

Whatcom County Fire District #5
Point Roberts Fire Department

**2030 Benson Road, Suite A
Point Roberts, Washington, 98281**

Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners

June 21st, 2017

MINUTES

A. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Commissioner Meursing.

In Attendance: Commissioner William Meursing
Commissioner Shannon Tomsen
Chief Christopher Carleton
Recording Secretary Linda Hughes

Absent: Financial Manager Patty Markel (via teleconference)

Guests: Jane Donaldson
David Lee
Ed Lester
Virginia Lester
Michelle Wallis
Adam Rozynski
Pat Grubb
Brad Lutz
Michael Wynkoop
Rhiannon Allen
Kimberly Butts
Assistant Chief John Shields

**B. Discussion toward filling a vacancy on the fire commission
due to the resignation of Commissioner Stan Riffle**

Commissioner Meursing described the position vacated by Commissioner Riffle as a six-year term which, once filled with an appointed candidate, will be on the ballot for election in two years' time, November of 2019, and again two years after that, November 2021, which is the actual expiration of the term for this position. After that, that position will not be on the ballot again for the full six-year term, unless it is once again vacated prior to term completion. He further described the three commissioner positions and staggered six-year terms, ensuring that every two years at least one of the commissioner positions is on the November ballot for election.

Commissioner Meursing then described the duties and responsibilities of the Fire District Commissioners. He advised that each Commissioner is required to attend regular monthly meetings and occasional special meetings, unless excused. He said that it is very important for commissioners to stay familiar with operations, and for candidates to bring a strong attention to detail and the ability to read and understand financial reports to the position.

Commissioner Meursing offered his personal advice to potential candidates that they fully investigate what this position means to the citizens of Point Roberts. He continued describing the role, saying that Commissioners have no authority whatsoever over the firefighters, EMT's or volunteers, but are responsible for fire district operations and the Chief. This means that commissioners are responsible to the public for proper allocation of their tax dollars, which amounts to approximately \$565,000 per year, received in April and October in conjunction with property tax payments. He continued to say that a little extra income is earned by the District from the current tenant, the Point Roberts Hospital District and Clinic also located within this building, the fire station. He mentioned other income which is generally not included in the annual budget calculations because the amount is negligible and inconsistent, being the fees received from ambulance transfers and the sale of burn permits.

Commissioner Muersing continued to describe the budget process saying that Chief Carleton, in cooperation with the District Financial Manager Patty Markel, draft the budget annually and then the Commissioners review all of the intended allocations of funds and make changes as deemed necessary. He described his confidence in the talent and experience of our Financial Manager, who attends the meetings by teleconference when she is not here in person, usually every third month. He described the monthly process whereby Financial Manager Markel provides financial reports and monthly expenses to the commissioners in advance of the regular meeting for their review, in order for the commissioners to prepare any questions they may have for the Chief or Financial Manager Markel at the meeting.

Commissioner Meursing continued to describe the regular monthly spending of the District, noting that Chief Carleton has broad purchasing power for District needs, saying that he felt the Chief has shown good judgment and prudence with that privilege, noting that the Chief often contacts the commissioners in advance to alert them to a particular upcoming expense or need. Commissioner Meursing reiterated the responsibility of commissioners to stay at all times dedicated to the citizens, who are really paying the bills here.

Commissioner Tomsen asked about the experience of Financial Manager Markel, and her tenure with this District. Chief Carleton responded that she has been a Financial Manager for another Whatcom County Fire District for at least a decade, he thought closer to seventeen years. She has been with this District at least two years and has extensive experience with fire district procedures and financials, including State audits. He feels it is important for everyone to understand the value of her experience to this District. Chief also described the clean audits this District has experienced under the tenure of Financial Manager Markel and advised that together he and Financial Manager Markel perform a full payroll audit regularly each month.

Commissioner Tomsen then referred to the Washington State Fire Commissioner Association Handbook, which is available online, which she recommended all prospective candidates read for an overview of roles, responsibilities and duties of Washington State Fire Commissioners. She also showed her copy of a handbook that has been prepared by our Fire District legal counsel, Brian Snure, which is provided to each commissioner. She described it as all of the information you need to know, digested in a very helpful format.

Commissioner Meursing described the process by which the District pays its expenses, saying that all monies received are held by the Whatcom County Treasurer, and not the District. The District does not have checkbooks to pay for operating expenses. As the monthly warrants are approved by

the Commissioners, the checks for those expenses are then issued by the County Treasurer out of the appropriate accounts of the District. He advised the public that this District has been operating on the plus side for quite a few years now, and that has allowed the District to save funds in reserve each year. He continued to explain why those reserve funds are not refunded back to the public, saying that those funds are needed for future capital expenditures the District is saving for. He mentioned that we have well over a million dollars' worth of equipment in this District and each of those items will run its useful course and will need to be repaired and eventually replaced. He continued that eventually this building, the fire station, will need capital improvements as well.

From the public forum, Bennett Blaustein asked if Fire Commissioners are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act training. Commissioner Meursing replied yes.

Michelle Wallis then asked what kind of qualifications the Commissioners were looking for in a candidate. Commissioner Meursing offered that, on top of the qualifications mentioned earlier, he felt that enthusiasm and a positive mind are a plus.

Chief Carleton described the going out to bid process for capital improvements when needed, noting that this District follows Washington State Law with respect to the bid process and looks to the Small Works Roster for some jobs when appropriate. He said that he felt it is important to use local contractors when they are available and bid the job, saying that we have recently hired local painters, local contractors on the kitchen remodel, and mentioned that upgrades are going to be needed upstairs as there exists a black mold problem resulting from a water incident some years back that was not properly repaired. He offered to give anyone interested a full tour of the station.

Chief Carleton then briefly described the equipment of the District, and mentioned that the current ISO rating is entirely dependent upon the viability of the equipment and services offered by this District, and that our recently improved rating has a direct impact on homeowners' insurance.

Chief also described the bunker gear and other protective clothing that is mandated, and further described how this District often piggybacks onto the purchasing power of larger districts to save money in purchasing, when the need and opportunity exists.

Chief also mentioned that choosing a Commissioner, or choosing to become one, is about life and property, and said that this District is always trying to provide more in emergency services.

Commissioner Tomsen responded to the earlier question about qualifications, saying she is looking for someone with community involvement, a background in finance, someone who is able to read and understand financial reports. She suggested that candidates have a look at the District's annual budget which is posted online at the district website.

Commissioner Tomsen then asked Commissioner Meursing to discuss the mechanics of applying for the vacant commissioner role. After some discussion, it was agreed that applications could be sent either by email to Chief@wcf5.com, or delivered in person to the Station, on or before the deadline of 5:00 pm July 10th, in order to give the Commissioners time to review the applications before the next regular meeting of July 12th.

Commissioner Meursing then advised the District Secretary to place an Executive Session as the 1st item on the Agenda for the July 12th meeting, so that a commissioner could be appointed and then the regular meeting could be continued with a third commissioner on duty.

Chief invites all interested applicants to come in and have coffee with him. He looks forward to any opportunity to discuss operations and answer any questions an applicant may have.

C. ADJOURNMENT

As there was no further business, Commissioner Tomsen moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Meursing seconded the motion. **Motion passed 2 – 0**

The next Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners will be July 12th, 2017, at 4:00 p.m.



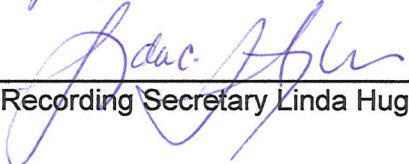
Commissioner William Meursing

Commissioner Shannon Tomsen

Dated

July 12, 2017

Attest:



Recording Secretary Linda Hughes