

ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT

Minutes of the Ross Valley Fire Board Meeting of October 13, 2021

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

Board Present: Hellman, Kuhl, Shortall, Finn, Goddard, Burdo.

Board absent: Greene

Staff present: Weber, Yeager.

Town Managers Present: Politzer, Chinn, Donery.

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2. Announce action from the closed session of the September 8, 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 asked for an update regarding the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator position, and Chief Weber responded that he would provide an update on his Chief's report.

5. Chief Report – Verbal Update by Chief Weber

SAFER Grant: Chief Weber reported that, unfortunately, we were not selected for the grant due to the high competition.

Fire Incidents: Chief Weber mentioned the three fires that have happened in the past several weeks. The first one is the three-acre roadside fire near White Hill, likely due to a vehicle malfunction. The second one was the seven acres Loma Alta fire between Sleepy Hollow and Lucas Valley due to a mechanical malfunction. And the third one, a structure fire in Fairfax at the French Cleaners Laundry, was a 2+ alarms; as you would expect, our firefighters did an amazing job keeping the flames to the building and origin. But, unfortunately, a business owner lost years of hard work, and the fire investigation is still ongoing, and a report has not yet been generated.

MWPA: Chief Weber reported that the Defensible Space teams have been doing inspections and have received great feedback. Now that the environmental compliance piece has been completed, they will move to the core projects related to evacuation routes. Further, we also met with the Public Works Managers to discuss future projects that will focus on evacuation routes. Additionally, Chief Weber mentioned that we were awarded two grants for about \$1M. The grants are from CalFire, and they will focus on the State responsibility

Emergency Preparedness Coordinator: Chief Weber reported that we have five candidates, and our goal is to schedule interviews in the next couple of weeks. We should have an update regarding the recruitment at the next board meeting.

Town of San Anselmo Finance Director: Chief Weber introduced Jeff Zuba, the new Finance Director for the Town of San Anselmo and RVFD. Town Manager Dave Donery gave a brief introduction since Jeff did not attend the meeting.

Use of bio-diesel: Chief Weber announced that as requested a couple of meetings ago by Dir. Hellman, the Department will start using RD-99, same as other agencies; this product is compatible with diesel and does not have a mechanical impact.

Dir. Hellman thanked the Chief for taking action on her request. She also thanked the firefighters for all their hard work in the recent fires and keeping us safe.

Dir. Goddard also thanked the firefighters and other agencies, such as the Police Department, for their quick and proactive response, allowing the Fire Department to access the area with no issues. Goddard asked about one of the fires that happened on a red flag day and the restriction to use power tools. She would like to know what communication is given to the construction companies or companies using these tools during red flag days. Chief Weber responded that we do not place restrictions, yet we encourage residents not to use them. Regarding the communication, red flags alerts are sent via Nixel and press releases, and FIRESafe Marin sends the warnings across the county.

Dir. Burdo also wanted to thank the Department for their efforts in keeping us safe and that their great work does not go unnoticed. He also wanted to give kudos to whoever is running the social media accounts because he is seeing it coming through promoting the Department's work and the great job they do and educating the community.

Dir. Shortall stated that he would follow up with the landscape contractors regarding the red flag warning days.

Resident Jody Timms thanked Chief Weber for his report and the great news regarding bio-diesel and the emergency coordinator.

- 6. 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.**

Dir. Brekhus requested to remove item 6d since she was not present at the last Board meeting.

No public comment concerning this item.

M/S Burdo/Goddard – roll call vote, seven ayes—removing item 6d, one absent.

6d. Approve Minutes of the September 8, 2021, Board meeting

No public comment concerning this item.

M/S Burdo/Goddard – roll call vote, six ayes, one absent, one abstain.

7. Approve Resolution 21-12 Approving the Incurrence of Debt to Finance the Acquisition of a Fire Engine and Approving the Related Master Lease-Purchase Agreement.

Deputy Director Fire Yeager stated that this item relates to the approved fire engine purchase from the September 8 Board meeting. Further, the resolution and staff report are specifically for the finance piece of the engine purchase; our legal counsel put all this together.

No public comment concerning this item.

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

8. Approve Resolution 21-13, a resolution proclaiming a local emergency and authorizing remote teleconference meetings without complying with certain Brown Act provisions per AB361 (Chapter 165, Statutes of 2021) for October 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021.

Chief Weber mentioned that this item relates to the passing of Assembly Bill 361 to continue meeting online via zoom, allowing open time for public expression. For this item, we must pass a resolution and come back to the Board in 30 days with any updates. If the resolution is passed, it will allow a certain time for an open time for public expression. Here, there are two options (1) unlimited open time at the beginning of each item, this will allow for anyone to speak after the item is presented and before the Board makes a decision; or (2) limited open time to two- or three-minute open time after the item is discussed to elapse. Chief Weber's recommendation is to choose option b if the resolution is approved and if a member of the public speaks, then the clock stops and the open time would be done by the time the person has spoken for their two to three minutes. Dir. Burdo suggested accepting Chief Weber's recommendation, given that although we have public comment, we have never had to cut anyone off.

Dir. Goddard asked for clarification on option one, and Chief Weber repeated the option.

No public comment concerning this item.

M/S Brekhus/Goddard – roll call vote, seven ayes, one absent. Approve resolution with option 2 with a three-minute set time.

9. Receive Presentation and Update Surrounding Ross Station 18 Options

Chief Weber provided a presentation that summarized the 23-page Ross Station (Sta18) staff report. He mentioned that the goal of the report and presentation is to provide as much information as possible to the Board to make a policy decision at the next Board meeting in November after asking any follow-up questions that can be made public. Moreover, Chief Weber added that this is an informational item, and no action other than a discussion is needed from the Board.

Furthermore, data from the Standards of Cover study that gathered information from the past 16 years was used along with recent numbers from the past two years. Additionally, it is important to note that across the county, incident volume was down in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic; most agencies saw a 20% call drop volume due to people having to stay home and not traveling to work, school, or stores, etc.

Chief Weber provided the background and timeline of the Ross Station planning process. The station is 100-years-old, and it is in clear need of repairs, and some of the challenges are related to the replacement cost. For more detailed information, *refer to the zoom video recording at the 34:30-minute mark*. Chief Weber asked if the Board had any questions. He also mentioned that he would make a couple of intermissions during the presentation for questions and at the end of the presentation to allow for questions from the Board and members of the public. There were no questions at this time.

Chief Weber provided the refined four options from May's Board meeting: (1) Station 19 Consolidation option, (2) Shift West/Adjust Ranks option, (3) Shift West/Covert Positions option, and (4) Shift West/Add Personnel option. The discussions surrounding these options involved multiple stakeholders, RVPA, Kentfield Fire District, Town Managers representing the Towns, and Dir. Finn is representing Sleepy Hollow Fire District and Labor.

Chief Weber stated that as we move forward with the decision-making process, the Board needs to see fire services as a whole and not as an individual agency; as we are one service and not individual fire stations because we not only rely on each other as JPA Fire agency members but also other agencies, as recent and past fires have shown. Also, Chief Weber noted that there is not a mandatory federal or state response time which means that the JPA members are not local or state-mandated to have a fire service level provided; communities decide the service level they can afford.

Chief Weber mentioned that the Suburban goals are generally to respond 07:30 minutes for the first arriving unit and 11:30 minutes for the first alarm unit for 90% of the time. Currently, the

Department's wide response is 08:45, and this is due to the geography of the area (hills, narrow roads, parking issues, etc.), and unfortunately, the only way to fix this is to put more fire stations in the surrounding areas. Please refer to the zoom video recording at the 44:39-minute mark for detailed information about the call volume.

Chief Weber provided the daily staffing levels at each station. Sta18 has one Captain and one Engineer; sta19 has one Battalion Chief, one Captain, and one Engineer; sta20 has one Captain and one Engineer, and sta21 has one Captain and one Engineer for a total of nine (9). Moreover, it is important to note that options one, two, and three do not add any wait to response (number of people); however, they do affect the speed (how fast engines get to the incident); moving personnel, or an engine west would have people arriving sooner to incidents from San Anselmo West. Please refer to the zoom video recording at the 47:42-minute mark for detailed information about the staffing levels.

Chief Weber provided "annual service demand by year and across the county, by incident type, and the number of incidents by hour by day of the year" data for the years 2018, 2019, and 2020 per station. Moreover, he mentioned that our busier stations have slower stations nearby which is helpful, and we do not have a single unit that is reaching saturation. Please refer to the zoom video recording at the 49:37-minute mark for detailed information about the data.

Chief Weber mentioned that simultaneous calls incidents between engines 18 and 19 are a big part of tonight's discussion. For instance, code two calls (i.e., fallen tree) can wait for a more distant engine without a catastrophic situation such as injury or death. For this presentation, we are focusing on code three calls which are 60-65% of our total incidents. However, it is difficult to determine when the simultaneous calls occurred or when the call changed from a code two to a code three, and these factors should be considered. If we were to eliminate an engine, a more distant engine would respond to the call 16% of the time. Chief Weber also talked about Medic 18 (M18) stationed at the Ross station.

Additionally, Chief Weber mentioned that an important item to cover is the mutual aid related to move up and covers. The Fairfax fire is a good example of how the Marin County Fire and greater Ross Valley fire agencies collectively help serve each other's communities because it is the best thing for our constituents. In incidents like this one, after the first alarm, we start moving up more distant engines to cover, and this would mean a longer wait time; however, this shows our ability to move our resources dynamically; therefore, if we were to go from four to three engines, we would be more dynamic in our deployment. Please refer to the zoom video recording at the 57:53-minute mark for detailed information about the code three calls.

Dir. Burdo asked about the maintenance cost for Sta19 should engine 18 be moved there. He would like to know the cost impacts for option one. Chief Weber responded that the facilities and vehicle maintenance cost could have a slight increase.

Dir. Hellman asked for more clarification around code three calls and the resources needed to respond to them. Chief Weber explained that code three calls (i.e., medical emergencies, chest pain, cardiac arrest, baby not breathing, etc.) have lights and sirens; they do not go faster, but traffic

is easily moved. Further, some of those calls require a multi-unit response which is sending two engine companies due to our staffing levels.

Dir. Goddard asked what would be the response if we had three people on an engine, would we still have to send two engines for something like a cardiac arrest. Chief Weber responded that we have some tools as well as the company officers that help determine the type of response needed. But as it stands now, since we have two people on an engine, we do send two engine companies.

Deputy Director Fire Yeager gave a summary of the financial piece based on each JPA's member annual contribution. The cost contribution is determined by average assessed value, population, and per incident. However, there is not a set formula or allocation; the total cost might vary. The fire protection level is based on what each community can afford, which might not always be the desired service. Please refer to zoom video recording at the 01:18-hour mark for detailed information about the cost.

In the next section of the presentation, Chief Weber summarized the operation and policy considerations and the fiscal, labor, and allied agency impacts for each of the four options: (1) Station 19 Consolidation option, (2) Shift West/Adjust Ranks option, (3) Shift West/Covert Positions option, and (4) Shift West/Add Personnel option. For detailed information about each option, *please refer to zoom video recording at the 01:23-hour mark*

Dir. Goddard asked about EMS and ALS response 21% rate. Chief Weber responded that for that data we looked at 265 medical calls in the Town of Ross for 2017 and 2018, and the medic unit stationed there was committed to calls 21% of the time during those calls.

Dir. Burdo asked about the voting requirements surrounding the policy decisions. Chief Weber responded that the ideal situation is that all members elect one of the four options and a less ideal situation is to bring legal counsel to discuss the options, and JPA amendments will have to be approved by each JPA member agency. Additionally, Weber added that to Fire Board's role is to get to a consensus in one of the options to inform Ross to decide, but ultimately, legal counsel from each member agency would have to get involved to determine the Fire Board's role. Dir. Finn added that there are two-vote categories to be taken under the JPA (1) top tier: four items that require unanimous approval, which are the four items covered in the four options, (2) lower tier: require a multi-member majority (majority vote with one vote from each member agency), this option has three attempts to pass it and if it does not, it could be done in a straight majority with at least one vote from each member agency. However, we are unsure if the unanimous approval is from the Fire Board Members or the Council Members of the Board each Fire Board member is elected from, but this is a legal counsel question. And the policy decision regarding the options is definitely a top tier—unanimous approval.

Chief Weber emphasized the importance of seeing the fire service as a whole rather than individual entities and maintaining the JPA; all agencies depend on each other for mutual aid. Weber added that each Town Council will be brief before the next Board Meeting and that at this point, the Fire Board is not asked to make any decisions but instead have a discussion surrounding the four

options. Moreover, Chief Weber thanked the Management Committee, including Dir. Finn representing Sleepy Hollow.

The following section is for the Fire Board Members discussion. For detailed information regarding the discussion, *please refer to zoom video recording at the 02:04-hour mark*

Dir. Burdo complimented the presentation and all the hard work put into it from Chief Weber and Yeager. Burdo stated that he does not think option three is doable for many reasons; one of them is the apprentice position, and because the labor is opposed to it and as a matter of good faith, it should be taken out of the table. He also mentioned that he favors option four, but it also seems undoable due to not getting the SAFER Grant. Option two seems the most logical and doable if a cost breakdown is provided.

Dir. Kuhl asked if any Board Member was considering option three.

Dir. Brekhus responded that it was her preference to keep the Ross station open. She has a concern regarding the response times and the effects of eliminating a fire engine, and the cost of option four. She is not opposed to option three and the apprentice program because it is a great opportunity to diversify the fire force. Brekhus asked if there was an option to add coverage during peak hours, and also the option to increase to three personnel should be discussed separately from the sta18 discussions. She believes that eliminating a fire engine is very risky, and at this point, she prefers option one.

Burdo asked if option three was still being considered, and Kuhl responded that Brekhus was considering it. Then Brekhus responded that she would like to see an apprentice program, yet she is not considering option three for this discussion but would like to see something like this to add a third person to the engine possibly.

Dir. Goddard commented about option three and the apprentice program. She believes we should have an apprenticeship program anyway. But option three compromises our ability to provide the best public safety service. She was in favor to option four and have spoken to some firefighters to better understand this option, and the SAFER Grant would have been a way to start it, but since we did not receive it, it made her reconsider; however, we have to find a way to add the needed personnel to be up to standards as many other agencies and option two moves us in that direction. Option one is not a good option.

Dir. Shortall agrees with Goddard and Burdo as he has been in favor of a three-person engine company. And he was counting on the SAFER Grant. Option three is out, and option one does not make sense. Shortall prefers option two. Dir. Kuhl added that while everyone agrees that a third person should be added, this topic should be discussed later.

Dir. Hellman commented that if now is not the moment to discuss the three-person engine company, when will it be as it shocks her that we are the last agency that has not moved forwards with it. Further, she does not think options three and four are good; option two makes the most sense operationally.

Dir. Finn agrees with Shortall's comments and that option four is the most expensive year after year. Additionally, he provided more clarification regarding the voting mechanism.

Dir. Kuhl commented that he is undecided yet believes that option three is impractical and labor is very opposed to it and should be considered. Option four is expensive, and each Town should consider the cost. Kuhl is undecided about options one and two.

Dir. Burdo asked if the video conference meetings recordings could be added to the RVFD website for the public to reference. Chief Weber responded that we started adding the link to the website, and we will continue to do so. Weber also added that the JPA agreements are hyperlinked in the staff report and the website.

Chief Weber added information about coverage during peak hours and peak events such as red flags warning, flood, and fire. Here, we typically out staff and bring additional resources. For predictable events, we can plan, and we are currently doing it. However, as covered in the Standards of Cover, adding a peak unit is not recommended due to our small volatile volume. He also said that RVFD has an explorer and volunteer program that many chief officers have attended.

Dir. Goddard that what the Chief said regarding the "operational impacts between option one and two are not life or death," but they should be considered when looking at the big picture for adding a third person and realizing the difference.

Former Fairfax Town Manager Frank Egger commented that engine 18 should be fully staffed in Ross, and rather than adding more personnel, a type three engine should be added and that staffing four type one and one type three increases the Department's response.

Dir. Finn reminded everyone that we had not heard from Dir. Greene regarding any of the options. Finn would also like to salute Ross Town Manager Joe Chinn for his work on all this before he retires and would also like to thank the other two Town Managers. Kuhl added that the new Ross Town Manager would be introduced at the next Board Meeting.

10. Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled for November 10, via zoom video conferencing.

Respectfully submitted,

s/Mariana Gonzalez
Administrative Assistant