

ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Minutes of the Ross Valley Fire Board Special Meeting of August 11, 2021

1. 6:33 pm Call to order. Announce action in closed session, if any.

Board Present: Hellman, Kuhl, Greene, Shortall, Finn, Goddard, Burdo, Brekhus

Board absent:

Staff present: Weber, Yeager, Alber.

Town Managers Present: Politzer, Chinn, Donery.

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2. Announce action from the closed session of the June 9, 2021, meeting.

None

3. Open time for Public Expression: The public is welcome to address the Board at this time on matters, not on the agenda. Please be advised that pursuant to Government Code Section 54954.2, the Board is not permitted to take action on any matter not on the agenda unless it determines that an emergency exists and that the need to take action arose following the posting of the agenda.

None

4. Board requests for future agenda items, questions, and comments to Staff, staff miscellaneous items.

Dir. Goddard requested either a brief presentation or summation of the defensible space inspections; she received a great report and thinks the public could benefit from getting more information. Dir. Greene responded that it would probably be covered during the Chief's report, and Chief Weber answered that he would give an MWPA update and include more data. Goddard added that she appreciates the Chief's update but would still like a report to share with the residents to answer any questions. Further, Chief Weber said that he would have Kathleen Cutter, the Defensible Space Lead, present at the next Board meeting. Dir. Brekhus joined the meeting at 6:40 pm.

5. Approve Resolution 21-09, Recognizing the Service of Executive Officer Garrett Toy

Chief Weber recognized Garrett Toy for his outstanding work as the Executive Officer and as part of the Management team. Goddard added that Garret Toy sent his thanks since he could not attend the meeting.

M/S Goddard/Burdo – roll call vote, seven ayes, one absent

6. Chief Report – Verbal Update by Chief Weber

Fire Season: Chief Weber mentioned that California, but especially the Northside of the State, has faced tremendous challenges such as the Dixie Fire, which has destroyed the Town and drawn down considerable resources. As we typically do, the Department has sent two engine companies (OES and type 3 engine) to provide mutual aid. Further, the OES continues to support the fires; it came back for a couple of hours but was sent back right away when the Dixie Fire lost its containment. For this engine, we have four personnel supporting it. The type 3 engine is back, and we won't release it to give personnel time to recover. Additionally, the State just reached the critical level for our life fuel moisture which is at 60%; we are a month and a half ahead of what we typically are at this time. Greene asked what the 60% meant, and Chief Weber responded that the life fuel level that can go above 100, the lower the number is, the higher the fire risk is.

Station 18: Chief Weber reported that the dialogue continues. As the Board knows, we have four options that are being looked at, and data analysis is in process and will be provided to the Board later. Additionally, we have a closed session tonight to cover some items related to labor negotiations.

Disaster Coordinator: Chief Weber reported that the top candidate who had initially accepted the job offer declined it after almost completing the background check. Additionally, the second candidate also declined the offer. Therefore, we are doing a job analysis and salary survey with benefits options. In addition, we will discuss with the management team to come up with other solutions, such as additional contributions from the JPA members. We are hopeful that the second job posting will be successful.

SAFER Grant: Chief Weber reported that some agencies had received award letters, and the Department has not. However, does that not mean that we would not be selected in the second round. And if we do get selected, Staff will come back to the Board in a special meeting to discuss the grant.

Introduction of Interim Fairfax Town Manager: Chief Weber welcomed Adam Politzer to the Management team as the Interim Fairfax Town Manager. We look forward to working with him while Fairfax moves forward with filling the position.

MWPA: Chief Weber reported that a Project Manager shared with the County and Southern zone region was hired to manage all the projects in the area and hire contractors. Further, the PM is a county employee but will support the Towns. Regarding inspections, Chief Weber added that the inspections are going pretty well. And to remind the Board, we are in a consortium with MCFD, Kentfield Fire, Central Marin Fire to work on these inspections. We have one lead inspector managing the program and 25 inspectors covering the different areas. So far, they have exceeded 8000 inspections this year; some are gross negligence, and some are neighbor complaints. For the gross negligence reports, they are doing a second inspection to ensure the issues were fixed, and if they were not, we would move forward with the enforcing part.

Dir. Hellman asked how inspections work for rental properties and if the owner or renter gets informed about the inspections. What happens when the owner is not present? How do they get notified? Chief Weber responded that we are using new software that provides a QR code and an email sent to the homeowner, and we also use the tax address to mail out a follow-up. Additionally, the renter could share the QR code or email with the owner. And in the instances where there is a compliance or non-compliance issue, a certified mail letter is sent to the tax address, and they have some days to respond.

Regarding inspections, Chief Weber mentioned that the feedback has been very positive, and the use of the software is very helpful since it provides pictures and to-do lists. Further, he provided some data on where the inspections have been done and mentioned chipper dates. As previously mentioned, Kathleen Cutter, the Defensible Space Lead, will present at the next Board meeting. Goddard thanked Chief Weber for the report and added that the information provided after the inspections is beneficial as it shows detailed images and information. Further, she asked if there could be more community outreach to notify residents about the inspections.

Additionally, Goddard asked if the zone zero distance has changed. Chief Weber responded that zone zero is still the immediate area around the property. However, the question is whether the State will adopt that as part of the fire code as law since it is currently recommended not to have any combustibles within 5ft of the property, so, though the zone has not changed, the enforcing legislation might. Further, he mentioned that the defensible space program is still a work in progress. Though the Department is including inspections information across our social media accounts, we will work with the Firewise communities to have better community outreach. The feedback is greatly appreciated, and we will work with Kathleen Cutter to make more improvements. Dir. Shortall added that FIRESafe Marin coordinates with Kathleen the inspection schedule and is now sending all the Firewise communities the necessary information a couple of weeks in advance.

Dir. Greene followed up with the zoom connection issue we experienced at the July 14, 2021, Board meeting. Chief Weber responded that some people could join the meeting through the RVFD website and the agenda link. However, working with zoom, we found that they could not connect if people did not update their browser. As a result, and as a reminder, we added a message on our website providing zoom resources. Further, we are also using a new link; we stopped using the ongoing webinar link used for over a year.

Resident Jody Timms thanked the Department for everything they do and the defensible space inspection reports; her report is beneficial, and she learned a lot from it. Unfortunately, she has not been able to download it. She can only print it. Further, Mrs. Timms inquired about the Disaster Coordinator position and how it differs from the County's Disaster Coordinator since the Towns contribute to that position. The Department will also ask for an additional contribution for the RVFD's Disaster Coordinator. Chief Weber responded that he would follow up with the download issues to ensure they get fixed. Moreover, he mentioned that the Cities, Fire Districts, Towns believe there is a need for Countywide coordination for a more efficient process regarding the Disaster Coordinator position.

The County's coordinator would streamline the process, bring consistency, and eliminate redundancy. For this position, the County secured funding for the first two years with no contribution to a minimal contribution from the Towns. Therefore, year three and on would require additional financing of the Towns, and the employer would be Southern Marin Fire.

Dir. Brekhus asked why the Towns should use tax money to fund the position when other areas voted against the tax increase when a large sum of money was already allocated. Chief Weber responded that MWPA would contribute about a third of the total cost; however, the issue is that the legislation is specifically for wildfire prevention. As a result, Management and Fire Chiefs agreed to request MWPA for 30% of the funding, and MWPA agreed. Further, the additional funding requested from the Towns is in the range of \$1,500 to \$2,000. But having the position would be beneficial and would eliminate the projects' duplication around the County.

Dir. Greene asked if there was a fire near the East Peak of Tam. Chief Weber reported a vehicle fire West of the East Peak that burned about 1.5 acres of vegetation, and we were fortunate there was not a lot of wind when it happened.

- 7. Consent Agenda: Items on the consent agenda may be removed and discussed separately. Discussion may take place at the end of the agenda. Otherwise, all items may be approved with one action.**

M/S Burdo/Brekhus – roll call vote, all ayes

- 8. Approve Resolution 21-10 Appointing San Anselmo Town Manager Dave Donery as the Executive Officer of the RVFD.**

Chief Weber reported that the upcoming changes to Ross and San Anselmo's Town Manager's willingness to step up on this roll with Garrett's departure. The Executive Officer serves as the Management team leader and oversees the Department's personnel actions. And under the JPA, we require an Executive Officer, and the Management team recommends that Dave Donery be appointed as the JPA's Executive Officer.

No public comment concerning this item.

M/S Goddard/Hellman – roll call vote, all ayes

- 9. Receive Executive Order N-08-21 establishing October 1, 2021, as a set date to transition back to public meetings for full compliance with the Brown Act.**

Chief Weber explained that this Governor's Executive Order came before the delta variance. Many agencies are still looking into managing virtual meetings and have adequate space to allow social distance with in-person meetings. Chief Weber mentioned that the order might change between now and our next meeting, and he recommends that we continue to do some research and look at

what other agencies are doing. Staff is already working with Dave Donery to see if we can use the Town Hall to provide in-person and virtual meetings.

Dir. Burdo agreed that it is more likely that the order will change and that over the past year and a half, we have seen more public attendance with virtual meetings, and he does not recall having any public when we had the Board meetings at the fire stations. Further, Burdo agrees that we should continue meeting remotely for now. Brekhus agreed and added that we should not meet in person until it is safe to do so. Hellman agreed as well and asked if we were exploring having a hybrid model to support both. Chief Weber responded that this option is being discussed with the Management team and other best practices.

No public comment concerning this item.

10. Receive Presentation on Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) areas.

Fire Marshal Alber provided background on Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). He mentioned that it originated in MCFD to work around the codes related to fire issues and defensible space. CALFire developed statewide fire risk maps showing where ignition-resistant buildings must be built for the State responsibility area (SRA) and Local responsibility area (LRA). LRA applies to incorporated cities and towns such as Ross, Fairfax, San Anselmo. Further, most agencies have adopted a WUI ordinance and adjusted their WUI maps to upload them to Marinmaps. Regarding the Ross Valley area, each Town has adopted its own WUI maps; however, the maps have not been updated in Marinmaps

Dir. Goddard asked about the consistency between the JPA agency members. She would like to know what would happen if the Ross Valley area within the JPA is designated as the WUI area due to the high fire risks. Alber responded that if someone did a remodel or alteration in their building, the altered portion would have to comply with Chapter 7A requirements. Therefore, if Downtown Fairfax is designated, anything replaced would have to comply with WUI (i.e., replacing a window with a WUI window tends to be more expensive than a regular window). Goddard asked why not all residential areas are considered WUI areas. Alber added that the Marinmaps version is more comprehensive than the maps adopted by the Towns. As mentioned in the report, the Downtown areas were left out because of the structure density.

Dir. Greene asked that if the Towns were considering implementing what Alber suggested. Would not each independent jurisdiction have to do its own regulation implementation? Alber responded that if a triangle code adoption is implemented as he suggests, a map could be adopted as part of the code. Moreover, Greene added that the adoption is done by jurisdiction.

Dir. Brekhus mentioned that she was doing some remodeling in the Ross Downtown area and was told to replace to WUI standards under fire code amendments. Further, she added that the WUI designation was looked at for all the Marin area to see other jurisdictions. However, she does not think the JPA should decide for each jurisdiction, but she is open to hearing its benefits. Alber responded that all jurisdictions had adopted a WUI map. Still, for consistency, it would be beneficial that the Town's adopted maps matching the Marinmaps, and that does not require a JPA

vote or regulatory action. And that decision, such as including the Downtown area as a WUI zone, would be up to each jurisdiction. Greene added that, for instance, if Fairfax wanted to designate its Downtown area as a WUI zone, nothing would prevent it from happening. Goddard clarified that she was not proposing any JPA mandate; she is just looking for more efficient ways to utilize our resources.

Brekhus added that there should be a cost-benefit for upgrading buildings since it is so expensive. Further, Brekhus also mentioned that construction costs should be considered before deciding on adding WUI zones to the Downtown areas since it would mean that building owners would have to pick up a cost of about \$100k. Manager Chinn added that in 2018 Ross included the whole Town as a WUI area (3/4 is WUI). Chief Weber said that Staff could come back to each jurisdiction for the tri-annual adoption for a more detailed WUI zone revision. Further, Chief Weber said that if it's in the WUI, the State legislator might make WUI regulations that can have downstream effects, such as resale inspection requirements.

Resident Max Edwards wanted to thank everyone for the WUI discussion, especially Dir. Goddard for her effort to put this on the agenda. Mr. Edwards wanted to confirm that since we are a month and a half ahead of our live fuel moisture and fire behavior, the fire staff recommends that the WUI zone be expanded to the downtown areas and that the benefit outweighs the cost. Greene responded that each Town would make the determination. Mr. Edwards added that if we do not mitigate this, the risk of a devastating fire through any downtown could be so much more expensive for building or remodeling than adopting WUI zones.

11. Receive Verbal Report on the use of Bio-Diesel and Potential Transition.

Chief Weber provided a brief report since the RVFD Engineer/Mechanic has been working on the Dixie fire for about 30 days. Chief Weber reported that the Department looked for this option a couple of years ago and opted to continue using conventional diesel for several reasons. While technology has improved, some of the challenges continue. Some of the pros of using bio-diesel are that (1) NOx emissions decreased, and (2) it is formulated with non-petroleum-based ingredients. However, some of the challenges from the mechanical perspective are (1) DPF exhaust system takes longer to regenerate, (2) the County has had several issues with deregulation in emergencies by losing power, and that is less than desirable when out in the fire line, (3) 10% to 12% decrease in engine performance has been reported by the operators.

Dir. Hellman asked for clarification regarding the complaints, and Chief Weber responded that the statewide fire mechanics are noticing the engine power is less while using bio-diesel. Further, Hellman requested a written report rather than a verbal one. She would like to have more detailed information. Chief Weber also added that RD99 (international and cummings) run at 99% biofuel. However, the engine manufacturers only approve B20 biofuel, a blend of 20% biodiesel and 80% diesel; this is probably related to their warranties. Therefore, the policy would have to be reviewed if we decide to move forward since it could potentially void the warranty. Moreover, Chief Weber mentioned that we are still gathering information about the warranty and the effects of using biodiesel in the type 3 engines. Additionally, Chief Weber noted that we are in the process of replacing the fire prevention vehicles, and we have the opportunity to go all-electric.

Resident Jody Timms thanked Chief Weber and Dir. Hellman for starting the bio-diesel use conversation. She mentioned that the Fairfax climate action plans were updated in the last couple of years, and they plan to use renewal diesel.

Dir. Greene thanked Fire Marshal Alber for his presentation and for providing the WUI zone information.

12. Adjourn to Closed Session

No public comment concerning this item.

Meeting adjourned.

The next meeting is scheduled for September 8, via zoom video conferencing.

Respectfully submitted,

s/Mariana Gonzalez
Administrative Assistant