

White Salmon Joint special meeting
City Council Meeting with Klickitat County Fire District 3 Board of
Commissioners

119 NE Church

Tuesday June 21, 2022

Hybrid meeting in person and via Zoom teleconference. The district posted notice of how to access the meeting.

I. Welcome and introductions (18:04)

ATTENDANCE

KCFD3 Commissioners; Tom Montag (Chair), Robert Connor (Vice Chair), Chuck Virts. (Quorum).

WS City Council- Patty Fink, Jason Hartmann, David Lindley, Jim Ransier, (quorum) Stephanie Porter Deputy Clerk, Mayor Marla Keethler.

Wes Long (KCFD3 Fire Chief), Bill Hunsaker (WSFD Fire Chief)

Robert Merritt (mHc Associates).

Audience and online presence: Jeremy Grose, Karl Swanson, Jess Wardwell, Chris Helton, Rozalind Plumb, Darren Lanz, Michele Renault, Beth Payne, Tom Andrews

II. Dinner

III. Call to Order: KCFD3: 18:21

WSCC: 18:22

IV. Introduction – purpose of this meeting is to look at Cooperative Services Opportunities

V. Presentation by Bob Merritt, [mHc Associates].

Bob presented a slide show highlighting how the fire departments currently function and options for sharing resources into the future. He emphasized considering opportunities to provide services regionally.

Key points:

- FEMA considers local Fire Departments as the 1st line of defense in any emergency. The community has roads, highways, gas lines, rail roads, hazmat, rivers, airports etc. The potential for a large-scale incident exists. Our fire departments will be called regardless of the level of training the volunteer personnel have. Fire departments do not just go to fires, they are “All risks”.
- Challenges to the fire departments include new growth, staffing/safety, demands for service and training, increasing workload, finances, administrative overload, unfunded mandates, struggling volunteer programs (this is a concern across the nation).
- Many Washington jurisdictions are considering cooperative efforts to maximize resources, increase the depth of service, improve standard of coverage, eliminate duplication, standardize equipment.
- Risk Assessment -we can identify risks, but we cannot be equipped to handle *everything*.
- Level of Service –What services will be provided; how well will we provide them? Time from dispatch to scene.

Recommendation is to create a task force comprised of citizens that will study the fire service. The task force can then make recommendations to the governing bodies for future planning. The proposal is then sent to the public for a vote.

Potential options for formal shared services include annexation or creating a Regional Fire Authority (RFA).

- Annexation: The Fire District governs (Organized under RCW 52), City has no direct control over services, city residents can serve as commissioner. District property tax applied.
- Regional Fire Authority (RFA): The parties agree to a plan on how to govern and approve level of service. 3 elected officials from each party put the plan together. Tax levy is according to the plan up to \$1.50. Organized under RCW 52 (same as fire districts).

Proposed planning:

- Assemble information and get educated
- Agree to look at it
- Evaluate neighboring organizations
- Conduct Feasibility Study
- Develop short-medium -long term roadmap
- Develop implementation strategies
- Execute and follow-up

Considerations:

- Culture
- Economic capabilities/limitations
- Service expectations
- Cooperative effort experience
- Perception of value/need
- Community Issues
- Political Issues
- Management issues
- Labor issues
- Volunteer issues

Timing:

- Set a date to put it on the ballot and work backwards. Recommended August vote to be implemented January 1st.

“What is in the best interest of the people that we serve?”

VI. Discussion

Levy rates: An in depth look at the costs would need to be done. Look at the hard costs of each department and estimate the soft costs of administration that is absorbed by the city and not assigned to the fire department annual costs.

Comparison of city taxes per \$1,000 property value -White salmon \$0.88, Bingen \$1.81, Goldendale \$3.07. It is possible the community is unaware the fire department is volunteer. Fire Districts and RFAs are not eligible for impact fees. Benefit service charges are for large industry/large growth areas (not applicable to this area currently)

Tourism – There are currently no mechanisms to charge for out of district population using the service (eg MVC, trail rescue).

The Fire District has dedicated funding. Funds cannot be used for another purpose.

Should the city have dedicated funding for fire, and not have to compete with other city departments for the limited funds?

It is an additional tax. The city can ask the constituents to vote if they support the fire department. Bob Merritt stated that every RFA proposal has been approved at the ballot.

Research and education will be required to establish the cost and what that provides.

Both Chief Hunsaker and Chief Long support the collaboration because White Salmon, Bingen and KCFD3 are one community. Where possible the chiefs have standardized equipment so that all firefighters have the same SCBAs (self-Contained Breathing apparatus), and radios. Chief Hunsaker stated he will be retiring from the city in 3 years. He does not believe a volunteer (or part time) chief will be in the best interest of the city.

Mayor Keethler– We are trying to be better for the community by planning and strategically identifying where we have risk areas. The city does not have the finances to pay a fire chief full time. “When we do not pay for the support and services that we are expecting we create a false or artificial sense in the community about what they are getting.”

VII. Determine Desired Future Actions

There is a desire to research the topic and the process. The consensus from the elected bodies is to look at the available options. The boards directed staff of each agency to work with the consultant on a proposal to establish the next steps in the process.

The city would need to go to bid for a consultant. The district already has a consultant. An interlocal agreement could be established to use the same consultant.

VIII. Public Comment

Jeremy Grose KCFD3 Captain - Cautioned the messaging of the process. This is about planning for the future of the service in the community. He advised to ensure the community is not tainted by any perception of “take over”.

Carl Swanson-The culture has changed. People are moving into the area, but they are not contributing to the community, they are not paying for the services they expect in taxes, and they are not volunteering.

IX. Adjournment

WSSC-Mayor Keethler adjourned meeting at 20:51

KCFD3-Motion to adjourn made by Commissioner Montag, seconded by Commissioner Virts.


Meeting adjourned at 20:51 hrs.

APPROVED BY:


Chairman – Commissioner Thomas Montag (date)

Attest:


District Secretary Rozalind Plumb


Commissioner Robert Connor (date)


Commissioner Charles Virts (date) 14 July 2022