



PUBLIC MEETING - FIRE AUTHORITY MINUTES

Council Chambers – 1300 First Street

January 05, 2023 at 6:00 PM

1. CALL TO ORDER - ROLL CALL

PRESENT: Councilmember Makos, Councilmember Carlisle, Councilmember Ancich, Councilmember Robinson, Councilmember Wenzel

2. PUBLIC DISCUSSION - FIRE AUTHORITY

Mayor Pauley stated this is for the Cosmopolis residents to get their thoughts regarding the Central Grays Harbor Fire Authority. He reminded everyone that the plan is not finalized at this time. There will be numerous public meetings prior to the plan being finalized.

McNall Mason asked how the vote works. Mayor Pauley stated it would be all three cities cumulatively.

Councilmember Ancich asked when the Council has to vote on the plan to be put to ballot. Mayor Pauley stated it would be at the next Council meeting.

Carl Sperring asked if the Council will have the financial numbers. Mayor Pauley stated the final plan will have the information. Mr. Sperring asked if the citizens will have access to the information prior to the Council meeting. Mayor Pauley stated it should be in the agenda packet.

Ed Van Syckle asked if all three city councils have to approve the plan. Mayor Pauley stated yes that all three are required to approve it if it is to go on the ballot.

Mason McNall asked what services Cosmopolis would get out of the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated that all stations would all go to the RFA. He said it is not specifically outlined as to what personnel would be at the Cosmopolis station. Most of the specifics would be decided by the RFA commission after approval by voters.

Linda Springer asked about who would be representing Cosmopolis on the commission. Mayor Pauley stated that it would be up to the voters. Councilmember Wenzel stated the vote would happen after approval of the RFA.

Ed Van Syckle asked how long the terms would be for the commissioners. Chief Miller stated that terms will stagger. One person will get 2 years, another gets 4 years, and the last would be six years to create the stagger. After the initial term, all terms would be six years. Mayor Pauley stated that this is state law.

John Bramstedt asked if the plan currently have expansion for personnel. Mayor Pauley said additional staff would be proposed and planned. Chief Golding said Aberdeen is adding three new personnel this year.

Jeannine Bramstedt asked if at the next meeting will they be discussing what it will take to cover Cosmopolis. Chief Golding stated it had already been discussed. Mayor Pauley stated the plan had been modified since Cosmopolis has joined the discussion.

John Bramstedt asked if the nearest manned station would be the South Side station. Mayor Pauley stated volunteer staff would be in Cosmopolis. Chief Miller stated the volunteer staffing would be enhanced and would have volunteer shifts so that there would always be someone here at all times.

Jeannine Bramstedt asked who the volunteers will answer to. Chief Golding stated there would be a volunteer coordinator that would oversee the volunteers. Chief Miller said the volunteers would fall into the ranks of the other firefighters. Chief Golding stated the volunteers would respond to all areas, not just Cosmopolis.

Tom Distler asked if the Council already made the decision to join the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated the council voted to be part of the planning. Councilmember Wenzel stated that at the next meeting, the Council will be asked to approve the RFA to be put on the ballot for voters. Chief Miller stated that all three councils have to approve it. If one city votes no, the whole plan dies.

Linda Springer asked if there would be an official vote at the next Council meeting and how will the citizens get the information. Mayor Pauley said yes. Councilmember Wenzel said it would be on the agenda for the next Council meeting.

Carl Sperring asked if our current EMS charge disappear and is it paid for by property taxes. Mayor Pauley stated property taxes would be taken from the City and go to the RFA. The EMS fees may still be on your bill but would go to the RFA.

Jeannine Bramstedt asked if the three cities approve the plan if we would have to pay Aberdeen until the plan is up and running. Mayor Pauley stated that the City would maintain until the RFA takes over. Chief Miller said the RFA doesn't collect anything until January 1, 2024. Chief Golding stated that during the first year, the City will have to help support the RFA.

Mason McNall asked how the city would bolster the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated it means the City will fund everything and keep adding volunteers until the RFA takes effect, but the agencies would act as those the RFA was in effect.

Ed Van Syckle said it was stated that we wouldn't have the same service at higher cost but we would be getting more services at a higher costs. Mayor Pauley stated it will be more streamlined and we would access to more staff if the RFA passes. Mr. Van Syckle stated his point is we get more benefits for more money.

Mason McNall asked if we would only be staffed by volunteers. Mayor Pauley stated that initially we would but it would adjust and grow. As it grows we would have better training and more comprehensive services.

Mason McNall asked if the plan lays out what we have now and what we would have in the future. Mayor Pauley stated that it is not. It would be up to what funds are collected and what the commissioners have in mind for the future. Chief Miller stated the RFA would get volunteers from all over Grays Harbor not just Cosmopolis. Mason asked if it is difficult to leave the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated it is possible. Chief Miller hopes the RFA will help with recruitment and retention.

Carl Sperring asked if it would help with retention if we were able to get people who grew up here and lived here. Chief Miller said it would help enhance the attractiveness of the department.

Mayor Pauley stated the next Council meeting will be to vote on the plan. In April, the citizens will vote on whether or not to approve it. There will be multiple public meetings to discuss this prior to the election.

Mason McNall stated there aren't a lot of calls in Cosmopolis so we won't have more fire department personnel here. Mayor Pauley stated it would take a lot of money to have a fully staffed department in Cosmopolis. Mason asked what happens if the RFA fails. Mayor Pauley stated we would continue to build our volunteer department.

Councilmember Ancich stated he asked for this meeting. He said he didn't realize that the financial side was not ready. He suggested everyone go to the RFA meeting to find out more information.

Linda Springer stated the chiefs have provided a lot of information. She stated that she supports the RFA. It is unrealistic for us to think we can have our own fire department.

Kim Gherna asked for clarification on when the RFA starts. Is it on passage or January 1, 2024? Chief Golding stated the after passage it will become in existence on January 1, 2024. Also if it passes, we will start operating as the RFA. You would see enhances prior to January 1. Kim stated that elected good commissioners would determine what this will look like in the future.

Ed Van Syckle stated that some people believe volunteers are an advantage over the RFA. He asked if they can compare response time from the South Side station versus volunteers from Cosmopolis. Chief Golding stated an engine can get to Cosmopolis in four minutes. Their medic unit has arrived either just prior to or at the same time as volunteers in the past. Mark Tarabochia

stated that he has responded to a call the night before from home. He said he was four minutes behind Aberdeen. If he had responded from the station it would have been much better. Nick Falley stated that he and Mark are averaging a 10 minute response time from home.

Steve Davis stated he is pro RFA but it is expensive. He said it is about funding our whole system as it is on the verge of collapse. He asked what we are going to get for the money and we need to get our culture back.

Mason McNall asked if the plan has someone to help promote recruitment of paid and volunteer staff. Chief Golding states they have someone who does outreach.

Chief Golding stated the RFA will streamline costs. Maybe we don't need all of the vehicles we have. There are opportunities to save money through combined purchases.

John Bramstedt asked if all three cities pay the same. Mayor Pauley stated that everyone would pay the same availability fee. The property tax rate would be the same in all three cities for the RFA.

Ed Van Syckle asked if the RFA be a county government controlled and the cities supplying administrative positions where needed. Mayor Pauley stated it would be like a school district. They have their own commissioners and operate separately. It is not county controlled.

Linda Springer asked if people would be able to ask questions via zoom. Director Pope stated the planning committee meetings are run by the Hoquiam finance director.

Steve Davis stated that Chief Hubbard said Aberdeen needs \$55 million in new facilities. He wanted to know how it would be funded. He also asked if the RFA picks up the liability from LEOFF 1 retirements. Chief Golding stated the LEOFF 1 liabilities would be retained by the cities. He said Aberdeen does not have the bond capacity to fund new facilities. The current fire stations will be retained by the cities and the RFA will lease them. If the RFA builds facilities in the future, the current stations will go back to the Cities.

Jeannine Bramstedt asked if the volunteers be hired and trained by the RFA coordinator or by the cities. Chief Golding stated it would be the RFA. The City would only provide admin services for the volunteers.

Mayor Pauley stated the next RFA Planning meeting will be here next Thursday. Public Comment will be allowed. The next Council meeting will be on the 18th.

Chief Golding thanked everyone for coming. He stated that in previous RFA attempts the other meetings never had this many attendees.

Chief Miller encouraged everyone to reach out with any questions.

Destiny Chilcote asked if businesses will be taxed differently. Director Pope stated that everyone is taxed the same. There is no difference.

Mayor Pauley adjourned the meeting.