



COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES

Council Chambers – 1300 First Street

September 15, 2022 at 6:00 PM

1. FLAG SALUTE - PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CALL TO ORDER - ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Councilmember Candice Makos, Councilmember Jim Ancich, Councilmember Raymond Robinson, Councilmember Miles Wenzel

3. COUNCIL DISCUSSION REGARDING THE CENTRAL GRAYS HARBOR REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY

Mayor Pauley called the workshop to order.

Councilmember Wenzel stated that he appreciated the emails he has received. It gave him some questions and comments that he had not previously thought of.

Councilmember Robinson stated that this is his first meeting since being appointed to the Council. He is hoping to learn a lot about the RFA.

Councilmember Ancich is hoping to get some feedback from the Council and the citizens that we can pass onto the RFA. He would like to know if it is possible to pushout the date in order for Cosmopolis to catch up on the process. Mayor Pauley stated the the goal from the other RFA members has been February. Extending it to the April ballot has not been broached. The further out it goes, the further out the RFA can start. Citizen Jerry Schreck stated that he agrees with Councilmember Ancich. Mayor Pauley said the committee needs to know if we are going to be moving forward.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Citizen Joe Shapansky stated whatever is going to happen will happen whether Cosmopolis is involved or not. Bigger isn't always better. He said they are two big entitles with our small community. Councilmember Wenzel stated that the RFA Commission would be made up of one elected official from each city if Cosmopolis joins now. Mr. Shapansky would like to see Cosmopolis out of it all together.

Citizen Steve Davis stated the last written plan available was from July 2021. He had asked at the last meeting if a new plan would be given to the Council before they vote to continue and he was told no. He said there is no plan to hire new staff and could be added later on with approval from the voters. Councilmember Wenzel stated the current plan does not add staff due to the last two measures which included the benefit charge to pay for additional staff. It is not included this time. Mr. Davis read part of a Daily World article said the RFA would increase staffing. Mayor Pauley said the article was not accurate. Mr. Davis says that all departments are understaffed and need to be increased. Mayor Pauley stated that they are looking at costs to see how additional staffing could be funded. It would be down the line.

Citizen Cheryl Turner said that in the last meeting it was stated both fire chiefs said that they are not understaffed. Mayor Pauley said all their budgeted positions are filled.

Citizen John Schumacher asked if they would have to go back out to the voters if they add more budgeted positions. Mayor Pauley said if it happens after formation they would have to.

Citizen Jim Lohr asked who would staff our station. Mayor Pauley said that it's not completely laid out yet. As of now, a battalion chief would oversee a training program at our station. He said that until the plan is finalized, we do not have all the details. Mr. Lohr asked if staffing costs were included in the per household amounts given. Administrator Raines said they were not. Mr. Lohr then stated that we are just voting to be on the planning committee for negotiation purposes. Mayor Pauley said the discussion is do we want to be a part of the planning.

Citizen Cathy Shapansky asked if the RFA would take ownership of the equipment. Mayor Pauley stated everything but the new fire truck. The Fire Truck is on an installment loan and cannot be given to the RFA at this time. Administrator Raines stated that if there was something the City wanted to retain, we could negotiate that into the plan.

Citizen Steve Davis stated that Cosmopolis would have oversight if we choose to join the RFA at a later date. We could create our plan and present it to the RFA, but we wouldn't have a voting member. He said the RFA keeping referring to the NFPA standards for staffing. The RFA is all about adding staffing with Hoquiam being understaffed and underpaid and Aberdeen being understaffed. Mayor Pauley stated it has been a part of the discussions. Councilmember Wenzel asked if Mr. Davis would like the RFA to add back the benefit charge to pay for additional staffing. Mr. Davis the beginning of the RFA was to add additional staffing. Councilmember Ancich said the benefit charge was why it failed twice and was taken out. Mr. Davis would like a more cohesive plan to establish more staffing before we decide to go into it. Mayor Pauley stated that it would not be possible.

Citizen Terri Phipps said an increase in staffing would be part of it since Cosmopolis has no staffing. She asked if this means Aberdeen and Hoquiam would continue to cover us. Councilmember Wenzel stated that when they refer to staffing it means full-time paid positions. It doesn't count volunteer services. The RFA would build back a volunteer program. Mayor Pauley said the RFA would cover our area. Councilmember Wenzel said the RFA system is a better roll-out for calls due to the mapping of the district and there are no calls out for mutual aid. The response time gets reduced because it is all one unit.

Citizen Jim Lohr asked if we would have permanent staffing at this station. Councilmember Wenzel said with the current plan, this station will house volunteers.

Citizen Cathy Shapansky said the first time the RFA went to the ballot it had the additional staffing, but the second time they took it out. Mayor Pauley and Councilmember Wenzel both stated that the additional staffing was included both times it went to the ballot. Attorney Steve Johnson said they ran the exact same plan both times. Mayor Pauley said the new plan does not include more staffing as the new plan sits now. Each City Council will have to approve the plan before it goes out to voters. Mayor Pauley said that if the planning continues with Cosmopolis, before December, the Council would have to approve the plan to go out to voters. It would be filed around December 10th in order to be on the February ballot. Councilmember Ancich asked what happens if the Council says no. Attorney Johnson said all three cities have to approve the ordinance for the RFA to be put on the ballot.

Another citizen asked what happens if the plan is derailed. Mayor Pauley stated a new plan would have to be developed. Attorney Johnson said they would take out all the Cosmopolis components and redraft it. She said that some of the firemen don't think it will pass. She wanted to know why we are even considering it. What do we have to add to the table? Mayor Pauley said we are not bringing a lot of revenue. Cheryl Turner stated that Cosmopolis is getting more benefit from the deal. Mayor Pauley stated the long term goal would be for our station to have a volunteer program based here along with training.

Citizen Daryl Brown says this option of the RFA will cost the citizens more money. He said there is an insurance standard and we are trying to meet that need. The City has been paying Aberdeen a significant amount of money to maintain fire protection services. The Aberdeen Fire Station is 2 miles away still meeting the standard to keep our current rating. He believes the only benefit the RFA would be is they if we are not a part of it, they could raise our rates without warning. He is trying to find more value.

Citizen Jeannine Bramstedt asked if we join the RFA would we have to continue to pay Aberdeen. Mayor Pauley stated that the City would no longer pay Aberdeen, but the costs would be paid by the citizens.

Citizen Jim Lohr asked how this will affect property insurance. Mayor Pauley stated our rating is a 6 now. If we are part of the RFA and their overall rating is a 5, then ours would be a 5. In theory, it should lower insurance rates with the lower rating.

Citizen Steve Davis said the ratings bureau is dragging their feet in re-rating us. We contract our services with Aberdeen but their City comes first. This would raise our rating if we were to be rated at this time. If the City council votes to be part of the RFA, and cosmopolis says no. Are we still obligated to be part of the RFA? Mayor Pauley says no. Attorney Johnson said what we are doing now is deciding if the City wants to be part of the planning committee. It doesn't mean the City will approve the plan. When there is a final plan, each City Council has to approve it before it goes onto the ballot.

Councilmember Ancich says that if we are going to be apart of it, we need to have a voice at the table. He asked if we could leave the RFA in two years or so if it wasn't working for us. Attorney Johnson stated that we could. It would have to be voted on.

Citizen Terri Phipps stated that we are contracting with Aberdeen but they won't continue to do so indefinitely. She asked if we hadn't been invited to the RFA, what would we do. Citizen John Schumacher stated the correct question is what is the alternative to the RFA. He says the alternative

is to contract with Aberdeen or the RFA at a much higher rate and we would be one step closer to merging with Aberdeen. She believes we should join the RFA instead of having to contract with them.

Citizen Joe Shapansky stated that needs to be a discussion about why we don't have a fire department and what is being done to get one back. Administrator Raines stated that we have two volunteers who have completed their paperwork and will be confirmed at the next Council meeting. There is another person who has started the process. We have a total of five or six packets that were filled out and returned. Mr. Shapansky asked if the previous volunteers were contacted. Mayor Pauley said those that stepped away had their list of reasons and those reasons were addressed. There are a lot of disagreements. There have been many discussions with the former volunteers.

Citizen Steve Davis stated the City still has to fund the fire departments while the taxes are collected for the RFA so citizens will have to pay twice for a year. He urged the Council to continue with the planning process until we get the final plan. He says we have a big gap to fill until the RFA forms. He wants a town hall forum and have the previous volunteers go over their grievances. He believes we could get the volunteers back.

Daryl Brown asked if the current volunteers go with the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated they would work with them. Steve Davis said the original plan stated they would be taken in until they retired and would not be replaced. Mayor Pauley stated the plan states that the Cosmopolis Volunteers would be integrated into the staffing response plans. Mr. Davis said the planning committee minutes and recordings should be made available to the public.

Citizen Mark Collett asked if the lack of minutes is a violation of OPMA. Administrator Raines said they hadn't been prepared yet. Attorney Steve Johnson said the next meeting will be next Thursday, September 22nd here at the Cosmopolis Fire Hall. The minutes from the prior meeting should be available then.

Citizen John Schumacher stated there is no double payment of funding for fire departments. The additional fees would not be paid until the following year. Cheryl Turner said at the last meeting that when the RFA takes over, it would be responsible for the building to include maintenance.

Mayor Pauley adjourned the meeting.