



MINUTES
Chelan Fire and Rescue
Special Meeting
Wednesday, December 22, 2021, at 10:00 A.M.
232 East Wapato, Chelan, WA



The CFR Board of Commissioners will conduct the meeting in person at the fire station, you are welcome to join via Zoom. The public is welcome to join by following this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87284665516> Meeting ID: 872 8466 5516 or dial +1 253 215 8782

Proposed Chelan Fire and Rescue agenda pending Board approval.

Roll Call: Commissioner Phil Moller, Commissioner Russ Jones, and Commissioner Karyl Oules.

Staff in attendance: Fire Chief Mark Donnell, Assistant Fire Chief Brandon Asher, AA Karla Mendoza

Others in attendance: Jasmine Shattuck, Stephanie Preheim, Karl Polzin, Robert Wentland, Robert Takagi, Marcia Holmdahl, Anne Clark, Steve Clark, David Sharp, Larry Peabody

Regular Meeting Call to Order: Chairman Moller called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m.

Public Comment:

Robert Wentland: Voted in November in the last election for no reduction in services which includes staffing, equipment, and maintenance. When I came to the November meeting, I heard a lot of we are not going to spend the money, we are going to save the money. We are not going to hire a deputy chief position. Wants to reiterate that 57 plus percent of the citizens and people of this valley votes are expecting their wishes to be honored voted in no reduction in services and expected that to be honored. Here in last November, we want to put some \$400,000 into saving and not put someone in the deputy chief's position and make it something else, that to me would be a reduction of services. That is not what the citizens voted for. We had several meetings, and they all talked about hiring staff for the future. Which I am hearing we don't want to do. We want to push that down the road. Which to me would be a violation of the voters. We voted 57 plus percent of us the majority, to have no reduction of services because that is what we were told. So that is what I am asking you guys to honor, the 57 plus percent of the public that voted yes, and maybe listen to the people that voted no. They are not the majority in this. They lost in the election; the voters voted to not have a reduction in services. In talking to the building department, we have 2500 plus building permits going through the process in the future. It is only going to grow, and we are talking about saving money and not spending because we don't want to, or because someone is in your ear telling you not to, the citizens are not going to get the services they ask for or that they are paying for. It is going to be a lot harder for the gentleman and women in the back to do their job if we don't have the staffing for them or the resources. It is only going to get worse if we don't preplan and get ahead of it soon. Thanks.

Commissioner Moller: Okay, I will address that if you don't mind.

I don't believe that any of the three of us have talked about reducing force. You realize that we do not get money for the new firefighter until 2022. (Robert Wentland: Yup, April 2022) Right, and so that is when we will be looking at putting more staff. It is when the money is expected. As far as reducing staff, what I said last time, is what I would like to look at is other ways we can get the job done without an "Assistant Chief" position. If we can do that with a Battalion Chief if we can do that with a Captain of some sort. Still get the same job done that we need to get done, that we told the voters that we would get done. If we could do that saving money somehow, I will always be in favor of that. So, I have asked Brandon to look at other ways that we can do business within the fire department yet maintain the services that we currently have. And then our ah, in our ah levy we are asking to maintain current services ah so we can plan into our future. Planning into the future isn't spending all that money right now. What I said is that I am not interested in spending all that "500,000" dollars, whatever that number is that we got additionally into the department because of an error in numbers, I do not want to spend that, and I won't spend that I mean as far as I am concerned. These guys might want to spend it, but for me, I am not going to spend that money now. So, if that is the money you are talking about, then yeah you are absolutely correct. You guys? (Commissioner Oules: I am totally on the same page you are.) We don't want to reduce services; we need to put more boots on the ground for those guys. If we can do that without the Assistant Chief position, what are our options? Anne.

Anne Brautovich Clark:

So, um I feel the same with what Robert just said. I feel like you are reducing services by not hiring an Assistant Chief. I think it is a very valuable position and spending unneeded money to put more workload on staff if you have them doing that job. Which is a whole job, we have proven that over the last few years. I am also concerned just generally with the attitude of the commission that I feel that is fighting the department. I feel like you guys are not working to make this a better department like you are always antagonistic, you are fighting against the workings of the department. And I feel like it is a really negative situation, that is not healthy. And because there are people that are unhappy. Commissioner Oules keeps talking about this group that she wants to help who voted no and is unhappy. Who are they and where are they? They never come to a meeting; we don't hear anything about it. Is it 5



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people, is it 100 people? We have no idea except you're working for those people instead all of us who spend this time, come to the meetings, vote for the levy, we are not represented. That is how I feel. I feel you are totally against everything that happens here. So, I think it is a very bad attitude that needs to change, because we are not going to grow. We are just going to fester, and it's going to get really, really poisonous here. Not because it is a good situation, not until the commissioners are representing the people of the department.

Commissioner Jones: So, are you still opposed to hiring an Assistant Chief?

Commissioner Moller: I am not opposed to filling that position.

Commissioner Jones: So, what is your thinking?

Commissioner Oules: My thinking I am not opposed to the position, my thinking is that we need to expand and look other directions. We don't have to hit a panic button that it has to be done within a week, by the end of the year. Our budgets, we are always told they are fluid working documents. I think to jump because is not even representing those who voted yes. There's going to be other options available, and Brandon, as I understand, looking into that. What other options can we look at? Can we look at a position a person does a certain percentage of this type of coverage and this type of coverage? Uh, I just think that we're making a quick decision without looking outside the box.

Anne Brautovich Clark: Can I make one more quick comment? We have been talking out this for 3 months. We have been talking about this since Chief announced his retirement in June. So why all of a sudden, everything gets pushed and pushed. As this is not a rash decision. You guys have been discussing it. Nothing ever happens, nothing is ever decided. I feel like it is push, push, wait, wait, wait.

Commissioner Jones: So, information was sent out on alternatives on the Assistant Chief position. Did you get a chance to look at that? The bottom line is that if those duties are not performed by an exempt employee, we are going to pay overtime. We are going to pay a lot of overtime.

Marcia Holmdahl: In the past we have had an assistant chief and it worked very well. So why are we changing it? Why are we thinking of doing something else?

Commissioner Jones: So, I agree with the fact that this has been budgeted for, for months now. We passed the budget now to include hiring for an assistant chief. Um, I don't, I don't know what kind of matrix you are looking at that would produce a more expensive option than hiring an assistant chief.

Commissioner Moller: Certainly, don't want to spend more money. Brandon, have you had a chance to think about that at all.

Assistant Chief Asher: Yeah, um. I like what Russ said we kind of gave you the breakdown of what other titled positions would cost but the key to that is that they are not exempt, overtime is there. I know there is a lot of talk about the future but let's look at the present. Our present situation, I am that person, so whoever is coming to talk whatever we decide to title this becomes me. And there is a ton of work involved with that. I averaged out the last 4 years and it's 358 a year extra that you know, if we bring up somebody from the bargaining unit, that's got to be negotiated, it's got to be bargained. They are going to get their overtime, or essentially coming here for any reason. Whereas with the exempt person, you, I don't (laugh) I don't submit for overtime, as much as I would like to. You know it's a lot of work, and it's a lot of you know, 2 o'clock in the morning work, that that need to be done. Somebody has to do it, and I think it is just really important that we, you also take into consideration the fact of having authority. Having somebody here who has some authority. Um, for instance, last week: I was gone for 8 days in Mexico, and there was probably no question as to who was in charge, who was running the show, um who we could call for whatever reason, it was Chief Donnell. And all this summer, when Chief Donnell would go on his vacation, same thing, you guys probably thought okay if we need anything, we can contact Chief Asher. Because you know, it's just, you have more authority to make decisions. Or for one of us to make a decision in place of the other. You know, again, the workload is huge, and I am your present example of it, and uh, there is just, there's things that would just not get done. And we want to stuff done and get better at what we are doing. So...



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Commissioner Moller: So, with that Assistant Chief position, would he be the training officer?

Assistant Chief Asher: Yeah, that would be one of his main focuses would be training.

Commissioner Moller: Because Brandon, yeah. We have Mark, with support from you. And however, many hours you said you know, that is mostly training...

Assistant Chief Asher: No. That's meeting. That's 911 responses. That's training.

Commissioner Moller: Well, a lot of training. I mean, I just don't want that element just to go by the wayside. We have to have that training element in um, in whichever (Asher: Absolutely) position we call that. And if we can't go with a position from the staff because of the exempt status, then that is that.

Assistant Chief Asher: Yeah, I mean obviously we have to train. The WSRB is going to come and look at our training and, and one other thing that I just wanted to bring up is just when we've got that assistant chief position, we, so, for instance, um, today well we've got a 3 people crew today. So really, we've got 5 people here today. We often have days where one of the chiefs is gone, one of the firefighters is gone and we have a 2-man crew. So having the 24 hours a day 365-day duty chief position, ah, it gives us the bare minimum to do the most critical thing we need to do, and that is going to the side of a building where there is a known occupant and save a life.

Commissioner Moller: And that ah, and that position will also be required to be combat qualified, correct?

Assistant Chief Asher: Right, yeah absolutely, yeah.

Commissioner Moller: So, I want to hear from you guys. What do you guys feel you need?

Captain Taylor Rains: Well, I am going to put it as an example, just a couple days ago we had a structure fire in Chelan Falls. Chief Asher was out of town, Chief Donnell was in Wenatchee at an appointment. I'll be honest in mid-route, I'm calling Troy, and like hey are you available to come, because I don't know how long we are going to have a response behind us, that can channel at the hydrants. So, like, I tell you want, try showing up with 2 on scene and can run the scene and go anywhere needed is extremely difficult, if not impossible. Safety-wise especially is absolutely essential, someone that can just sit can and take control of the scene and be looking as we can focus on our job. Yeah, absolutely, the Assistant Chief is absolutely necessary, in my mind.

FF Sam Belsky: So, the steps to it I think are: 1) I agree that the workload is there. So, somebody, somebody needs to fill that role, so that is step one. Step 2 is how do we fill it, and most importantly which I know you all agree with is the Fiscal responsibility. We can all preach to that. And ah, having somebody from the staff fill it, is just fiscally not as responsible as having an Assistant Chief come in and fill it. It's just as simple as that, um like Chief Asher said, you won't have to pay overtime with an exempt employee. If you did put one of us in that role, you have to replace that role, that you just moved up there. So now, you are increasing salary and I don't think that goes in line with the finances that the board wants (inaudible)...I think it would be a great opportunity for one of us to take it, and I don't think that was a bad idea at all to look at it as an option, ah I just think that it is not, even thinking that one of us would do it, but I don't think it is in best interest to have one of us do it. We don't have enough people. It needs to be filled by someone who could do it, (inaudible) not us.

FF David Sharp: I am David. I am a new volunteer, recently moved from Kittitas, where I volunteered for 12 years, so I can give an outside perspective, I think. For me, there is a job description for the Assistant Chief, just being new here for a couple months, it's operational leadership for me. You can't separate it out training vs. duty chief vs. recruitment retention at all. It has to be overseen by a single leader because all that goes together. And so, for me, there's a financial aspect, but then there's also safety. Right, so then having that operation leader who is part of your recruitment and retention, part of your training, part of your leadership on the scene, because of all safety concerns for us as firefighters, as well as with the public. And secondly, I used to be a training captain up at Kittitas, and there is a huge liability aspect to that. So, if you want to get into the fiscal responsibility aspect, if we are not doing that role properly, that's the first thing that they look at when someone gets injured and hurt, whether it is one of us or



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one of the citizens, response time...(inaudible). So, I just want to put that out there that as a new volunteer here, I would be hugely concerned volunteering my time and safety in a department that is unhealthy structurally. So, I... I totally respect and follow Chief Asher even after a couple of months, been to 6 trainings, we burned a house down together, I have been to 4 major calls. I see the benefit of what is going from...(inaudible). Putting that out there, I know you guys have a tough job, you are elected official, you have to listen to the citizens, I am one of them. (inaudible)...I appreciate you letting me have a little bit of your time this morning. Thank you.

Richard Uhlhorn: I have been interested in this conversation that has been going on for a long time, and I just happen to run into a past chief of Chelan Fire and Rescue. Quite a long time ago, but I asked him about this, he said that they have to hire an Assistant Fire Chief, there is no other question. Because Brandon can't work 365 days a year, and they need someone to cover him administratively and so forth. And that was from a past fire chief in this town, who I respect a lot, so just throwing that out.

Commissioner Jones: Well throughout this conversation I guess the thing I haven't heard is why wouldn't we hire an Assistant Fire Chief?

Commissioners Moller: And, again, it's not filling that position. I will always look for ways to get business down in a fiscally responsible way. I am always going to look at that. So, I've never not wanted that position, I wanted to look at that position to see if that position is somewhere where we can save a little money, but yet still get the job done. If our hands are tied because of the exempt ...(inaudible)...to see you know which positions can be exempt and which are not exempt. I mean so a lot on my mind right now is really so for me, bottom line is that exemption. I mean, if you have to have an Assistant Chief in order to be the exempt position...(inaudible)...then it is the way it will work.

So, David?

FF David Sharp: Yes, Sir

Moller: As training Captain, were you exempt?

FF David Sharp: I was a volunteer training Captain, but it did take over 40 hours a week on top of my full-time ...(inaudible)...

Commissioner Moller: So...(inaudible)...can we do that with a training Captain, and still get the administrative duties done and not have you know the extra chief money in there. If we can only, do it with an Assistant Chief then we do it with an Assistant Chief, I mean that is just the bottom line.

Commissioner Jones: So, what I think I am hearing is: you are okay with an exempt employee to handle the duties, you just don't want to necessarily call him an Assistant Chief, is that the issue?

Commissioner Moller: If that is where our wage scale is going then yes. Yeah, if we can get the job done at a lesser wage, why wouldn't we want to do that? (inaudible)....

Commissioner Jones: I think the answer to that is that we may find it difficult to find somebody that is going to perform those duties without the title, and the difference in pay between the seasoned career firefighter and assistant chief, isn't that great.

Commissioner Oules: And you may be correct Russ, but I think we need to investigate. I am not opposed to Assistant Chief, but I am with, I am exactly where Phil is on the thing. We need to do a little more investigating, to satisfy me, ah yeah. No way do I expect Brandon...

Assistant Chief Asher: That's the parallel, every department around us has an Assistant Chief. Some of them have, of the comparable we use, combination fire departments, which is career and volunteer, they all have an Assistant Chief. And sometimes they have a Deputy Chief or a training officer, or Battalion Chief, or whatever you want to call it.



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Commissioner Moller: And Brandon honestly, that is exactly what I see happening. It's now we are too busy for the Assistant Chief, and now...(inaudible)... I don't know at some point....

Assistant Chief Asher: We are fiscally responsible though, I think we have proven that, and we will continue to prove that. And there is not going to be a fluff position, so to say. It's a critical position.

Fire Chief Donnell: So, if I may just add one thing, in 2015, after the assistant chief that was in the position was, had left the organization. We put a training captain in the position, okay. That lasted until 2016 when Chief Lemon realized that the number of hours, he was putting in outside of that, the cost of that position was overly prohibited, and he wasn't getting the things necessary that he needed to get done. They opted to go back to that Assistant Chief position, which I was hired in 2016. We had the luxury to bring in Chief Asher on in 2018 from a grant. That grant was specific for a regional approach for volunteer recruitment retention, and I will tell you, we abused that grant. This department did, we had Chief Asher for 50 percent of the time, then Chief Lemon left in 2019, and basically for the last two years, two and a half years we have been fulfilling that position between the two of us. Tried to keep him at his 50 percent commitment to this organization, trust me it was way more, I can guarantee that Entiat and Orondo got short-changed on that deal. Okay, the two of us picked up the slack on that work, and maybe we didn't recognize what that work looked like, but there is a tremendous amount of work there. So that all being said, I am not really sure what options you want to look at. I gave you; we gave you 3 options: the Assistant Chief, the Battalion Chief with training and retention, which would have to be negotiated, negotiations with the local in order to make that position fillable, and the other is a captain, training captain which we have done in the past and we have language for. Now, all that being said, we are still looking at duty chief rotation, which is going to cost even more money on top of that to fill that. We have a process in place with a contract to fill that one the weekend, where we bump the captain up in that role, and we backfill for overtime. We have been doing that for 3 months per your direction, to get us out of the 2-week rotation into a 3-week rotation. I am not really sure where else we can go to look at other options. Okay. This has been on the table for as long as I can remember with the discussion with the board. We since 2020, when we started talking about what does it look like in the future, we all have budgeted this position and made it known to the board that in 2022 that this position would be moved up into the administrative category. I'm sorry, yeah, the administrative. That cost would be born out of there because of the end of the grant in 2021. So, we are already there. Even if we were to move forward with the hiring of the assistant fire chief position, you are looking at least 4 months, when this posts, of getting that process set up, doing all the things necessary to even have that person in place. Our original thought was when we came to the board that when we discussed this, that we have this person in place by April 1st. Well now we are looking at May 1st, and if you continue to put this off, it will put us in the middle of fire season, which puts us way behind the 8 Ball on that. So, this position has been budgeted for, okay, we have shown that the positions work, the job description is very tough on what this position does. There is a benefit, other than the cost savings too, this is the person that in absence of the Fire Chief has the administrative authority within the fire district. You don't necessarily have that with that captain position training officer position. So just some of the things the board needs to consider, when we looked at that we have tried this, that was the reason we opted to go back to the Assistant Chief Position.

Commissioner Jones: I agree that we've, you have given us options to look at. I guess I am having trouble picturing what other things you want to examine, would they be any different from what we have already seen. We don't want to leave Brandon hanging out there, we want to make sure he can succeed. He is going to need that Assistant to help with that and having him on board with that before the main fire season is pretty critical.

Commissioner Moller: ...(inaudible)....

Commissioner Jones: Made a motion to post the Assistant Fire Chief Position

Unfinished Business:

Assistant Chief Hiring Process/Acting Assistant Chief:



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- Commissioner Jones Made a MOTION to approve the posting of the Assistant Fire Chief position, Commissioner Moller second the MOTION. Commissioner Oules OPPOSED. The MOTION CARRIED.

Commissioner Moller: So, with that, we will move forward with the Assistant Chief position. Before anything is sent out, we will want to look over that thoroughly... (inaudible)...

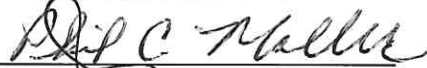
Chief Donnell: We will go back, I will have Brandon go back and just review that, reset the dates, and send it to you today. So that you have the ability to review that and give us feedback on that.

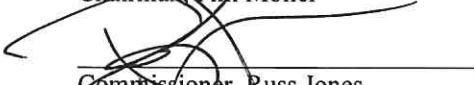
Larry Peabody: So, these last few days I was talking to Phil Moller in a private e-mail conversation, about the Assistant Fire Chief position... (inaudible)...I apologize to you. It was not my intention to sound ... (inaudible)...how email work, and for that, it was not my intention to sound condescending, so I apologize. ... (inaudible)... the position of the Assistant Chief ... (inaudible)...years of firefighting, and training officer, nonexempt training officer. Training officer for regional division is how this person... (inaudible)...that is a can of worms at the end. The dedication and respect the assistant fire chief holds is the best thing... (inaudible)...

Commissioner Moller: So, get that to the board. Your wishes on that position. We will take a look at it, to get that posted.

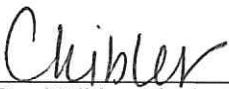
Adjournment: At 10:34 a.m. the meeting was adjourned.

Chelan County Fire Protection District 7
Board of Commissioners:


Chairman, Phil Moller


Commissioner, Russ Jones


Commissioner, Karyl Oules


Carol Kibler, District Secretary