

**GRAHAM FIRE & RESCUE
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
DECEMBER 9, 2013**

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Pierson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Commissioner Verne M. Pierson, Commissioner Robert E. Skaggs, Commissioner Gerald W. Gustafson, Fire Chief Ryan Baskett, Deputy Chief Tony Judd, Assistant Chief Tom Mason, Assistant Chief Steve Richards, Public Prevention and Education Officer Myra Merdian-Drake and Board Secretary Jodi Reynolds

Absent: Assistant Chief Todd Jensen had an excused absence.

Commissioner Pierson led the Pledge of Allegiance and welcomed the audience.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Skaggs moved to approve the Agenda as presented.

Commissioner Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The minutes of the Special Board Meeting of November 20, 2013, were approved as presented.

The minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of November 25, 2013, were approved as presented.

CORRESPONDENCE

- Letter from Tacoma-Pierce County Chaplaincy
- Notice of Health Care Committee Vacancy from WFCA
- Closing Report from Patterson Buchanan et al, PS

FINANCIALS

Payable (Payroll) Check #17076 in the amount of \$306.68, Payable Checks #17078 through #17118 in the amount of \$21,111.15, and a transfer in the amount of \$226.43, for a total of \$21,644.26 were presented for approval.

Commissioner Gustafson moved to accept the payables in the amount of \$21,644.26 after proper auditing. Commissioner Skaggs seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Pierson pointed out one additional Payable (Payroll) Check #17077 in the amount of \$5,889.63 was issued to an employee whose direct deposit into his bank account did not occur as scheduled on November 27th due to a technical error.

GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

Chief's Report

Chief Baskett reported on the following:

On November 29, 2013, citizen Bill Hicks, representing the Tacoma Pierce County Association of Realtors, presented the Department with framed proclamations signed by the Governor in recognition of First Responder Day. One will be placed at each station. Mr. Hicks is also a member of the M&O Levy Citizen Advisory Group and Graham Business Association. Unfortunately, he is unable to be here tonight.

The Commissioners/Chiefs Banquet and the Department Santa Breakfast went extremely well. Thank you to Ms. Reynolds and Assistant Chief Jensen for their work on the Banquet and to Lynne Walters and Support Services for efforts on the Santa Breakfast.

Commissioner Pierson informed staff and the audience the Bill Jarmon Lifetime Achievement Award went to Commissioner Skaggs for his service above and beyond at the local, county and state levels. Commissioner Skaggs then stated the Distinguished Service Award went to Commissioner Pierson for his 18 years of service to the District and state. Congratulations Commissioners Skaggs and Pierson!

Chief Baskett stated Deputy Chief Judd informed him that at the Graham Association meeting on November 26th the Commissioners voiced an interest in paying a portion of the food cost for the Santa Breakfast. Chief Baskett said he must check with the auditor on this and will get back to the Board with an answer at the December 23rd meeting.

Two of our Lieutenants will be out for an extended period. Per contract language we will temporarily promote the top two individuals from the eligibility list. Fire Fighter Bamford and Fire Fighter Kanton have been offered temporary promotions expected to last no more than ninety days.

Fire Fighter/Paramedic Kennedy has returned to shift work after being out for an extended period of time.

Fire Fighter Billings is retiring at the end of this year and has a retirement celebration planned for January 11th at the Union Hall.

Fire Fighter/Paramedic Robert Turner has accepted a job offer from Gig Harbor Fire and his last shift here is December 19th. He is an outstanding employee and we wish him the best of luck.

Resident Fire Fighter Nitz has tendered his resignation effective December 22, 2013, to pursue other opportunities.

Commissioner Skaggs inquired of the other Board members and Chief Baskett if the Department has a policy standardizing how we recognize retiring members. With all of the retirements recently, a policy is now necessary. Discussion ensued and

Commissioner Skaggs requested staff prepare a policy addressing this issue. Chief Baskett stated a policy would not likely be ready for the next Board meeting. Commissioner Skaggs asked staff to begin working on one.

M&O Levy. The Citizen Advisory Group has met for the second time and several are in the audience tonight. They have prepared their responses to the questions assigned by staff and the Board. Chief Baskett introduced John Seidl as the group's spokesperson to address the Board and answer the assigned questions and any additional ones the Board may have.

Mr. Seidel explained Gina Leigh, the group's official spokesperson, could not attend tonight's meeting; therefore, he was acting on her behalf and would read the Citizen Advisory Group Recap she prepared. The group's responses to the assigned questions are as follows:

Question #1: Does it make sense for Graham Fire & Rescue to place a Maintenance and Operations Levy on the ballot?

Answer: Yes. The citizen group has reviewed documentation presented to them; and they have decided an M&O levy is needed. With call volumes increasing, dissolving seven fire fighter positions and closing stations does not seem realistic or in the best interest of the community.

Question #2: If yes, based on the cost of elections, time required for citizen education and other ballot measures possibly on the different elections, during which election should it be placed on the ballot?

Answer: The citizen group recommends placing an M&O Levy on the August 2014 ballot. They also recommend the resolution be done January 2014 to allow time for educating the citizens about the current financial state of Graham Fire.

Question #3: In your opinion, what starting levy amount is needed to provide a minimum level of service?

Answer: Based on the financial report given, \$.60 per \$1,000 is the amount needed.

Mr. Seidl stated that in his support of an M&O levy, education is the true deciding factor in getting voter support. Inadequate education will result in "No" votes. Education must include full disclosure of what it costs to run the organization including expenses, salaries, benefits, etc. In speaking with several neighbors and customers at Graham Feed, they all say, "Where is the money going?" They don't know. They must be educated so that they do know.

Citizen Advisory Group member Matt Hamilton then addressed the Board. He stated he foresees considerable growth in the Graham area in the near future. He believes 224th will look like 176th in the next five to eight years. This area is one of the fastest growing in the state and Graham Fire must be able to support this growth. Mr. Hamilton said he was previously unaware Graham Fire had a \$2 million deficit. Graham Fire has been caught in the downdraft like everyone else. The bosses are the citizens, and if we want a raise, we have to ask the boss. Maybe we will be successful, maybe not, but we must ask. He stated he had three requests for the Board: 1) Have Graham Fire on the ballot

August 5th, 2014, at \$.60 per \$1,000, for an estimated amount of \$2.7 million; 2) have the resolution take place in 2014 rather than 2013 to eliminate potential voter confusion; and 3) run it on the August 5th and November 4th ballots and have a split resolution. Mr. Hamilton stated he has studied the voter data for the recent ballot measures for Fire District No. 17 and Fire District No. 6, and he believes the votes and community goodwill are there for Graham Fire. With proper education and a little bit of funding the election will be a success and Graham Fire will be set for the four-year cycle.

Citizen Advisory Group member Ryan Portmann explained he is a longtime resident of Graham and didn't realize the financial position the District was in. He believes the Commissioners have been good stewards of the citizens' money and have had the support of the electorate. We have great, beautiful fire stations, paid for by the citizens, and he does not want to have any stations close. Station No. 6 on 224th would be the first to close, which is the station that would respond to an emergency at his residence. Do the citizens want reasonable response times or lengthy ones? He is in support of the levy at \$.60 per \$1,000, and as the economy recovers, he recommends scaling down the levy amount so as not to become dependent on it. Let the voters decide.

Citizen Advisory Group member Tony Roehl addressed the Board next. The financial situation of Graham Fire is quite stark. The Board and management have done a really good job attacking the cost side. We have reached the limit on cuts and cannot afford to cut back any more, which leaves the revenue side. He supports the unanimous opinion by the six-member Citizen Advisory Group for putting a \$.60 levy on the ballot.

Chief Baskett asked the Board members if they had questions for any of the speakers. Commissioner Skaggs commended them for their knowledge of the information provided to them. They went far beyond what was asked of them and added other elements. He felt they did an excellent job. He reiterated the Board and especially Chief Baskett have made difficult cuts to the budget and do not want to cut personnel. He acknowledged he is in agreement with the advisory group's opinion to go ahead with the M&O levy as recommended.

Commissioner Pierson also commended the advisory group for their grasp of the information given. He stated we are fortunate to have started making cuts to the budget back in 2008. He agrees with the advisory group's thought process, including the recommended timing and importance of education time. He sees the M&O levy as the appropriate next step.

Commissioner Gustafson stated he believes the following concerns must be addressed for the citizens:

1. How much is the levy?
2. Where is the breakdown of how the money will be spent and where?
3. Where is every dollar going above the \$2.00 (for fire and EMS levies) and bond money to build the buildings (stations)? We still have some of that money left.
4. Fire trucks are Class A vehicles for 20 years. Usually on the 19th year they are rebuilt and are Class A for 15 more years, not 4 or 5 years as shown on one of the handouts he received.
5. Medic Units: How many miles before we get rid of them? How many miles do the private (companies) keep them (for)? As you know we have a new medical law in place – Obama Care. When we price ourselves out of the market they

(the private companies) will take over. There is a company in Bothell now that would love to take over and we're trying to avoid that.

6. Are people going to be hired with the levy money? If so, where are they going, each and every one of them? To what position?

Commissioner Gustafson said the days are over when we just tax and spend. We do not have the prerogative to do that. We must determine what is a "want" and what is a "need," if and when.

Chief Baskett agreed with Commissioner Gustafson all of these questions and concerns must be addressed as part of the process before we move forward with the M&O levy. We must explain to the citizens how we are going to manage that money.

Commissioner Gustafson recalled back when we built Station No. 6, he had said that now all we have to do is find some money in order to place some people in the station. The situation remains the same today.

Commissioner Pierson added that addressing these questions will be part of the education process. The people have the right to ask these questions and it is important we answer them up front and clearly.

Commissioner Skaggs stated he understands Commissioner Gustafson's concerns. The resolution must clearly define where the money is going to go in accordance with County and State law. He agreed the cuts already made will keep our heads above water, but cannot sustain us. That is why the M&O Levy is necessary as a stop gap measure, hopefully the economy will improve while the M&O Levy is in place, so we will not have to close stations and lose personnel. The advisory group is correct in saying the decision is not for the elected officials to make, the decision is the citizens' based on the level of service they are willing to fund. We must give them the opportunity to tell us what they want. He recommended the Board direct staff to start putting together the resolution in accordance with the recommendations of the advisory group including dating it for 2014 and making it a split resolution.

Fire Fighter/Paramedic and Local No. 726 Representative Troy Flowers stated the union members are aware of where the budget is at and are in favor of an M&O Levy. He asked the advisory group what the duration of the M&O Levy is. They responded four years. Commissioner Pierson added the advisory group recommends starting at \$.60 with that amount decreasing over four years if the economy improves.

Commissioner Gustafson stressed the importance of being very specific when writing the Resolution to state exactly where the money will go. Chief Baskett pointed out to the Board the Staff Report he provided them had benchmarks illustrating the effect each of the figures would have on the level of service. He requested the Board advise him if they need additional information.

Commissioner Skaggs moved to direct staff to prepare the Resolution dated January 2014 for the Maintenance and Operations Levy initially in the amount of \$.60 per \$1,000 assessed valuation. Commissioner Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion carried with two affirmative votes. Commissioner Gustafson abstained.

Commissioner Gustafson elaborated on his concerns for clarity in the Resolution and adherence to it. He stated the Resolution for the Bond to build the new stations included verbiage stating the current facility at Station No. 21-2 would be developed into a complete station, but that did not occur. He stated he does not want that to happen again.

South Sound 911. The Operations Board meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 13th. Chief Baskett will attend.

AFG Grant. Deputy Chief Judd and other staff worked diligently to prepare and submit an AFG micro grant application by the deadline. Staff determined applying for funds for training and small equipment through the micro grant process would more likely be awarded.

State Audit. The State audit began on December 4th with the financial review and is projected to last three weeks. Chief Baskett asked the Board how they would like to address the entrance and exit conferences, and we will call a Special Board Meeting if two or more of the Commissioners attend. The entrance conference is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday the 18th at 3:00 p.m. Commissioners Pierson, Gustafson and Skaggs all responded they would attend.

Commissioner Skaggs moved to call a Special Board Meeting for December 18, 2013, for the State Audit Entrance Conference. Commissioner Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Response. Chief Baskett met with Chief Wright from Central Pierce Fire & Rescue last week to discuss mutual aid response. Chief Wright is very concerned his units respond in our district a disproportionate number of times compared to the number of times we respond in their district. Assistant Chief Jensen collected data which shows the ratio is currently running 3.1 aid received by Graham Fire and 1.0 aid given. We are implementing run card changes to allow us to utilize our equipment as much as possible. Making response changes such as delaying non-priority calls and implementing a single unit response for BLS calls will bring the numbers closer together; however, without adding units and personnel, it will be difficult to bring the ratio closer to being even.

Oil Can Henry's. The Department recently opened a fleet account with the local Oil Can Henry's in Graham to relieve our light maintenance work load. As a benefit of opening a corporate account they offer a Henry's Club employee benefit program for our Department members. The employee presents their Department I.D card at the time of service and receives a 10% discount. He asked the Board if they had any objection to allowing our employees to participate.

Commissioner Gustafson moved to allow Graham Fire & Rescue employees to participate in the Henry's Club Employee Benefit Program and receive a 10% discount on services at Oil Can Henry's. Commissioner Skaggs seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Resident Program. Due to the defunding of the resident program for 2014 because of changes to the health care law and other funding issues, we intend to bring the current residents into the volunteer program. Chief Baskett has not had an opportunity to develop the new program yet. He requested Board approval to maintain the current

resident program through January 2014 to allow staff, Assistant Chief Mason and himself time to bring a plan to the Board.

Commissioner Skaggs moved to approve the continuation of the current resident program through January 2014. Commissioner Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Divisional Updates: Due to the length of the meeting thus far, Chief Baskett referred the Board to the Chief's Report to view this information and welcomed their questions. The Board members had none.

Chief Baskett informed the Board that Public Prevention and Education Officer Myra Merdian-Drake wished to address the Board. She offered her sincere thanks for their participation in the various Department events, complete with their smiling faces and aprons on.

NEW BUSINESS

None

OTHER BUSINESS

None

GOOD OF THE ORDER/PUBLIC INPUT

Commissioner Gustafson requested an update from Chief Baskett regarding an incident which allegedly occurred the weekend after Thanksgiving at Station No. 21-5. He had learned from a citizen who heard on the radio the fire fighters' cars were broken into at Station No, 21-5. Chief Baskett responded he had received no such report. Fire Fighter/Paramedic Kolibas was in the audience and had updated information passed on to him at the end of that shift. He explained an altercation occurred offsite following a robbery and the suspect was cornered on the apron at Station No. 21-5. Our personnel misread the situation because it appeared as if someone was trying to break into the station. The incident was reported and law enforcement responded.

Commissioner Pierson mentioned upcoming Commissioner conferences for 2014. In addition he stated he attended his last Washington State Fire Commissioners Education Board meeting recently. He served on the Board for ten years and provided much input. Pierce County will still have one representative on the Board after he departs.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chief Baskett requested a five minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.140 to adopt a position for collective bargaining, with business to follow, and a five minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.110(1)(g) to evaluate qualifications of a public employee or review their performance, with no business to follow, for a total of ten minutes.

Commissioner Pierson announced a five minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.140 to adopt a position for collective bargaining, with business to follow, and a five minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.110(1)(g) to evaluate qualifications of a public employee or review their performance, with no business to follow, for a total of ten minutes. The Executive Session was announced as beginning at 8:17 p.m.

Commissioner Pierson reconvened the Regular Board Meeting at 8:27 p.m.

Commissioner Skaggs moved to approve the Memorandum of Understanding between the District and Local 726 with changes to Article 20.6, as presented. Commissioner Gustafson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, the Regular Board Meeting of December 9, 2013, was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Verne M. Pierson, Commissioner

Anthony D. Judd, District Secretary