

EAST COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE

Board of Fire Commissioners Special Workshop

April 12, 2010

CALL TO ORDER:

The Workshop—a joint meeting between East County Fire & Rescue and Fire District #3—was called to order by ECFR Chairman Gary Larson at 6:00 PM at Station 91.

The Special Workshop was advertised in compliance with State law.

The following were in attendance and introduced themselves: Mike Berg, Jack Hooper, Gary Larson; Scott Koehler; Jon Couture, Dick Deleissegues, Buck Heidrick; Steve Wrightson, Donavon Mattern and Scott Sorenson.

PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP:

Commissioner Larson stated that he felt the purpose of the gathering is to get to know each other better.

Chief Wrightson thanked the ECFR Board for inviting District #3 to this gathering. District #3 then called their Special Workshop to Order.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

What Activities are Each District Currently Involved In ?

District #3 described their Agency: 83 square miles; 4 fire stations—two are typically staffed; they run about 1,200 calls each year—66% are EMS; they have 21 paid staff, 11 college interns, 5 shift volunteers, 3 Respond From Home Volunteers, and 8 Cadets; their budget is \$6 million—they try to keep a \$2 million reserve fund; their Assessed Valuation is about \$2 billion—but recently dropped 21% due to the downturn in the economy.

East County Fire & Rescue described their agency as: 60 square miles; 6 fire stations—two are typically staffed, one other has a live-in Resident Fire Fighter and his family; there are approximately 650 calls each year—about 70% are EMS; the District has 5 paid staff, 9 part-time staff, 3 college interns, 10 shift volunteers, 15 Respond From Home Volunteers, and 11 Cadets; the budget is about \$2.4 million—there is approximately \$1 million in reserve; the Assessed Valuation is about \$1.2 billion—but recently dropped about 18% due to the downturn in the economy.

District #3 stated that, right now, they are ‘hanging on’—hoping that the economy improves. They have not, yet, had to dip into reserve funds—however, if the economy is not ‘flat’ or better next year, reserve funds may be needed to balance the budget. They just completed an addition/remodel at their Venersborg Station. They need to replace a 1970’s-vintage water tender and need to remodel their Battle Ground Lake Station.

East County Fire is trying to construct a storage building at the Bear Prairie facility. It will eventually need its own apparatus. The District has three fire engines nearing the end of their 20-year service life. The District will be hiring five (5) full-time Fire Fighter/EMTs when the joint staffing agreement with Camas ends in December.

What Challenges does Each District Face—Now and in the Future ?

District #3's Assessed Valuation dropped significantly this year—as did their tax revenue. Volunteers are getting harder and harder to recruit and retain. Their Respond From Home program is almost gone—few well-established residents are volunteering.

ECFR's Assessed Valuation dropped significantly this year—as did our tax revenue. We have several apparatus to replace in the near future—which will be very expensive (we are considering use of smaller apparatus with rated pumps). We have been lucky, lately, with our Volunteer recruitment and retention—our numbers are up and (so far) holding steady.

How is the Economy Affecting Each District's Operation ?

Both Districts's discussed this topic previously.

What Activities/Projects Do Each District Desire to Undertake In The Future ?

District #3 is currently updating their Strategic Plan. They are looking to develop a replacement schedule for apparatus—which then leads them to development of a Strategic Financial Plan. They have not been re-evaluated by the Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB) for many, many years—they think they might get a better rating than their current “5”. There was also discussion about CRESA and MDTs—and the trouble the Fire District was having with ‘dead spots’ for data coverage. External antennas helped overcome MDT coverage issues.

East County will be updating their Strategic Plan this year. Three engines will exceed their WSRB-mandated 20-year Service Life during the next five years. Funding replacement apparatus will be challenging when considering the current economy. ECFR just completed its WSRB re-evaluation and maintained our ‘Class 8 with Tender Credit’ rating. The addition of the Bear Prairie Satellite Station will keep folks in the NE corner of the Fire District—more than 5 miles from the Mt. Norway Fire Station—from receiving a Class 9 rating.

Chief Koehler suggested that more automatic aid and mutual aid could be a possibility—especially to ensure that adequate personnel are on-scene and that Water Tenders get out the door.

Does District #3 Have A Training Officer ?

No. District #3 spreads various training assignments among career staff. They feel that this is the most cost efficient manner available to them. Scott Sorenson coordinates their training program; Jeff Stewart coordinates cadet training and New Member training; and Dave O'Brien coordinates EMS training.

ECFR does not have a Training Officer—Dean Thornberry currently coordinates that program. Training will be shifted among the Full Time personnel—after they start in December—unless the economy improves enough to cover the cost of this additional position.

What Kinds of Activities/Projects Could The Districts Work on Together ?

Topics that were discussed included more automatic aid/mutual aid, joint training, joint purchasing, etc. For example, if one District was hosting a fire, the other might provide water tenders and/or rehab service. Or station coverage. And vice-versa.

There was discussion about Vancouver's offer to discuss a large-scale Regional Fire Authority in Clark County. District #3 feels that there is no advantage to participating—Fire District funding could easily be used to support the busier urban areas. They are not sure that partnering with city departments—who are financially in-trouble—is a good partnership. They suggested that State

Law might allow for a three-tier system of mergers: Rural departments could pair with other rural agencies; suburban with suburban; and large cities with like-agencies. Currently, associating with other larger departments seems to offer no promise of maintaining—or improving—the current level of service that District #3 offers.

East County is always open to ways to improve service and efficiency—and is willing to join with other agencies. However, ECFR relies upon its Volunteers (we can't afford any more career people)—and anything that undermines or demotivates Volunteers is counter to the needs of the District. Not too many Clark County fire agencies place enough emphasis on Volunteer recruitment or retention. A growing number restrict what tasks, responsibilities and opportunities are given to Volunteer Members. Therefore, until a partner can be found that embraces Volunteers—in a manner equal to or better than we currently do—ECFR will not be partnering with others.

After discussion ended at 7:17 PM, Chief Koehler provided a tour of Station 91 for the District #3 personnel. Significant time was spent looking at Water Tender 91—District #3 desires to replace their 1970's-era Water Tender.

There was discussion between individual members of each Board—and various Staff (from both agencies)—regarding a vast array of subjects.

GOOD OF THE ORDER:

There was no information discussed.

ADJOURNMENT:

With nothing else to discuss, the Workshop was adjourned at 8:08 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

EAST COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE

by

Gary Larson, Chairman

Jack Hooper, Vice-Chair

Mike Berg, Commissioner

Absent _____
John Clancy, Commissioner

Absent _____
Victor Rasmussen, Commissioner

ATTEST:

DISTRICT SEAL:

Scott Koehler, District Secretary