



COUNCIL WORKSHOP & PUBLIC FORUM MINUTES

Council Chambers – 1300 First Street

September 07, 2022 at 6:00 PM

1. **FLAG SALUTE - PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
2. **CALL TO ORDER - ROLL CALL**
3. **COUNCIL DISCUSSION - CENTRAL GRAYS HARBOR REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY**

Mayor Pauley stated the reason for the meeting is to discuss the regarding the potential Regional Fire Authority and whether Cosmopolis should move forward with it. He said the RFA is still in the process of adjusting the plan.

Fire Chief Matt Miller gave a brief history of the Central Grays Harbor Fire Authority.

Mayor Pauley stated Cosmopolis joined the planning committee in June of this year. Miles Wenzel, Stana Cummings and Mayor Pauley are the three elected officials who joined the committee on behalf of Cosmopolis. Mayor Pauley stated Councilmember Robinson emailed him a couple of questions. He wanted to know what the financial difference is between the RFA option and other options for fire services. Mayor Pauley stated that the cost per Cosmopolis \$.50 per one thousand of assessed property values for an EMS levy and an \$26.54 EMS on utility bills. Cosmopolis currently charges \$6.75 per month. The biggest increase is on the utility bill. Mayor Pauley said the City Looked into getting a report from ESCI to see what other options we could have would have an 8 to 12 week turnaround.

4. **PUBLIC FORUM**

Frank Chestnut - He asked what does the structure of the RFA look like for the three cities. Interim Chief Golding stated all three departments will combine into the RFA as one entity. All equipment and personnel transfers into the RFA. The headquarters would be ran out of Aberdeen due to central location. The facilities will stay owned by the City. Mayor Pauley stated that there would be elected commissioners. There would be one from each City. Hoquiam Finance Director Corrine Schmid stated that if Cosmopolis doesn't join now, it will lose the elected seat on the board.

Terri Phipps - She asked where the money comes from for the study. Mayor Pauley stated it comes from the City's general fund. She then asked if Hoquiam and Aberdeen are down firefighters how does this work? Fire Chief Matt Miller says they are down on call volume compared to staff. Aberdeen has provided ALS services prior to providing full coverage for the past 8

months. There aren't a lot of calls from Cosmopolis. He says it will be absorbed into the system. At this time, Hoquiam and Aberdeen have already started merging. This will help to spread manpower and equipment better. Chief Miller clarified that they are fully staffed but the study stated that combined they should have more people.

Cathy Shapansky - She asked if everything in the fire hall goes to the RFA. Mayor Pauley stated everything but the new fire truck as it has a debt on it.

Jerry Schreck - He asked what happens if they need additional funding after the RFA is approved. Director Schmid stated the RFA could go out for an Excess or M&O levy which would have to be approved by the voters.

Cathy Shapansky - She asked about the \$1.50 per thousand. Director Schmid stated that is currently being paid to the City and would not be an additional fee.

Joe Shapansky - He asked what the City pay per thousand for it's fire department. Director Schmid stated that she has not calculated that for Cosmopolis.

John Bramstedt - He asked what the current budget for the fire department is. Director Pope stated it is about \$250,000 for the year.

Cathy Shapansky - She asked how much the fire truck payments are. Director Pope stated they are \$44,000 per year.

Steve Davis - He stated there is a difference between budget and actual expense. Director Pope stated the budget and actual expenses can vary each year. You may need additional training or maintenance expenditures that were not budgeted for. He then asked what the crucial dates for when Cosmopolis has to make a decision and will there be a written plan. Mayor Pauley stated the planning committee is adjusting the plan. The City needs to make a decision in order for the RFA plan to become finalized before it goes to the ballot. There is no definitive hard date, but the sooner the better. Chief Miller stated they would like this on the February ballot. In order for it to be on the February ballot, all three cities have to approve the plan by around December 10th. Director Schmid stated that Cosmopolis needs to decide by their next Council meeting. This decision would be whether or not to stay on the planning committee. Mr. Davis stated that he supports the RFA with definitive numbers.

Carl Sperring - He asked how much of our current property taxes are for fire coverage. Director Pope stated that we do not have that calculated. Mayor Pauley stated that fire coverage is not currently calculated that way. He confirmed the EMS levy of .50 per thousand the increase in monthly EMS fees.

Steve Davis - He stated the reason we paid less before is because we had a staffed department. He stated that the monthly fee is just for ambulance availability and the citizens would still be charged for any service received. Chief Golding stated that in Aberdeen insurance is billed and they write-off any remaining balance.

Cathy Shapansky - She stated that resident pays \$6.75 and business pays \$25.00 per month in Cosmopolis. She asked if that will be the same with the RFA. Directors Pope and Schmid stated that all accounts would pay the same rate regardless of residential or commercial.

Dave Muma - He asked why every time the ambulance leaves a fire truck follows. Chief Golding and Chief Miller stated that it depends on the type of call.

Frank Chestnut - He asked how this levy could possibly impact the other junior districts in the area. Director Schmid stated it would only affect the city. Mayor Pauley stated the biggest impact to the City would be for the street fund. A portion of our property taxes are allocated to streets and with the loss of property taxes, this would be about a \$40,000 loss to streets. Mr. Chestnut also asked why the RFA failed in the past. Director Schmid stated it was due to funding mechanisms which were fully understood. The Fire Benefit Charge couldn't be calculated by citizens themselves. Mr. Chestnut stated people have contacted him saying they believe the City joining the RFA is an attempt to solve our fire department problems. Mayor Pauley stated that we were invited unprompted to join the RFA.

Linda Springer - She stated that we would pay a little bit more for service, but this would provide the best service.

Dave Muma - He asked what it was that scared previous voters. Chief Golding stated that they had threw out numbers and people grasped onto the worst case scenario. Director Schmid stated it was the benefit charge that was based on the square footage of your home not the value. He said that people need to understand that the \$1.50 per thousand is already being paid and the only additional is the \$.50 per thousand for EMS and the monthly EMS fee. Director Schmid asked anyone to call her if they would like an estimate for their property.

Daryl Brown - He asked about staffing for Cosmopolis. Chief Miller stated there would be a MSO training position would be here and volunteer services would fall under that. Chief Golding says that as the RSA matures and is able to grow, there would be someone who would be here to guide and run the program. Mr. Brown asked if our fire rating would drop. Chief Golding says his gut feeling is that it would. He said there are many different factors that go into the rating.

Terri Phipps - She asked what is in it for Aberdeen and Hoquiam for Cosmopolis to join. Chief Miller stated it is the bigger growth potential and opportunities for our communities.

Cheryl Turner - She asked if the RFA grows through would our fire department be considered volunteer or full-time paid department. Director Schmid said it would be part of the RFA. Ms. Turner said this would give us a better rating and reflect in your homeowner's insurance.

Steve Davis - Mr. Davis said a 6 is the best a volunteer fire department can be. Our department had achieved this. Mr. Davis asked who takes care of the maintenance on the new fire truck and the facility since the RFA won't have ownership. Mayor Pauley stated it would be the RFA. Mr. Davis then asked how much of the monies being used to build the new city hall would go to the RFA. Director Pope stated none of it.

Joe Shapansky - He asked if we will have full time staff at this station. Chief Golding stated logistically this station is not centrally located due to where most of the calls are located. If Huntley is punched through, this station would work. This station will be used for the volunteer program. Mayor Pauley stated that Cosmopolis has only been involved with the planning for two months. There are still discussions regarding the initial plan versus the long term plan are going to be. Mr. Shapansky asked what will Cosmopolis gain from this. Chief Miller stated that in a fire call, we would be gaining additional manpower from the RFA plus additional volunteers staffed

here. It will be a seamless approach. They would also provide building inspections and fire code enforcement. They do not charge extra for these services. Mr. Davis asked what our other options are and why we don't see a regional police department. Mayor Pauley stated there is no legislation authorizing a regional police department. Director Schmid the reason the City is looking at ESCI for a study. She said it would lists the options but wouldn't tell them which one they should take. The basic options would be to rebuild the fire department, become a fire district, contract services, or join the RFA.

Frank Chestnut - He asked how long it would be from the approval of the RFA to the expansion of staff. Mayor Pauley stated if the RFA is approved in February, it would start January 1, 2024. Chief Golding stated a lot would depend on the funding. Chief Miller said the cities have to help fund for the first year while the RFA builds funds. It would take approximately two years to see additional staffing if it was approved in the plan that went out to the voters. Director Schmid said an MSO (medical services officer) would be added first and others would trickle in based off previous conversations with former Chief Hubbard.

Steve Davis - He asked if the only loss to the city is \$40,000 to streets. Director Pope stated if RFA was in effect \$290,000 of our property taxes would go to the RFA. She stated the fire department isn't funded strictly through property taxes. Mr. Davis stated it would take roughly two years for the RFA to be up and running. He said it is in Cosmopolis' best interest to get the volunteers back up and running. Chief Miller said during that time we would work to get the volunteer numbers up and would start working together as one unit. Chief Golding stated that they have created a training timeline to get everyone up to speed on apparatus and aligning policies. Mr. Davis then asked if the trailer park and the golf course is in the city limits. Administrator Raines stated the trailer park is and only a portion of the golf course is. Chief Golding stated that if any of the cities annex property, the RFA automatically grows as well. Mr. Davis stated the RFA should have posted minutes and recordings. Director Schmid said meeting minutes will be approved at the next meeting and then will be available.

Dave Muma - He asked if the size of the RFA will affect getting funding. Chief Golding said that a lot of agencies like the regional requests.

Joe Shapansky - He asked if our taxes go up as this gets bigger. Director Schmid stated that if the RFA needed additional funds, it would have to go back to the tax payers for approval.

Daryl Brown - He said a regional fire authority would ask for additional taxes on an annual basis. He asked what Cosmopolis is currently paying to the city of Aberdeen. Chief Golding stated that EMS is currently \$21,000 and fire service is by call. Mr. Brown asked what the financial benefit is to the City and citizens by joining the regional fire authority. Mayor Pauley stated what we pay Aberdeen is currently what our fire department is. He is assuming that the cost is going to go up. All the options are roughly the same cost. Chief Golding stated that Aberdeen is working on their budget now.

Terri Phipps - She asked who is on the planning committee from Cosmopolis. Mayor Pauley stated it is himself, Councilmember Wenzel, and Councilmember Cummings. Ms. Phipps then asked how soon a recommendation is needed. Director Schmid said a recommendation is needed by the next Council meeting.

Daryl Brown - He asked if there is a possibility of the planning committee extending the time frame. Chief Miller said it is possible but it is up to the committee. Chief Miller stated there would be public forums and meetings that would occur the end of September. These would be RFA based.

Jerry Schreck - Asked how the vote works. Director Schmid stated it would be based on the total not the individual cities.

Ashley Arcangel - She asked what happens if we don't join now. Director Schmid stated Cosmopolis would lose a seat on the board and would be subject to the policies set by Aberdeen and Hoquiam.

Cathy Shapansky - She asked when the next Council meeting is. Mayor Pauley stated it is two weeks from tonight. Mrs. Shapansky asked what happens if it fails. Director Schmid stated that they RFA would have to start the plan all over again.

Cathy Shapansky - She asked if there will be another meeting like this. Mayor Pauley stated that there is not another one planned but will have public comment at the next meeting.

Steve Davis - He states that the post office is the best place to post notices along with the City's Facebook page.

David Muma - He says we have a volunteer fire department and yet have to pay Aberdeen. He said with the RFA we would have better response time. He says \$25 per month will keep our fire rating down and insurance costs down. If we don't move forward, our insurance costs will go up.

John Bramstedt - He asked if we have a fully staffed volunteer fire department would our costs go up. Mayor Pauley stated he is comparing to current costs to what we pay Aberdeen are roughly the same. Administrator Raines stated that he doesn't know what it would take for us to trigger mutual aid with Aberdeen. Chief Golding stated we would need a sustainable operation to trigger the mutual aid.

Steve Davis - He said it costs us more with paying Aberdeen \$20,000 a month than it used to. He said our volume is going to grow and therefore costs will go up. Director Schmid said the goal is for the plan to have the funding for the staffing model.

Mayor Pauley stated that if there are still questions, please reach out to the City staff, the City Council, or himself.