments and what they are doing. We are seeing that the cross staffing model is a stepping stone and at some point in the municipality you realize that it's not going to work and that it needs to change. All of our annual reports have looked at drive times.

Councilmember Lilliquist said I would appreciate a simple graph over time showing how our drive times have gone down. It would be nice to see the percentage of meeting our target compared to other Puget Sound cities. Are they declining too? We are at a tipping point where our old model isn't working and the call volume is so high. I would love to see these graphs.

Chief Newbold said I could share with you some examples to give you some context. The City of Redmond in the early 90s added a dedicated BLS car in their downtown Station 11, and then in 2006 the City went out for a levy that failed. In 2011 they went out for a second levy for new FTEs and a new aid car. Kirkland did the same thing – they added their first BLS aid car in the late 90s and the second came in at 2010 or 2011. Bellevue had two dedicated aid cars added in the mid-2000s and they now have four dedicated aid cars and no cross staffing. The avenue that we are proposing with BLS aid cars does not create an additional station or apparatus, but adds to existing stations. In the past, we did BLS off of engines and then we went into transport. It became recognized that cross staffing was a stepping stone to the need for dedicated BLS units. That's why other agencies have experienced it sooner than we have. We have a high number of calls at 3,000.

Mayor Kelli said because of life safety and the split between fire and EMS/BLS, there is more growth in that area than the fire response. Is there anything that we can do to look at existing personnel and see if that's an issue? Is there a different staffing model that could increase our BLS transports?

Chief Newbold said that's how we utilize our ladder truck and the specifications of our new ladder truck. We are relying on BLS from other stations. Right now our ladder truck does not have suppression capability. That is one way that we can use creative staffing to cover suppression, aerial device, etc. while utilizing existing personnel.

Chief Hewett said looking at a fire truck with a crew doesn't equate to just a fire problem. If we wanted to have the greatest flexibility, we would have two or three aid companies. What do we have to do to keep the aid company in a certain service area available for the highest priority calls like CPR, heart attack, stroke, or working fire? No matter if the call is fire or aid, we want to keep a crew there that can get there within that 4 minute mark.

Councilmember Bornemann said this lets us know what we have to do to get that somewhere down the line. Between this group and Council, we can be looking at these as we approach the budget.

#### 4. Next Steps/Future Meeting Schedule – Bill Hewett

Assistant Chief Hewett said what I've gotten from this meeting is that our next meeting we will have a little more from City Attorney Ruffatto on what's left to be done in the future for an RFA, as well as a follow up on level of service and comparisons to other jurisdictions. Are there any other items for our next meeting?

Mayor Kelli said I thought this was the last of our regular meetings. I wanted to give staff the time to work on the budget without giving them homework on something we aren't doing right away. We have things we could still discuss, but maybe we should take the summer off?

Chief Newbold said I don't know of any information that would be decisive for the budget. I would like a little clarity on what work is going to continue behind the scenes. Not necessarily when we meet, but I don't want to wait a month before that and then decide we want to have a meeting.

City Attorney Ruffatto said my work requires a lot of other pieces that depend on other people. The budget is influenced by other departments.

Councilmember Lilliquist said after Chief Newbold finishes the draft of what he needs to turn in for the budget would be a good way to go about it.

Mayor Kelli said let's do a fall meeting before the budget goes to council.

Finance Director Henshaw said the end of September is when we will have the most information before the budget goes to Council.

The Planning Committee is considering the next meeting date as Monday, September 17<sup>th</sup>.

The RFA Planning Committee adjourned at 4:39 P.M.

Recorded by Monea Kerr, Mayor's Office.