

Klickitat County Fire District 3 Commissioners Meeting  
119 NE Church Street  
May 8, 2023, at 1900 (7 pm)

**SPECIAL BOARD MEETING**  
**West Klickitat County Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee**

**Call to order.19:03**

**The City of WS and KCFD3 called their meetings to order.**

**Attendance**

Commissioner Montag (Chair), Commissioner Connor (Vice Chair), Commissioner Virts – (Quorum),  
City Council Members: Jason Hartman, Ben Giant (remote), Jim Ransier- (Quorum).

Staff/volunteers: Wes Long (Fire Chief), Rozalind Plumb (Dist. Secretary), Jennifer McLean (Admin.  
Assistant), Bob Merritt (mHc Associates) Chief Hunsaker (WSFD), Stephanie Porter (COWS Clerk Treasurer),  
David Shultz (COWS Legal Counsel),  
Public Thomas Crumpacker, Peter Fink, Lilly VonMoch, Adam and Nancy Filippino,

**Public Hearing/Comment.** – None noted

**Business items:**

A- Formation of WKRFA Plan. Robert Merritt  
Opening comments from MHC Consultant Robert Merritt.  
Summary of the process from Task Force recommendations to RFA committee meetings and the draft plan.  
This was a compressed timeline.

Section 6 (Finances): At the last meeting on 5/1/2023, the proposed Levy rate was agreed on at \$1.05. There was another suggestion made over the weekend that it could be lowered to \$0.69.

Committee requested clarification on levy rate.

Chief Long stated the levy rate of \$1.05 was based on anticipated operating costs (\$0.91/1000AV) that would *fully fund* the recommendations from the task force for increased support staff for the volunteers, and increased community outreach programs. In addition, the \$1.05 levy rate included set aside funding that would *partially fund* the currently unfunded liabilities of Apparatus, Equipment and Facilities. The concern was that \$1.05 would be too much for many citizens. Chief was asked by Commissioner Virts to review the costs. Chief Long worked on the budget and reduced costs to provide options for the committee. To reduce the costs Chief Long reduced the funding for staffing and training and volunteer stipends based on the premise that those costs would not be in effect during the first year of transition.

Committee requested to know what would happen after the 1<sup>st</sup> year.

Chief noted that the plan tasks the new Governing Board of the RFA with establishing a process on how they would increase levies in the future. They will need to decide if it is via voter approval or via another mechanism that justifies the increase to the constituents.

Request for clarification on meeting the August ballot versus the November ballot.

Robert Merritt noted that Chief Hunsaker will be retiring at some time in the not-too-distant future and the city does not have the mechanism available to replace him. Using the primary election for the vote, the effective date could be September 30<sup>th</sup> and the RFA would have time to submit its levy certification to the



county for tax collection to begin in 2024. Waiting until the November election the RFA would be in effect on January 1, 2024 but would not be able to collect taxes until 2025 (realistically the funds are not available until May of that year due to tax collection dates being in April and November). This would leave the RFA with no income and reliant on the COWS and KCFD3 to fund the year fairly from their respective reserves.

Some discussion on having more time to educate the public and address any uncertainty of the firefighters. Robert Merritt noted the plan states the new Governing Board will be required to create a 'master and deployment plan' that will be formulated with input from the volunteers. He also noted that it is a public entity that serves the community to an expected level of service and is responsive to the view of the community for increased training, retention, and public education.

Chief Hunsaker noted that there have been several meetings with volunteers, and they are all on board with the RFA. He stated they want to know more details on how the plan will be implemented.

Merritt reiterated that the volunteers will be involved during the creation of the 'master and deployment plan'. He noted that most of the RFA's he has worked with do not provide input from the firefighters. It is specifically written into this plan to allow volunteer input through the new governing board.

Commissioner Virts noted he went through several mergers while he was a firefighter, he was never given any opportunity for input. He feels this plan is addressing the safety needs of the firefighters as well as the safety of the community.

The condensed timeline has meant that education to the public has been lacking. Concern is that if we fail to adequately educate the public on why we are proposing the RFA it will fail.

Discussion on options to educate the public. Emphasis was placed on ensuring the elected officials do not lobby for or against a ballot measure. The volunteers cannot lobby for support when in uniform but can show support through their Volunteer Firefighter Associations (KCFD3 volunteer firefighters association is a registered 501(c)(3)).

David Schultz legal counsel for COWS referenced that RCW 42.17A.555. As a board they can express a collective decision, make a statement in open meetings or responses to specific inquiries. Board members and staff are limited in what they can do regarding 'Politicking'.

Discussion returned to the levy rate. It appears the lower rate of \$0.69 will adequately cover operating costs for the 1<sup>st</sup> year but does not cover any of the unfunded liabilities.

Some discussion on the ability to reserve funds during the 1<sup>st</sup> year as the hiring process would not begin until later in the year. Chief confirmed the \$0.69 rate would still cover Full Time Chief, Training Captain and Recruitment captain, and two part time administrative staff.

Also noted was that the plan asks for designated reserve funds. Concern is that the RFA needs to be set up for success from the beginning with the correct funding level. Is \$0.69 enough to meet the intent of the task force report?

Chief Long responded that he had evaluated the numbers and offered a reduced operating budget for the committee to assess. It is up to the committee to decide how much of the unfunded liability they wish to address. The option is to not fully fund the unfunded liabilities.

Committee discussed dedicating funds to unfunded liabilities into the plan without restricting the chief and governance into the future.

The current status of facilities is in good condition so the replacement timeline could be extended out to help reduce costs.

How will the RFA increase levy rates in the future when needed? If \$0.69 is not enough, how do we get more money for the RFA?



The RFA is authorized by RCW 44.12 to the levy ceiling of \$1.50 per \$1000AV when there is a full-time paid employee. The budget process of the governing board will determine the levy rate every year. They will not need to request a levy lid lift from the voters if it stays below the \$1.50/1000 AV.

Discussion on how to present that to the voters in this plan.

Legal counsel provided the following for P 17 Section 6 B 1

“The WKRFA shall be authorized to levy the authorized rate for a fire district with one full time employee per RCW 84.55.010. The WKRFA shall be initially funded beginning in fiscal year 2024 by an authorized ad valorem property tax of \$0.69.”

\$0.69 will not cover unfunded liabilities. Ben Giant requested that there be a requirement to fund at least some of the unfunded liability. He suggested the Ad valorem tax be increased to \$0.76.

Recommendation was to identify in the plan that \$0.69 will be for operating costs and the additional funds would be dedicated to the unfunded liabilities.

Discussion on how to present the split without being overly restrictive for the future. Consensus was for a minimum percentage of the total levy rate to be dedicated to unfunded liabilities.

Discussion on transparency of the \$1.50 ceiling, and the requested starting levy rate.

Adding the authorized amount of \$1.50 but stating the beginning year is an ad valorem tax of \$0.76, where \$0.69 is for operations and \$0.07/or at least 10% will be for unfunded liabilities.

Consensus from all committee members for the ad valorem tax in the 1<sup>st</sup> year to be \$0.76 with at least 10% assigned to unfunded liabilities.

Robert Merritt suggested a group consisting of Chief Hunsaker, Chief Long, Stephanie Porter, Rozalind Plumb, and himself, get together tomorrow to craft language that meets the concerns of the committee. The options for wording can be approved at the Wednesday meeting prior to presenting the final approved plan to the Full City Council.

Summary of levy rates discussed:

	Operating budget	Unfunded liabilities	total
RCW allowed Max Levy rate for Fire with 1 FTE			\$1.50
Fully Funded operating year and liabilities	0.91	0.76	1.67
“Acceptable” rate that would likely pass a vote	?	?	1.05
Reduced 1 <sup>st</sup> year operating only	0.69	?	0.69
Consensus for 1 <sup>st</sup> year	0.69	0.07 (or minimum of 10%)	0.76

**B- Appointment of Pro and Con Committees**

Con Committee – There has been no response to date for a con committee.

**Next steps:**

**May 10<sup>th</sup>** - Joint meeting with City Council and KCFD3 to review and approve the plan.

The committee will need to take action in the meeting to approve or reject the RFA Plan. If approved the plan will be presented to the full City Council and the KCFD3 board for approval to place on the ballot.

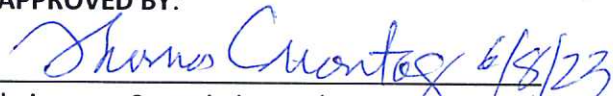
May 12<sup>th</sup> Deadline to submit the ballot measure to the County for the August Primary election.

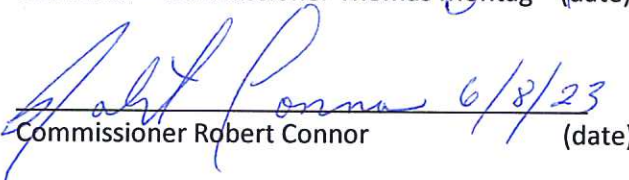
**ADJOURN.**

***"Motion to adjourn," made by Councilman Hartman, seconded by Commissioner Montag.***

Meeting adjourned at 19:30 hrs.

**APPROVED BY:**

  
Chairman – Commissioner Thomas Montag (date)

  
Commissioner Robert Connor (date)

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Commissioner Charles Virts (date)

**Attest:**

  
District Secretary Rozalind Plumb