

# Board of Fire Commissioners Special Meeting Minutes

June 9, 2009

0930 hours

## CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lorentzen called the meeting to order at 0932 hours.

## ROLL CALL

Chairman Lorentzen, Commissioner Elmore, Commissioner Foster, Chief Faucett, DC Lingenfelter, Leah Schoof, Laura Kipp, Laana Larson, County Councilmember Heather Coleman, City Councilmember Kathy Holder, LS Journal Pam Stevens, various members of the district and two members from the community.

## FIRST QUARTER REVIEW

Chairman Lorentzen asked members to limit their comments to 3-5 minutes in length. He informed the audience that their feedback was important and that this was their opportunity to speak during the public meeting. The Commissioners will consider all that has been said before making an informed decision.

Chief Faucett opened with a few slides to review an update on the economic and revenue forecast. He reminded everyone that 95% of all of our income is through property taxes. If the economy bounces back it is going to take quite some time to turn things around. We are currently reviewing trends within the state of Washington.

Chief Faucett continued with the following summary.

### Operations vs. Capital

The issue is to get administration out of the building in order to make room for the firefighters. We need to fulfill what we promised our community. Our levy was to maintain current response times and to build an Admin/EOC building. It was not intended to increase levels of service or get more for the firefighters. We have done a phenomenal job within our department and our priority has been operations. Operations has been taken care of with millions of dollars.

### Cash Reserves for Employment

The Commissioners have to be very careful with taking one time money and putting it towards new hires. We don't want to hire firefighters and then have to fire a year later because we can't afford to keep them.

### The Team vs. the Deal

We got into this levy together and we came up with a plan. It is important to note I have not changed the plan. As soon as the economy recovers and growth occurs, let's hire the firefighters. There is no CEO who would promise an exact date for new hires during this economy. We passed a lid lift and it was not a bond. This means that as the economy grows we get the money, and when the economy shrinks we don't get the money. I hope the team can see I am keeping my end of the deal. Our plan didn't succeed like we wanted it to, and everyone else is facing the same challenges.

Chief Faucett also mentioned he met with the Union Executive Board and again with President Rasmussen. We are sympathetic to each other's causes; however we were unable to come up with a solution.

Chief Faucett recommended that the Commissioners delay the hiring of the firefighters until we start growing and our finances are under control. We can't lock ourselves in at this time.

Chairman Lorentzen commented he hopes Chief Faucett's summary brought the audience up to date on the issue at hand and reminded everyone there were handouts available on the back counter. He also commented the Commissioners are not looking to make a decision today. He asked the audience to direct their comments to the Commissioners and to keep their comments respectful.



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*"Touching Lives Today ~ Planning for Tomorrow"*

Fire Commissioners:  
Troy Elmore, Dan Lorentzen, Vern Foster  
Fire Chief Gary L. Faucett

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Lake Stevens, WA 98258

Councilmember Heather Coleman commented she hasn't studied the LSF Budget or the levy. However in 2004 there were 2,256 lots purchased, in 2005 there were 1,900 lots purchased and only 1,700 were built on, in 2006 there were 2,200 lots purchased and only 1,600 were built on. As you can see there is quite a surplus in lots. In 2008 there were 850 lots purchased and only 92 were built on, and so far this year 32 lots have been purchased and only 3 have been built on. It does seem there has been a small seasonal trend; where we had 5,500 houses for sale and this month 600 homes sold. The resale market is very slow, and personally speaking this seems to be a very small seasonal blip. We are not seeing large commercial developers coming in as there is no ADC funding. Housing is the leading economic indicator and until we see a return in the housing market we are not in recovery; and in my opinion we have not yet hit the bottom. The good news is we are not falling as fast. We are very cautious about adding staff. We are currently in a very tough position with less staff and no decrease in the workload. According to the assessor's office property value has gone down over 11% in Lake Stevens which is another revenue hit.

Chief Faucett commented the good news is we had heard it might be 11-22% and it is 11% rather than the 22%. This could mean an 11% reduction in revenue.

City Councilmember Kathy Holder commented the city is looking at mitigation for parks. They are going back and forth with Master Builders, as there is no sense of what lots are selling for and things are so deflated. There is still a lot of uncertainty out there.

**Motion to open the meeting to public comments to allow the audience to address their concerns.  
Motion by Chairman Lorentzen and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Elmore.  
Vote Unanimous.**

Chairman Lorentzen suggested the audience start at three minutes per person and requested that each person submit a sign up sheet before speaking.

President Rasmussen commented it is unfortunate that it has come to the Commissioners about hiring and that labor and management couldn't come to a mutual agreement. He commented what labor thinks is best for the department and what management thinks is best are different scenarios. We know we need people. Response times don't say that, they aren't the only true tale of the story. What does the community truly think? The community thinks we have six more firefighters to go. We run two man engine companies which is unheard of in this area. We have cross-staffed aid and engine cars. It is not five years down the road. We should be able to find a way to make this work. It is not mistrust, it is different priorities. Hiring is more important than capital. Unfortunately we won't know what the community thinks until we go out for another levy.

Citizen Terry Gellner commented that he is a taxpayer. When the tax levies come up, they are hard choices to make. Firefighters should be a sure thing. We want to be sure that we are covered. As far as a new building goes, I don't believe the money should go to the building. Buildings can wait, and let's keep the people in Lake Stevens covered. If we have to hire people to do that I think we should.

Chairman Lorentzen commented the Commissioners are happy to hear what the audience has to say.

Commissioner Elmore commented he met with a couple of the crews. This topic has been weighing very heavy on his mind. We are in a sticky situation, if we don't build buildings there are those who will expect them, and if we don't hire there will be those who expect additional hiring to occur. There are things that can be done, and there are some unknowns that will soon be known. He appreciated hearing from the crews.

President Rasmussen commented if we were initially considering a decrease of 11-20% and we are going to be at 11%, it seems 4% would go into the bank account.

PM Keith Terry commented he started at Lake Stevens Fire nine years ago, and we are headed in the right direction. The scenario is we are chasing an engine with the medic unit and we do the best that we can. I don't think we are safe all the time and there is room for improvement. I want to see us shoot for greatness and not just a standard.

FF Lisa Defenbaugh commented we are a progressive department and we don't have three people on the engine. They get to the fire faster, and what do the citizens say when we choose to have a building over having three people on an engine? It is going to come out to the community.

Commissioner Elmore asked if we have we had the situation where we have not been able to rescue someone.

FF Lisa Defenbaugh responded not yet, but it could happen tomorrow.

Commissioner Elmore commented if we can't do everything at once, we need to consider what we can do to creatively reduce the risk.

FF Lisa Defenbaugh commented it is a shame we see our officer at the hydrant. Getting three people on the engine and an increase in staffing is absolutely necessary.

FF Pat Cook commented the soul of the department is in the staff. During this time of uncertainty where we keep hearing we just don't know; we need to hold onto our money until we do know. Yesterday is an example where both medic units had to get on the engine. It comes down to education. We may not be able to do what we promised we would do and we just need to keep our community informed. We need to treat our people well and give them the best of everything.

Citizen Dennis Egan commented he is in favor of hiring more firefighters. Ultimately the justification is providing the service to the public. It is not a question of whether it is going to happen. You have a choice to impact the safety of the crews and the people they serve rather than buying a building. It is easier to justify hiring versus purchasing a building.

FF Mike Eagle commented there is always potential for an imminent rescue when Station 82 gets called to a structure fire.

Commissioner Elmore asked if there was one example.

FF Mike Eagle commented it is not if, it is when.

President Rasmussen asked what we are comfortable living with. Are we comfortable not adequately staffing our rigs? It comes down to a risk assessment.

Commissioner Elmore commented it is an organizational decision. It is the burden on everyone that works here to pass along any ideas they have up their chain of command.

Chairman Lorentzen commented it is the obligation of the Commissioners to be open to everyone's ideas. He asked for any additional comments and confirmed that we will continue to post our next meetings and we will continue to refer to this topic as "First Quarter Review."

Chairman Lorentzen moved to close the public portion of this meeting.  
Motion by Chairman Lorentzen and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Elmore.  
Vote Unanimous.

Chief Faucett commented he is trying to weigh out whether he should respond to the public comments and with everyone present it seemed appropriate to address the issues. This is an emotionally charged subject. Chief Faucett commented he understood where everyone was coming from. It is not a matter of priorities, and it comes down to the money. Not hiring is not going to increase or decrease our response times. The levy was based on response times. We went to the public and told them we wanted to maintain our current response times. My priority is to keep everyone employed and I am going to give it the best shot I can.

Commissioner Foster stated the revenue lost in Whiskey Ridge is the equivalent to the hiring of three firefighters. We did well not to lay off the three firefighters when we lost Whiskey Ridge. Commissioner Foster stated that asking to delay the hiring in light of that road bump is okay. The additional six firefighters are still in the plan by the end of our levy cycle and the hiccup caused by Whiskey Ridge should be understood by the community.

Chief Faucett commented that Marysville built the station in our jurisdiction and hired the firefighters. We have to consider how the plan has changed. The district boundaries have changed and the economy has changed. We all want more firefighters however nowhere did we tell the community that we were placing three people on the engine. The third person on the engine will not improve our response times. That is not to say a third person wouldn't help us and benefit us. The department needs to be careful with the assumption of where the third person would go. Even given the economic fall no one is currently scheduled to lose their job, however if we hire there is a risk (just like the school teachers, etc.). If we don't buy the capital, what are we going to do with that money? If we don't buy now it will be a

guarantee that we pay at least a million more. We need to be careful with our choices.

It makes no sense to do nothing at all. Absolutely people are the heart of our organization. We need to follow through with our commitments. We are talking about .58% of our calls when we are talking about structure fires. I believe you need the people. Yet rarely do our crews respond with only two people, most often there is a medic responding with the engine as well.

Commissioner Elmore commented we need to remember that when we take tax money in, the government has a two year lag time. We won't realize the full extent of the drop until two years later. We did have an initial bump in money, and since then it has decreased. We are not expected to gain 2008 taxes until 2012. It comes down to meeting our obligations and staying in harmony with everyone. We can achieve our objectives; however there will have to be some creativity. We can get it done. We are going to give it our best shot and we will modify as we need to.

Chairman Lorentzen commented we made a promise and when we put numbers to paper we need to follow through. We have the resources and we need to determine the best way to allocate. We have touched on a lot of topics here.

Captain Mike Barry commented that when we experienced the loss of revenue at Whiskey Ridge we didn't have our billing program in effect.

Chief Faucett informed everyone that we did have our ambulance billing program in effect at the time of the Whiskey Ridge loss. One of the things we have discussed is consideration of placing some capital money into operations to staff a position. We are considering adding one firefighter in TeleStaff and increasing the minimum district staffing from 8 to 9. We can run the numbers and see what that would cost (potentially using funding from the Commissioner Contingency Fund or Reserve Funding). Or we could place the ninth position in there regardless of minimum staffing. We need to continue to explore all of options and determine the best plan.

Commissioner Elmore commented the objective is to meet our obligations.

Chairman Lorentzen confirmed our next regular meeting will be Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup> at 9:30am located at the Station 82 Conference Room at 9811 Chapel Hill Road, Lake Stevens.

Chief Faucett explained the funding is not currently in the budget for the next three firefighters and it will need to be added into the budget if this is what we decide to do. We did place items in the capital budget and those monies have not yet been spent.

Chairman Lorentzen commented there are some capital items which are more expensive and we will have to review everything.

### **PROPERTY ACQUISITION**

Chairman Lorentzen commented the Commissioners are not planning to discuss property acquisition at this time.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

None

Commissioner Elmore commented he appreciates everyone's hard work.  
Chairman Lorentzen thanked everyone for their comments.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

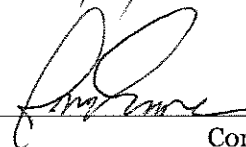
Motion to adjourn the meeting at 1107 hours.  
Motion by Chairman Lorentzen and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Commissioner Elmore.  
Vote Unanimous.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Laana Larson, Communications Director.



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Chairman Dan Lorentzen



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Commissioner Troy Elmore



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Commissioner Vern Foster