



CITY OF WHITE SALMON
Special City Council and Fire District 3 Joint Meeting
Wednesday, April 19, 2023
In Person and Via Zoom Teleconference

Council and Administrative Personnel Present

Council Members:

Ben Giant
Jason Hartmann
Jim Ransier
Patty Fink
David Lindley

Fire District 3 Commissioners:

Thomas Montag
Robert Connor
Charles Virts

City Staff Present:

Marla Keethler, Mayor
Bill Hunsaker, Fire Chief/Code Enforcement
Stephanie Porter, Clerk Treasurer
Troy Rayburn, City Administrator
David Schultz, City Attorney

Fire District 3 Staff Present:

Rosalind Plumb, FD3 Secretary
Wes Long, FD3 Fire Chief

I. Call to Order

Mayor Marla Keethler called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.
Staff noted that City Council Member Jim Ransier would be late for the meeting.

Fire Commissioner Thomas Montag called to order at 4:30 p.m.

II. Public Comment

There was no public comment made.

III. Presentation

- A. Fire Task Force Report - Consultant Bob Merritt and Fire Task Force Members
Bob Merritt stated the Fire Task Force Action Plan was adopted in July, and the task force members were chosen from both the city and fire district.

The Fire Task Force recommended a regional fire authority to improve the current level of service in the greater community. Seven meetings were held with a huge data dump, and the task force chose the model presented. This has been a fast and furious operation with a talented and challenging group. The group was able to become very astute in both jurisdictions and represented well. They facilitated the meeting and gathered data from both entities, but the key word of the exercise was independence. The executive summary was put together entirely on their own and included substantial charts and data to show how it all went.

Jim Ransier, Council Member entered the meeting in person at 4:38 p.m.

This is an opportunity for the team to present their report and recommendations, and to answer any technical questions. They have a draft schedule for the next 20

days, and an updated document with two columns for White Salmon Volunteer Department and Fire District 3, showing the level of training and number of people trained.

Nate Reagan, White Salmon Task Force Member

The task force that was invited by Mr. Hunsaker to participate in the RFA Regional Fire Authority's journey to understand the sustainability of fire response for the community was able to make a recommendation regarding funding. The city funds its fire department through its annual budget and varying amounts year to year, while District 3 has a levy which provides a consistent annual budget, but is unable to keep up with inflation due to the limit on the annual increase of 1%. The regional approach with property tax funding is the recommended path in the report to establish annual long term budgetary plans. The most important details in this text are that the city and District 3 have created annual and long-term budgets to save money for specific purposes. Additionally, they have considered building a cohesive community wide volunteer system, reviewing the duplicity of fixed and rolling apparatus, setting up an apparatus, equipment and facility reserve replacement fund, and starting public first aid and CPR courses. Finally, the RFA would simplify the complex task of emergency response by enabling 1 unified response plan and opening the door to neighboring cities like Bingen, Underwood, and Lyle.

Eric Wilson, Fire District 3 Task Force Member

Eric Wilson discussed the levels of service provided in West Klickitat, Washington. It looks at regional landscape and assets, emergency incident types, response time, current resources and methods, breadth of training and manpower, and the assessment process as people evaluate performance. Fire is a high threat in the area, with over 70% of all fires being man made. The majority of emergency calls are primarily medical, and the community has an aging population, a growing population, and a high percentage of outdoor sports industry and tourism. To address this, the community should consider Fire Rescue and Medical, as it is a void when talking about just fire with the number of medical calls that both respond to.

He covered the considerations for effectively addressing the needs of the community, as well as the safety and well-being of the responders themselves. Additionally, the potential for random but also mass casualty events, such as multi vehicle accidents, fire flooding, and rescue, was considered. The conclusion was that the community is in a high-risk environment, and it is imperative to improve the service before something happens and to educate the community about what the current services have to offer. Additionally, there is a huge gap in knowledge and awareness of what the current services have to offer.

He detailed the most important metrics in defining levels of service are time and time to response. These metrics include dispatch time, reaction time, turnout time, arrival time, and effective work force time. Arrival time is the time to incident, driving time is the dispatch time, and dispatch time is coming from a central dispatch. There are 22 windows of opportunity or reaction time and the workforce.

To evaluate performance, metrics and data are considered, such as when the clock starts, when the unit receives the call, when the unit leaves the station, when the appropriate vehicle leaves the station, and when someone leaves their office and goes to an emergency.

The task force looked at the number of volunteers available, the number of volunteers trained, the spectrum of training response time to event, the number of responders to the event, peak times when the events happen, and the percentage of responders responding to an event. They found that for over 60% of the events, three to four people were responding. The other issue that came to light quickly was data generation and collection and consistency. The conclusion was to create performance goals, publicly track data, and report annually. Additionally, the gap between the peak workload of emergency incidents between 9:00 and 3:00 o'clock was significant, as most emergency responders were volunteers.

Chris Wiggins, Fire District 3 Task Force Member

The most important details in this text are the depth of the bench of volunteers, the critical tasking charts put together by both fire chiefs, and the level of training that those individuals have. The data from 2021 showed that there were 18 volunteers for white salmon, 15 on the active list, 25 and Fire District Three was 17 in the active list. However, the combined 32 active volunteers between the two departments and a critical tasking of a minimum number of people to a commercial fire of 27 raises some questions. Additionally, there is no single individual in either department that has first responder training, and the difference between first aid and first responder is the ability to do life saving maneuvers in a disaster. The most important details in this text are that there are two components of a fire response: structural fire and non IDL H training.

Fire volunteers are supported individuals for a firefighting effort but are not certified to enter the building and do any type of offensive firefighting. There are 16 individuals certified for both offensive and defensive firefighting between both departments, raising questions about the critical tasking level.

He discussed dedicated funding from the RFA to drive a training recruiting program for volunteers, and that there is a need for a system where volunteers can be grown on a yearly basis to increase the depth of the bench in water rescue.

Allison Hensey, Fire District 3 Task Force Member

Allison Hensey detailed what were defined as the most important statistics in the report, that there are not enough volunteers trained to respond to emergencies, and a chart showing drill participation shows that in both areas less than 50% of the volunteers made less than 50% of the trainings. The task force is recommending that a consolidation between the department and the district and a single stable consistent funding source be created to support the development of a program for recruitment, training and retention. This requires professional staff to develop and lead those programs to be successful in the long term, and that will depend on the

good judgment of the leadership. The most important details in this text are that there is a need for a recruitment and cadet training program with high schools to provide volunteers with career skills for the future, more targeted training opportunities, and enough volunteers to meet all of the emergency needs in the region. The chart showing how many volunteers are able to show up to any given emergency shows that there is a big gap between how many volunteers can show up and what the Chiefs have determined is the appropriate number of volunteers to show up. In some cases, between one and four people show up to an emergency.

She said there is a lack of volunteers and skilled emergency responders in rural communities. Additionally, there is a lack of professionalized community education and engagement, so that all citizens have better skills and tools to help themselves and help each other. Additionally, there is a need for professional staff to lead recruitment and training and retention. Finally, there is a need for a more robust program that is coordinated and collaborative in this region, so that all citizens have better skills and tools to help themselves and help each other.

David Lindley, White Salmon Council Member asked who abstained from voting in the Task Force Report.

Tao Berman, White Salmon Task Force Member

Tao Berman noted that they abstained from voting because they did not have enough information to make a confident decision. They assumed that merging would lead to synergies, specifically with regard to cost savings. However, they were not given the data on the actual financial cost savings, which was a mistake on their part. The speaker's takeaway is that they have been getting a good deal on fire services 100% due to Bill's volunteering for the last couple of decades, but it has the potential to have cost them far more. The most important details in this text are that if North Carolina were to merge, there would be no cost savings for White Salmon residents, as they would still need to have a station in Houston and White Salmon.

He noted that the fixed cost of administration would increase substantially, as it is already an absorbed cost by the city staff and is already a sunk cost to White Salmon and staff. Therefore, from a financial perspective, there are not much savings.

He noted that he believes that there is a level of service that is commensurately higher to justify the additional cost to White Salmon, and that the Council has run an analysis on when Bill Hunsaker retires, if he chooses to be selfish enough to not continue to volunteer for the next two decades. The speaker also believes that there needs to be more analysis of what white salmon's cost is going to be when Bill decides to stop graciously donating in his time. Finally, the speaker believes that there needs to be more analysis of what white salmon's cost is going to be when Bill Hunsaker decides to stop graciously donating in his time.

Discussion:

The City Council and staff discussed the fact that if the City Limits were to include the Urban Exempt Area, which is allowable for annexation into the city, the populations of Fire District 3 and City of White Salmon would be comparable.

Members from the Fire Commission and the City of White Salmon Council and Mayor expressed the overwhelming need for a higher level of service and emergency response. They requested that the focus remain on the services needed rather than focusing on the cost. Mayor Keethler noted that Bill Hunsaker will be retiring, and his salary is currently only made up of \$10,000 from the Fire Budget. She emphasized that this is not about the city saving money but planning for the future safety of our community.

IV. Business Items

A. **White Salmon Joint Resolution 2023-04-559 and Klickitat County Fire District 3 Joint Resolution 2023-9 Creation of West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee**

The City Council and Fire Commissioners discussed the Resolution and clarified the steps moving forward if the Resolution is adopted. Staff confirmed that the City Council would see a second Resolution in order to approve the Final Draft Plan before it can be moved to the ballot.

Ben Giant, White Salmon City Council Member expressed his desire to see financial information in the future for these types of projects to be able to make a fully informed decision.

Jim Ransier, White Salmon City Council Member agreed with Council Member Giant's request. He noted that the departments are not sustainable long term individually and it would be helpful to see where the benefit of combining the resources would make sense financially.

Jason Hartmann, White Salmon City Council Member agreed that it is important to see the numbers. It is the council's responsibility to ensure the financial stability of the city and without the financial data, this could become a financial responsibility that the city cannot afford.

David Lindley, White Salmon City Council Member asked how the volunteer fire fighters felt about the proposed RFA route. Bill Hunsaker, Fire Chief said they have many questions, but overall seem to support the project.

Thomas Montag, Fire Commissioner noted that the combined sustainability of the department offers a much higher level of service than apart. He noted that it will cost the taxpayers money but offered that the safety and health of the community should hold a high priority.

**Moved by Ben Giant. Seconded by David Lindley.
Motion to adopt Resolution 2023-04-559 Creation of a West Klickitat Regional Fire
Authority Planning Committee.
CARRIED 5-0**

**Klickitat County Fire District 3 adopted Resolution 2023-9 at their regularly scheduled
meeting on April 13, 2023.**

V. Adjournment

The White Salmon City Council meeting was adjourned at 6:00p.m.
The Fire Commissioner Meeting was Adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

Marla Keethler, Mayor

Stephanie Porter, Clerk Treasurer