

**GRAHAM FIRE & RESCUE
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
March 29, 2017**

CALL TO ORDER

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

Attendance:

Present: Commissioner Gerald W. Gustafson, Commissioner Russell T. Barstow, Commissioner Gina Blanchard-Reed, Commissioner Ryan Portmann, Fire Chief Ryan Baskett and Deputy Chief Tony Judd

Absent: Commissioner Adam Rosenlund and Board Secretary Jodi Reynolds had excused absences.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Commissioner Barstow requested a 30-minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.140 to plan or adopt strategy/position for professional negotiations, with possible business to follow.

Commissioner Gustafson announced a 30-minute Executive Session under RCW 42.30.140 to plan or adopt strategy/position for professional negotiations, with possible business to follow.

Commissioner Gustafson announced a recess at 7:03 p.m.

The Executive Session was announced as beginning at 7:04 p.m.

An announcement was made at 7:34 p.m. to extend the Executive Session five minutes.

The Executive Session was announced as ending at 7:39 p.m.

Commissioner Gustafson reconvened the Regular Board Meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Commissioner Portmann moved to accept the Separation Agreement between the District and Ryan Baskett, as presented, subject to Ryan Baskett's review and approval. Commissioner Blanchard-Reed seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Interim Fire Chief. Commissioner Portmann acknowledged the need to fill the vacancy of the Fire Chief's role, and proposed the Board establish a committee to reach out to the State Fire Commissioners and Fire Chiefs Associations and request a list of potential candidates to fill the interim Chief position. The Board has looked internally, and after speaking with Deputy Chief Judd, has determined Deputy Chief Judd is not interested in the position due to the need to then fill his current position. Deputy Chief Judd then clarified he recommended to the Board he not fill that position because his current position is technical in nature and to find someone to fill that role will probably be more difficult in the short term than finding someone to come in and manage the District for the interim period. Commissioner Gustafson concurred. He stated he

would contact the State Commissioners Association tomorrow and get some names from them. Commissioner Blanchard-Reed confirmed the Board will form a committee of two members. Commissioners Gustafson and Barstow stated they will serve on that committee.

PUBLIC INPUT

Citizen Bob Vellias stated that as the former Chief of South Pierce Fire & Rescue, he would like to thank Ryan (Baskett) for all he has done for him and for Graham. The irony that the building the Board holds meetings in, the people hired at this Department and the people that were never laid off are a direct result of him as the leader of this organization. When it comes time to finding a new Chief, he implores the Board to understand the job that Ryan did inside and outside of the Department. This is very, very important. There are not many people committed to both the job inside and the job outside as Fire Chief. They have weakened the Board and administration through this process. They need to find a way to strengthen it again. There will be moments with the new Chief that will be great, but when things go south, support him. Mr. Vellias stated he went through the same process at South Pierce and the one thing he had throughout it was the support of his Board. Don't show it; don't say it; don't go behind people's backs and say things about the Chief. Work as a group. Announce as a group. Talk as a group. Stand behind that man or woman through thick and thin. It has not been easy being Fire Chief the past eight or nine years with finances the way they were. Ryan had a tough job to start out with and had to say no many times. Sometimes saying no puts you on the spot and puts your job on the line, but he did it at the right time. The District was upside down and now it's on a level playing field and the thanks he got was what happened tonight. Remember to support the next Chief in any way, shape or form, not just at these meetings, but outside of them as well. Also, find someone who understands the community, because we are losing now.

Citizen Terry Hurd stated he has had experience as a union official of a local and it is a very awkward job when you deal with people who really don't want to get along. Based on the meetings he has attended and the written information he has picked up, there was a lack of communication that was tolerated for too long. The failure is not always one person. It really comes back to the Board to take those people who are causing this issue in multiple fire districts and bring them in line. Make sure they understand what their task is supposed to be. We are here to solve the problems, not to get our own way. The rules are plain, and the job pretty well described. For the public to turn around and see this type of in-fighting, not just on one occasion or one Chief, we are finding out. It is rather embarrassing for the citizens in the audience who are wondering what is going on.

Citizen Bob Benum asked the Board when he can get a copy of the report. Deputy Chief Judd explained he had prepared a letter to give to Carolyn Benum, because she had requested a copy of the report. The letter states that because a third party was identified in the report, the third party has the ability to seek an injunction to stop the report from being released. We are allowing time for that to occur, by law. We expect by the 7th, assuming nothing occurs, we will be able to release the report. Mr. Benum asked why certain portions couldn't just be blacked out, and Deputy Chief Judd responded we cannot redact a report without being told to do so by a judge. We are bound by public disclosure law to provide the report if requested, in its entirety, unless we are directed by a judge to redact a certain portion of it. So, once that is figured out, we will provide either the complete or redacted report.

Citizen Carolyn Benum asked Deputy Chief Judd if there was a chance the court could decide that none of the report could be released. He responded that the third party has the ability to seek an injunction on the entire report or a portion of it. The judge can grant or dismiss the request. We then must follow what the judge says.

Citizen Bill Hicks stated he is disappointed in the Commission. They are elected by the citizens of this community, and he feels they did not represent the citizens and instead represented the Union. He has been both a union leader and the manager of several companies, so he has been on both sides of the discussion. As a union leader he fiercely fought for the members and as a manager he fiercely fought for the companies he worked for. What he sees here is a Chief that has done a fabulous job. He may have upset union members, but he has never met a good manager who did not upset the employees at one time or another. He thinks Chief Baskett has done a tremendous job; he listened to the citizens regarding the levy, did what they suggested and got a levy through that no one thought would pass. He has a strong feeling it is going to be very hard to get levies through and very hard for some of them to retain their seats on the Commission. This is way out of line. In his opinion they have done a real disservice to the community. He is sorry they made their decision.

Commissioner Blanchard-Reed stated she had a public statement to read on behalf of the Board to summarize how they have been feeling. She proceeded as follows:

We, the Board of Fire Commissioners, would like to thank Chief Baskett for his 29 years of service to the community of Graham. No doubt that countless families have been touched by his service. The community and district owe him a debt of gratitude. We would like to thank community members for contributing to the conversation and sharing their support of Chief Baskett in various public meetings held over the last two months. We know it has not been an easy process. We would like to thank the Firefighters for their dedication to the District and their patience while the Board worked through the process of evaluating the Chief and considering the needed course of action.

The Board took the "no confidence" vote by labor seriously as we know that it is imperative that firefighters have confidence in their Chief in order to best fulfill the duties of their job. They must feel supported and heard. When it was clear that intervention was needed, we hired a third party at taxpayers' expense to assess the climate of the District. Countless people were interviewed including Board Members, Staff, Community Members and Firefighters. We received input from Chief Baskett and met with him many times to hear his views and thoughts on the issues raised. Our goal was to conduct a fair, ethical and transparent process.

We decided after much deliberation to offer Chief Baskett a severance package with full pay and benefits through February 2018. This offer is five months longer than the terms in his contract. We did this to signal that we do appreciate all of the energy, commitment and dedication Chief Baskett has put into the District.

Moving forward we are committed as a unified Board to seek the right person to lead District 21. This may take some time and we are prepared to properly vet the candidates. The Board is determined to do a better job supervising the chief and creating an environment where everyone is heard. We want to be more engaged and aware of potential concerns. We look forward to starting a new chapter in District 21 while deeply appreciating the service of Chief Baskett over the last 29 years.

*Sincerely,
The Board of Fire Commissioners*

Commissioner Gustafson stated he wanted to personally thank Chief Baskett for all of the years he has put in. He was on the Board back when a group of candidates for the position of fire fighter came in, and Ryan was one of them. He thanked him for all he has done for the Fire Department, the County, all of the committees he has been on and everything he has done. Thank you, Ryan.

Citizen Carolyn Benum thanked Commissioner Gustafson for what he said because she didn't feel Chief Baskett was thanked in a very good way.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board, the Special Board Meeting of March 29, 2017, was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Gerald W. Gustafson, Commissioner

Anthony D. Judd, District Secretary

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