



## Pierce County Fire District 13

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### Minutes Board of Fire Commissioners Special Meeting June 8, 2016

Present: Commissioners Zuluaga, Ballantyne, and Noll, Chief McCollum, Captain Wassall

Members of the Public and Staff: 23

Commissioner Zuluaga called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Zuluaga: Reviewed department...40 volunteers, 3 people on duty, 24/7/365. Respond to medical aid & fire calls in the district. Sustainability was reviewed and started long range planning. We looked at our business model. Moved our fire rating down from 4 to 3. Reviewed what we are doing well. Volunteers are coming from outside the district now, for the training learning a trade moving onto other departments. We get for the first 2-3 years of their careers. We moved approx. 17 FF to other districts in WA State. Looked to going beyond the Chief's retirement. How we pass along info, how we recruit our volunteers, our website. The result a 17 page Voter Information packet. Reviewed the condition of station and equipment. May 10<sup>th</sup> commissioner meeting resolution was passed to put Lid Lift on the Aug. ballot.

Commissioner Noll: Displayed slides he prepared. Website is refreshed, is a work in progress. Reviewed Fire District #13 (FD#13) coverage, major services Fire & EMS, calls, primary FD facilities; equipment, staffing (50% salaries); Fire insurance rating (top 8% in WA state) by WA Survey & Ratings Bureau; Property Owner/Voter Info document; current cost of service (71c per 1000 fire, 39c per 1000 for EMS); what other taxpayers are paying in other districts; what the tax levy limit means (rate has eroded from taxpayer approved \$1.00 per 1000 down to 71c per 1000); voters have to approve what they had already approved before; need approval of a prior approval; what a Lid Lift means (restore the \$1.00 rate for 6 years); how this proposition will impact taxpayers; table showing approx. increase per household assessed values; why the additional funding (equipment & facilities maintenance, system upgrades, training supplies); what do all of us get from FD#13 (referred to mission statement); what taxpayers are being asked to do (review Lid Lift Levy evaluation document; ask questions, provide feedback).

Commissioner Ballantyne: When he came on board about 1-1/2 years ago; used to be volunteers coming from their homes to put out fires; now have 2 full time employees. Of the volunteers only one lives in the district. Chief has done a wonderful job of recruiting volunteers, teaches at TCC & has built a reputation for the training provided. Driven by how we have to make sure we get X # of recruits and provide training for them. What happened in 2015 was there was an  
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increase in demand for recruits. Close to 100% staffing, potential concern about maintaining that. 33% turnover last year. Cost of training all of these people. We did not have capacity to train so we sent people to Buckley for training. That is how we operate. Looking at Financial evaluation: wants to clarify. Thinks the district is woefully underfunded right now. We are at 71c per 1000 now. How did we get there? We are less than ½ of many of the other districts.

**Public comment: Our taxing is one of the highest in the district at \$16.55 per 1000, but our fire is one of the lowest.**

Commissioner Noll replied: 60% is state & local schools, 12% county roads, 10% Metro Parks, 8.5% county, 6.9% fire/ems, 3.1% library. We pay almost 2x's to Metro Parks.

**Public comment: Our district is small, but even if we vote no, voters pass school district votes. Looking at other communities with fully staffed fire departments, they are paying less than \$16.55M.**

Commissioner Zuluaga reminded we are “unincorporated Pierce County”. As cities incorporate, monies are taken away from the county.

Commissioner Ballantyne: We are the only governance that is local in our own district. Monies staying in our own district. He is supporting of a lid lift, but doesn't feel that any comments made will make any difference to the wording on the ballot.

Fire Department Personnel: Thinks that the public comments are valuable.

Commissioner Ballantyne: He doesn't feel that versions should have been changed. Proposes that this has the potential of a 71% increase. Indicated that the attorney presented that monies can be put in a bank.

**Public comment: Suggested could pull back the lid lift levy from the ballot, change the wording and put on the November ballot.**

Commissioner Ballantyne: Doesn't cover timing. 6 year lid lift, then goes back to the 1%. Possibility we will need a new fire engine during that time, which would require a bond. Concerned about the stability of department over next 5-10 years. Chief's retirement in 3-5 years of concern. We have borrowed a brush truck and dispatched to fires in other area. In needs survey we have indicated to buy a brush truck. The part of Dash Point State Park is in unincorporated Pierce County. He counted about 120 houses in Heritage Park in the City of Tacoma where the taxes go to Federal Way & Tacoma. We have responsibility to provide fire service to this area of Dash Point State Park. We have water rescue responsibility; we have borrowed personal water craft from the tribe. There is a budget item in the Needs Survey for a water rescue vessel.

**Public comment: Asked that if it doesn't impact Commissioner Ballantyne directly, doesn't it still matter?**

Commissioner Ballantyne: Wants to talk about these issues amongst the board, wants to open it up to allow more input.

**Public Comment: Purpose of board is elected by their choice to make decisions for your district. Love what you do, but have a divisive board, and should not be brought up in front of the public. Should be brought up amongst the board. We have a lot of access here, PC Sheriff boats, Coast Guard. When there is an emergency, FD #13 will respond quicker than other entities. Distressed what he is hearing today. All fine people, always has been a cohesiveness group, now not being demonstrated. Opinions not brought out in a public meeting. Some of these budgetary items should have been brought up amongst the board.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: All items have been discussed, not always in agreement. Issues our out on the table and being discussed from items Commissioner Ballantyne has brought up. Part of our holistic program. He personally is a big fan of the water rescue program. It is the closest asset that can save a life. We are very much on the same page. We are in agreement that we need to increase our funding. Disagreement is how much discussion we have prior to putting it before the voters.

**Public: Watchdog now on board. Levy being offered is not a mandatory hike, at the board's discretion. Watchdog is not saying he is against, just wants more input. At the board's discretion what you buy and how much you spend. Let the public know what we need. Put it out there more than you have before.**

**Public: We are Fire District #13, but we are a training facility. Asked about the Fire/EMS split.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: One pot of money. The firefighters have to pay for their own EMT. We train basic firefighting 1 & 2.

Chief: We get \$600 reimbursement per firefighter for training them.

Captain Forsythe: He has been here since 2004, was a resident firefighter. Pulled 15 twelve hour shifts per month. Now as an officer he pulls 6 to 7 twelve hour shifts per month, and he no longer lives in the district. That is about 1,000 hours a year...comes out at about \$1 per hour.

**Public: Asked about how volunteers from the community are encouraged to participate.**

Fire Department: Volunteers come from all areas...hear about our great program.

**Public: Brag more in our community to get more local volunteers. Get it out more in our local community. Requirements more stringent now so many don't qualify.**

Chief McCollum: Firefighter 1 & Hazmat training takes about 300 hours of their own time. 170 hours of EMT training they pay for at community college. Speaking of marketing...how many of you will give up 470 hours of your life to give up physically taxing work while taking 15 college credit courses and working? Special breed that comes to this department looking for a program, and other career departments to serve the public, be good citizens and having the hope  
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of moving onto career jobs, some in law enforcement, private industry...not just fire departments. They have this program that has fostered them along. Ben McElfish was here 7 years before getting a career job.

**Public: Kids couldn't wait until they were 16 to join the Fire Department, started losing more when the state required more. Every week for a meeting to learn something instead of shooting water out of the fire hose. They started losing interest because it got serious and wasn't just fun. What you think is simple can turn around and kill you.**

**Public: We have veered off course. Thinks we may be able to cut costs. Would like to hear the rest of what Commissioner Ballantyne was saying.**

Commissioner Ballantyne: Needs survey projected over next 5 years, we needed 18%, then 6% in subsequent years.

**Public: Prioritize items; if going to the city we are losing the tax base there, taking away our money by annexations; rainy day fund.**

**Public: Thinks we overspent.**

**Public: Asked Commissioners about the 33% turnover, how we would recruit people that want water rescue and wildland training. If those aren't available how would we recruit?**

Commissioner Ballantyne: Thinks what we are doing is great, whether we can maintain the recruiting over the next 5-10 years. Lots of consolidation has taken place around us. Agrees items like water rescue is a balance. Clarified that we made \$22k from the brush truck last year. Questioned if we buy one how much would it cost to store and maintain. Dispatched out when we need it here too.

**Public: Why not water rescue here? We are part of a consortium of water rescue departments. Feels it is a very important thing to have.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: We border more water than anyone else.

**Public: Does Federal Way provide a brush truck for the rest of the park?**

Commissioner Zuluaga: We respond first, afterwards we sort out whom. Same for on the water.

**Public: Heritage Park is in the City of Tacoma. Why is it our responsibility?**

Commissioner Zuluaga: Department of Natural Resources provides fire for Dash Point State Park. Water rescue commitments with others. Dispatch to Eastern WA is part of agreement with Pierce County.

**Public: Asked about how many calls to State Park last year.**

Chief McCollum: 2 fires, 2 EMS. State Park fire shared with South King Fire and Rescue, and Department of Natural Resources. Mutual aid agreement with City of Tacoma. We fought fires with the City of Tacoma. We try not to have fixed borders because there is human life and property involved.

Commissioner Zuluaga: Most of the programs run in this department come from needs. Those needs have grown into training programs. Commissioner Ballantyne brings up good points about revenue from the parks. There are discussions going on now.

**Public: Table this levy lid for August and put it on the ballot for November.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: It is on the ballot.

**Public: What if we just let the voters vote now?**

Commissioner Zuluaga: Are you suggesting we let the voters make the decision?

**Public: Yes. No question this fire department needs funding. How can we increase funding to this district without raising taxes?**

Commissioner Zuluaga: Junior taxing district. Metro Parks & Libraries are junior taxing districts. They are at their lid. 2001 was the last time we asked for \$1.00 levy.

**Public: Lid Lift is a tax increase. Where are our tax \$ going? We shouldn't have to pay more money for basic services like fire. We pay the highest at \$16.55M.**

Commissioner Ballantyne: If we ask for more than \$1.00M we would impact Metro Parks. If we ask for \$1.50, they have to reduce their tax rates.

Chief McCollum: Ballot measure was put on where the district asked for the additional 50c knowing full well that Metro Parks was going to have to right the check because they didn't want to see their taxes increased. Happened in 2002.

**Public: We are not the highest taxed district. We have a 400 million assessed value, approx. 1,000 houses, that is \$400k average per house.**

**Public: Because of the area we live in is the reason our property tax is up. The higher your assessed home values the lower your tax rate. GH is \$11.00 per M running a full city. Fife is only \$14.00 per M, buying their services from Tacoma. Running their own city. We have none of that but we are paying \$16.55M.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: Not going to be any more homes unless we annex, we could contract for service with City of Tacoma. The cost of a staffed station was \$1.3 million for 3 people 24/7/365. We are currently about \$500,000 budget currently. People in this district are getting a real bargain and great service.

Chief McCollum: City's can derive monies from other sources than property taxes. What separates an incorporated city vs. unincorporated. Gig Harbor collects revenue from business like B&O tax.

**Public: No question the department is underfunded. Everything a community needs is important.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: With economy of scale, more houses would provide more monies.

**Public: Thinks we are doing an outstanding job.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: Firefighters will come to work if there are sand bags on the roof.

**Public: Departments live within a budget.**

**Public: On a \$200k house, monthly is less than \$5 per mo. Improved rating should bring your insurance cost down. Fire insurance is only a small % of the homeowner pkg. Just like our tax bill here, the 29c is 1.75% of the tax bill.**

**Public: Over 50% is voter approved items. It adds up.**

Commissioner Noll: Shown on tax statement that 52-55% is voter approved.

**Public: Believes that Commissioner Ballantyne has done a good job of presenting some valid concerns. Has been a healthy conversation for the community.**

Commissioner Noll: He is the newest commissioner. Sees that the Chief and Captain do all they can with resources.

**Public: Do better to get the word to the community about public meetings.**

Commissioner Zuluaga: One of our missions was to better communicate to the community. Appreciate the comments and feedback. Thanked all for attendance.

**Announcements:**

The next regular meeting will be June 14, 2016 at 9:00 AM.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 8:47 pm

Approved By:

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Chairman Zuluaga

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Commissioner Ballantyne

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Commissioner Noll

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Fire Chief/District Secretary

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