

THURSTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT THREE

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

June 2, 2022

Commissioner Kirkbride
Commissioner Gamble
Commissioner Hetzler
Commissioner Kelling
Commissioner Roberts

The meeting was held in person with limited attendance and is open to the public via the Zoom meeting platform. The meeting is being recorded.

Commissioner Kelling was excused.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Kirkbride called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, followed with a salute to our Nation's Flag.

II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

A. Additions/Deletions
None

MOTION: To approve the agenda as published.

MOTION: To approve the agenda as amended.

Motion: Commissioner Hetzler.
Second: Commissioner Roberts.
Carried: Unanimous

III. HEARING OF THE PUBLIC /MEMBERS PRESENT

None.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Draft minutes of the May 19th, 2022, of the Board of Fire Commissioners meeting.
- B. Warrants:
 - General Fund 001 (Acct #6630) EFTs numbered 5072 through 5073; checks numbered 23107 through 23112 for a total amount of \$18,485.36.
- C. Payroll 5B in the amount of \$512,066.34.

MOTION: To approve the consent agenda as published.

MOTION: To approve the consent agenda as amended.

Motion: Commissioner Gamble.
Second: Commissioner Hetzler.
Carried: Unanimous

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Thurston County Medic One

No report – the next meeting is June 15th.

B. Thurston 9-1-1 Communications (TCOMM)

Commissioner Roberts reported from the June 1st meeting:

- Financial: received the April report. Revenue is slightly below the budget for sales tax. Still 2% higher than it was last year. Not expecting any difficulties at this time.
- For TCERN, the site shelters are moving along well. It has been difficult to get some of them done. There is one remaining one in Dupont on JBLM property. There are a few issues there to work through.
- Still looking at implementation in December 2023 or very early in 2024.
- The sheriff is 80% done as far as radios go. Fire is going to start on Monday possibly with training for radios. Installation is due to be in September.
- Staffing is really good. There have been seven new hires coming on board, which is very good news because TCOMM has been understaffed for quite some time.
- They have contracted a firm to look at a support program for 911 folks. It was reported that Lacey said theirs is working well.
- No new business to speak of. The executive report primarily centered on the TCERN issue.
- Congress passed a law, 988 for suicide, and it was supposed to go into effect July 2022, but there is a little bit of a problem in Washington and other states because it is cell phone based. If someone with a 615 area code called in, and if she was to phone in, they might try to find her in Nashville, although she

lives in Fair Oaks, California. They are still trying to work that through. 911 is still the way to go besides the suicide hotline.

C. City/District Liaison

Chief Brooks shared that he has not heard back from staff yet but still has a placeholder on the 21st. The week of the 27th is a possibility. Commissioner Hetzler can substitute if needed.

D. Thurston County Fire Commissioners Association

No report – the next meeting is June 21st.

Commissioner Gamble reported that she would not be able to attend the June 21st meeting.

E. Thurston Regional Planning Council -

No report – the next meeting is June 3rd.

Commissioner Roberts will be substituting at this meeting for Commissioner Kelling.

F. Community Outreach

Chief Brooks shared:

- Continuing to have regular requests. The next opportunity to engage with the public is next Saturday at the Duck Dash. This date was supposed to be the inaugural deployment of the inflatable firehouse. Unfortunately, Chief Schmidt and the outreach coordinator, Chris, are concerned about this given the anticipated weather. There will likely just be a rotation of duty crews at this event.
- Chris continues to do a lot of great targeted outreach and was just out doing car seat checks, which are taking a lot of her time. There are more and more requests for engagement on the smaller events. She is starting to receive some for National Night Out all the way into August. Trying to triage those and work with Chief Schmidt on the impacts to the crews and what can actually be done with the level of call volume.
- Chris did a presentation for the West Region EMS yesterday because that was one of the grant funders of the Senior Safe At Home program. Chris provided an overview of the program.
- The Lacey Fun Fair had a great turnout. There were duty crews there and a stand with crews rotating through all day. It was a very well attended and well received event.
- Commissioner Kirkbride asked what the crews are doing at these events. Chief Schmidt shared that they will usually open up the apparatus to do tours and send the crews with a travel pack including brochures, hats, badges, et cetera.

G. Capital Facilities and Equipment Activities

Chief Cerovski shared:

- Engine 35 has been sent to Freightliner Northwest for repairs to the door on the passenger side and the side of the vehicle.
- Visited Braun Northwest with a team from logistics and Chris DeBell to look at options for a new ISU vehicle. Waiting on a grant and whether it will be received or not before moving forward with any definitive budget work. Also looked at their re-chassis program for Aid 34.
- Commissioner Kirkbride asked what the anticipated timing is on hearing back on the grant. Chief Cerovski responded that it was expected to have heard by now, but hopefully there will be some word back by mid-year. Waiting on the federal government's grant approval process.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. COVID Emergency Declaration Status: Staff Report

Chief Brooks shared that the declaration is still in place. There has been an uptick in impact. Last Friday there was notification of a positive case among the recruits, which delayed the swearing in of the recruits. They were supposed to come to shift on Tuesday of this week. Chief Schmidt and Chief Flowers looked at the risk benefit of bringing them back, even though the majority of the group had no symptoms and none of the others had tested positive. But because they were going to be infiltrating every station on every shift in the district, out of an abundance of caution, a seven-day waiting period was implemented. They have been on that week of quarantine and the hope is that they will roll out on Saturday for their first shifts. The pinning ceremony will hopefully be done at the meeting on the 16th.

Director Huff put together some of the information since the onset of the pandemic about the impacts on numbers and order of magnitude for amounts of hours covered. The estimated backfill costs from COVID-19 to date have been received except for costs thus far from 2022.

There have been a handful of positive cases but a number of others with direct or significant exposures that have had to put themselves in quarantine or do regular testing before each shift.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

None.

VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Chief Brooks reported:

- Regarding the chair's request regarding the city of Olympia and their investigation of a possible BLS transport program. There was an article in The Olympian stemming from their city council meeting last Tuesday night, at which time the fire department had brought forth a proposed resolution before the council requesting that notification go out to the private ambulance

partners in accordance with statute to basically declare a 60-day monitoring period. If there is any region of our state where a private entity provides ambulance transport, there is a statutory requirement that if a public agency wants to start providing that service, there is a prescriptive process they have to go through to first notify the private agency who's already there of their intent to monitor performance. They have to express a performance standard, monitor it for 60 days, and if the private entity is found to be in noncompliance, then there has to be a period of time, a waiting period and a remediation period of 30 days for a total of a 90-day window that has to be fulfilled. If over the course of that 90-day window the private company is not able to meet the established performance criteria that's provided by the public agency, then the public agency has the right without consequence to take over the ambulance transport. The City of Olympia has expressed a desire and interest to staff public aid units with additional members, and they are currently proposing 18 additional full time equivalency positions within the Olympia Fire Department that would staff two aid units, one at their headquarter station downtown and the second on the west side at Station 2 near the Capital Mall. Those two units would provide the primary transport services for the City of Olympia. When this went to the city council to declare this resolution and then send notice to the private providers, staff from Medic One, representatives from EMS Council, and representatives from private ambulance all spoke in opposition saying that they did not feel like there had been enough public discourse, notification of the EMS system at large, and evaluation of the impacts, and they asked the city council to defer a decision on this formal notice. Council deferred it. They are supposed to meet again next Tuesday night. In the meantime, Olympia staff came forward today and made a presentation to the Medic One operations committee of their overall plan summarizing their analysis to date of what the problem statement is, that they feel like there is a deficit of availability from their private ambulance provider. Olympia is primarily served by AMR and not Olympic who serves the Lacey fire agency, but there is a significant impact across the whole system because when AMR is not available, Olympic provides the backfill, as do some of the other public agencies. That presentation was made today and there was discussion and dialogue among the operations committee. The only formal action that was taken by the operations committee was to basically send this information forward to the EMS council, which will hear it midmonth. As a notification element, it was not clear from today's discussions what staff's action will be back to the council next Tuesday. It is unclear if staff is going to ask to defer council action again until after the EMS Council meets or not. There is significant concern from the private ambulance companies about what the impacts to the system would be, and other public agencies need more information to know. There is a risk if Olympia takes this over, it could cause the other private agencies to either reduce their staffing or remove their services from the county, which would then have a ripple effect.

- This is running in tandem to the discussions that are being had about the Regional Fire Authority between Olympia and Tumwater.

- Chief Brooks' understanding is that Olympia feels like their citizens are not being adequately served by the current private provider. They feel like their time on scene is extended significantly because of the lack of availability, and everyone in the county admits that there is a lack of availability to BLS transport resources right now. The private companies also admit that they have staffing challenges. They assert that this is like everyone else's staffing challenges and that they are doing everything they can to hire and staff up.
- Chief Schmidt and the other operations chiefs have been meeting and talking about this subject now since the beginning of the year and working on a plan. They brought forward a proposal for a 90-day trial of a mechanism to try to improve ambulance availability, and the concept was that we would no longer send a private ambulance immediately upon dispatch to basic life support calls except for motor vehicle accidents, so if something were blocking the road and there was time sensitivity. But for all other BLS calls, we would not initially dispatch the private ambulance companies but wait until the local fire agency got on scene, evaluated the patient, and confirmed the need for BLS transport. Then they would request it, so that we didn't have these private ambulances driving all over. Right now, the private ambulance no-load rate or their response with lack of transport is greater than 50%. Every time they go out to a call and don't transport, they're unavailable for other calls. So the operations chiefs brought forward the idea of trying for a trial period to not send ambulances except on certain key situations. It would not include the officer in charge if they saw something that appeared time-sensitive such as a stroke. They could request the ambulance early, but as a standard practice, they would not go until there was a confirmed transport need. All the other agencies were able to get behind that and get on board. But because of this proposed trial by the City of Olympia, they are trying to manage data analysis for 60 days with AMR. They are not willing right now to participate in this other trial, so that makes it non-standard across the entire county. So the operations chiefs have put a pause on that until this can be figured out.
- For Olympia to take over ambulance services, they would have to hire 18 additional people. Chief Brooks commented that it would take a series of hiring in at least two phases if not three to bring on this number of people. It would be at least a year for Olympia to be able to provide this service. With regard to vehicles, they do have one aid car available to them and Tumwater has offered them an additional aid unit to use. The Medic One system allows for the use of a medic unit.
- Commissioner Kirkbride mentioned that when Medic One gets new units, they surplus the old ones to the agencies. Lacey Fire is going to be replacing seven units through this system.
- Commissioner Kirkbride also shared that about 15 years ago, the system operated with BLS providers coming on scene and making the evaluation if there needed to be an ambulance transport or not, and the ambulance would then be called out. They were not automatically called out as the first response. A big part of that was that 911 communications was paid for by the fire service agencies on a per-call basis and so were the ambulances. So the ambulance would be charged for calls they did not end up doing a transport, so they were non-revenue. They were not happy with changing this to where

they would have to go out. That is what prompted a total change in the 911 system and how it is funded and operated. That allowed the private ambulance companies to be toned out with the first response. The reason that most fire service agencies wanted this was to relieve the crew off site so they didn't have to wait there until the ambulance showed up, the same issue that the Olympia City Council brought up. The operations chiefs are also looking at the public agencies who are doing the primary work are right now experiencing staffing challenges and so they're not consistently available. On a given day, a public agency might drop their unit and then that agency who was not previously factored in is also relying on the private resources. Commissioner Kirkbride shared that in all the previous conversations about changing ambulance services, the EMS Council has not been involved but is involved in approving the licensure of them in this county not only for 911 responses but also interfacility transport. MultiCare uses a different ambulance company for transport but cannot get toned out and go on 911 calls. The EMS Council has a responsibility with the county because the county licenses the ambulances. There is a process for identifying the number of ambulances that are within the county, and the EMS Council is involved in that as well. East Olympia, experiencing some of the same problems, came to the EMS Council and asked to have an ambulance licensed for use only when a private ambulance is not available. Commissioner Kirkbride commented that it's notable that staff went to the city council without any authority, and one of the citizen representatives who was a former staff member of Medic One went to the city council and asked them to not do this. Commissioner Kirkbride stated that he is looking for what his position needs to be on the 15th when it comes up.

Chief Brooks responded that everyone recognizes Olympia's authority and right to do this process, and that the reason that staff got involved and that all the agencies have a level of concern are the ripple effects to the rest of the system if Olympia makes this change, and particularly the proposed pilot for trying to evaluate how to make more resources available today and Olympia's unwillingness or inability to participate in that. Olympia staff and Medic One staff are struggling about what the ask should be, and because there was a strong voice that came out saying there should have at least been further conversation with all the stakeholders beforehand, that is likely why staff inserted themselves trying to encourage that to happen before the Council took further action just so the impacts could be fully evaluated.

Commissioner Kirkbride mentioned not seeing where EMS Council or Medic One staff have any involvement in BLS transport issues within the agencies. It should be up to the agencies and their committees and communication amongst the agencies and it should not lie with Medic One or the EMS Council.

Commissioner Kirkbride asked if he could get a writeup about the pilot program for ambulance use and use that to make the point that the agencies, all except one, are undertaking this pilot program to address the staffing issue and that it would be nice of Olympia would join in that and put on the record at the EMS Council that this plan has been proposed.

Chief Brooks also shared that four assistant chief positions have been added over the past year, and a chief’s retreat will be conducted later in June.

IX. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Hetzler – no comments

Commissioner Gamble – congratulations to Chief Brooks on the election to vice president for the Washington Fire Chiefs.

Commissioner Roberts – was able to attend graduation, and it was a lovely event and very nicely done. Will try to participate via Zoom at the next meeting.

Commissioner Kirkbride – congratulations to Chief Brooks on his election.

X. CORRESPONDENCE

- None.

XI. HEARING OF THE PUBLIC / MEMBERS PRESENT

- None.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned as of 6:13 PM.

*Next Regular Meeting: June 16, 2022 – 5:30 p.m.
Available via remote meeting.*

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 Chair

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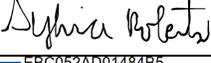
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