

# Clackamas Fire District #1



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS' WORK SESSION MINUTES June 7, 2022

### ATTENDANCE

Board of Directors: Jay Cross, Chris Hawes, Thomas Joseph, Jim Syring, and Marilyn Wall

Others present: Nick Browne, Michael Carlsen, Denny Dahlgren, Steve Deters, Mark Gayman, Heather Goodrich, Tracey Grisham, Izak Hamilton, Oscar Hicks, Rick Huffman, Ryan Kragero, Dan Mulick, Ariel Roberts, Josh Sanchez, Jonathan Scheirman, Brian Stewart, Deidre Toczyski, Stephanie Walker, Mark Whitaker, Doug Whiteley, Jared Wick, Michael Wong, Stations 5, 11, 16 – Clackamas Fire; Andrew Gordian – Local 1159; Jason McKinnon and Phil Schneider – Sandy Fire; and Chris Edmonds – Coastline Public Relations.

### **I. CALL TO ORDER PER ORS 192.610 TO 192.690 ORS 192.650 – The meeting is being recorded.**

President Joseph called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm.

### **II. PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

### **III. FUTURE FUNDING PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION – Fire Chief Browne, Director Hawes, Assistant Chief Deters, Division Chief Mulick, Local 1159 Shop Steward Gordian, and Chris Edmonds (Coastline Public Relations)**

Chief Browne explained that the Future Funding Taskforce comprised of himself, Assistant Chief (AC) Steve Deters, Director Chris Hawes, and Shop Steward Andrew Gordian. They also had meetings with Deputy Chief (DC) Dan Mulick, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Mark Whitaker, and Chris Edmonds with Coastline Public Relations.

Chief Browne explained that CFD has had to make cuts in the organization which meant they had to decrease the internal and external services they provide. They had to make a lot of difficult decisions so that they could work within their means. CFD is going to need investors so that they can provide the level of service that the taxpayer expects.

AC Deters thanked the taskforce for all their hard work. He explained that they were focused on finding solutions. They discussed staffing the unstaffed stations, modernizing EMS, and increasing staffing, as well as other updates and improvements. He shared that Stations 12 and

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13 have been empty for a long time. The volunteers do a great job at these stations, but they remain difficult to staff.

AC Deters reiterated that CFD has had to make cuts. The Board has asked to see a plan to build back. Building back staffing is going to take time, and likely more time than customers are expecting, especially with increasing service demands.

Director Hawes explained that before they could look to the future, they had to figure out where CFD was at. Unfortunately, the District is in a tough spot. It would take time to build back. The District's reserves could also be depleted if another major incident hits like the 2020 wildfires. CFD is facing an uncertain financial future.

Director Hawes said that the taskforce looked at possible revenue streams, including a possible levy. With a levy, CFD could benefit every area in the District. They could make updates, upgrade staffing, and staff the empty stations. It would also allow the District to build capital reserves. The District needs to get on a regular purchasing rotation for replacement equipment or at some point in the future, there will be a need for another bond. This proposed levy could be used as an operational bond to fund operations and then some of the general fund could be diverted to help build the capital stream. CFO Whitaker forecasts that this could mean \$15-20 million that could be generated for the Capital Fund.

Director Hawes said they also considered what would happen if CFD did nothing. They could build back slowly as long as nothing bad happens. In 10-12 years, they would still have very little to no reserves for capital replacement. He compared it to treading water.

Director Hawes felt that the group has come up with a responsible, practical solution. He commended the group on their collaboration.

Chief Browne said that, to his knowledge, CFD hasn't had a work group that has comprised of the Board of Directors, the Local 1159, and CFD Admin. It was amazing teamwork. They determined the three focuses pretty quickly: increasing staffing, staffing the unmanned stations, and modernizing EMS. He turned over the presentation to DC Dan Mulick to dive further into those focuses.

DC Mulick said they want to improve the wall-to-wall coverage within CFD. In order to achieve this, several major components have to be met. First, they need to meet industry standards on staffing, which means four-person staffing on rigs. They recently had to move five stations from four- to three-person companies. With the possible levy, they would increase 10-12 companies to

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four-person staffing. This would greatly increase CFD's flexibility to deploy. With the increased number of firefighters, it would take less rigs to fill the basic requirements needed for an effective response force. This keeps other available rigs in their quarters and ready to respond to other incidents.

Another component of increased staffing would include staffing Station 12 (Logan) and Station 13 (Clarkes). These stations are located in CFD's most difficult to reach areas. They are looking at getting ALS coverage 24/7 in these areas.

DC Mulick continued saying that CFD needs to adapt to the ever-changing EMS system. They need to keep heavy assets available in quarters for critical calls such as fires and advanced medical calls. They have been looking at going to a lighter model in the EMS system. A car program or rescue vehicle with a two-person company could have 2500-2800 calls per year.

He shared that they are looking at a levy of \$.45 - \$.52 which would cover 58-66 full-time positions. He reiterated that in order for CFD to ensure service delivery wall-to-wall, it needs to meet staffing industry standards, to have flexibility with response models, to keep heavy assets available, and to supply staffing to CFD's rural areas.

Local 1159 Shop Steward Gordian shared that he also valued the collaboration and looks forward to continuing to work together. He highlighted that even though they will be focused on levies, the taskforce will continue to look into other sources of funding such as grants and other programs.

Chris Edmonds of Coastline Public Relations said this group was great to work with. They clearly identified some needs and proposed a solution. He is at this meeting to explain how that solution could be implemented. He shared some of his background which included involvement in Oregon politics for close to twenty years working with senators, congressmen, boards, and committees. Coastline's specialty is working with local governments pertaining to bonds and levies. He has prepared a report for CFD.

He explained that unlike other peer agencies, CFD does not have dedicated funding via an enhanced levy. He felt that CFD had three factors working against it. One is a lower assessed tax value than the comparable neighboring districts. Another is compression issues due to urban renewal. Lastly, not having an enhanced levy. He recognizes that CFD's budget is a barrier to best-practice, four-person staffing and 24/7 coverage at rural stations. Chris said that there is an opportunity to seek voter-approved funding in May of 2023.

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Chris explained that research shows that there are five rules for successfully passing revenue measures: 1) Demonstrate sufficient need, 2) Voters perceive a direct benefit, 3) Spending on essential needs, 4) Trust: strong track record and community involvement, and 5) Levy is affordable for voters. He felt it was important that CFD communicate why the budgetary challenges occurred and how an operational levy would allow them to avoid issues in the future.

He then presented on the operational needs that the taskforce covered earlier. They estimate that to cover those needs, it would take 58-66 full-time employees with a total annual cost of \$13-\$14.5 million. The required enhanced levy to fund these services is approximately \$0.45 - \$0.52 per thousand of assessed value (AV). For example, a property of assessed value of \$266,018 (District-wide median) would be approximately \$119-138.

Director Wall brought up that this is an 18.6-21.5% increase in taxes. This is a big increase.

Chris said that comparable to the rest of the Portland region, taxes are lower for a majority of the District, especially in unincorporated areas. Discussion followed regarding assessed versus market value and what these rates could mean in CFD's region in comparison to other regions/districts.

President Joseph commented that this will not be a soft sell; it will affect everybody. The District is going to need something out of the ordinary (levy) so they can deliver the service level needed.

Director Syring said he's been consulting on a project in Vermont. In that state, the jurisdiction figures out what their need is, they present a budget, and the citizens vote on it. The tax rate goes up and down every year based on need. He said that Clackamas County's tax rate used to fluctuate prior to Measure 5. They used to have the ability to ask for what they needed and had more flexibility. There was a 6% increase built in instead of a 3%.

Director Syring also brought up Crew 30 and wondered if this program continuing was contingent on this proposed levy. There has been tremendous public support for this program.

Chief Browne said the focus of this levy would strictly be for the previously mentioned focuses. The levy would provide the opportunity to support Crew 30 through the capital fund. However, the goal is to have Crew 30 be a self-funded program and Battalion Chief (BC) Brent Olson has been focused on that goal. The capital fund may help bridge the gap during any off years so that the program could continue.

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Continuing with this presentation, Chris said that his group is not telling the District what to do, and the needs and recommendations were put together by the taskforce. Coastline Public Relations are consultants that look at how the public will react. Would a request like CFD is proposing line up with the expectations and values of this community?

He presented some information on comparable districts. Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVFR) is \$0.45/\$1000 with \$1.52 permanent base. Canby Fire is \$0.45/\$1000 with \$1.55 permanent base. Marion County District 1 is \$0.59/\$1000 with \$1.90 permanent base. Chris said the primary comparable district is Marion County.

Chris then presented on the levy development process. It consists of determining operational needs/priorities, developing community engagement, the community engagement process, polling to test ballot title and confirm support, and creating the measure title, explanatory statement and referral. They encourage all their clients to do exhaustive public engagement before anything is put out to the voters. After they have received qualitative data and conducted polling to confirm support, they would then create voter pamphlets and statements and launch a broad-based communications effort.

Coastline's recommendation is to focus this levy on the basics. The District has some basic needs with staffing and meeting national best practices that most people would support. National studies show that having fully staffed crews leads to better outcomes, improved safety community-wide, and earlier responses times. He recommends that CFD build the levy around staff positions and fund other operational priorities through budgeted funds. They need to also ensure that levy rates do not exceed what is considered a minimal, affordable expense by average voters.

In order to get the public involved, Chris recommended doing open houses, qualitative online surveys, ad-hoc presentations, and Zoom presentations. One of the points that helps CFD is that firefighters are popular and no other groups poll higher than fire and emergency response. Many people feel that fire and emergency services are an absolute essential. He encouraged public engagement and inviting citizens into the fire station to see where their tax dollars go.

Chris shared a slide showing a suggested timeline for this levy's development. He explained that prior to a measure's referral, staff are allowed to be persuasive. That is the time to meet with groups and explain the needs of the District. After a measure has been formally referred to the county elections department, then communications must be reviewed and deemed neutral.

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Chief Browne thanked Chris for his presentation, the taskforce for all their hard work, and President Thomas for his support in creating the taskforce. He feels that CFD is at a crossroads. The District can stay where it's at and stay afloat, or they can become who they were meant to be as an organization. They will be able to provide the level of service that the citizens have come to expect and in a way that's safe for the crews. He fully supports and believes in the direction that the taskforce is proposing. They are seeking consensus from the Board to pursue a formal levy process that will include community engagement, public involvement, test and measure, and an ask to confirm the request. After they get that data, they would then ask the Board to refer the levy to the voters.

Director Cross asked Chris about funding personnel with the levy. Some consider that not wise because if the levy didn't pass in five years, that would mean dramatic steps backwards and loss of staff. He supports the levy, but this greatly concerns him.

Chris responded that if they look at the performance rate of fire agency levy renewals across the state of Oregon, it's quite high. The argument could work both ways; it's not just the fire agency that would lose personnel, the community would too. Typically, he sees fire levy renewals passing in the 70 to mid-80s range. They are some of the strongest performing ballot measures they'll find. On the rare occasion that a levy doesn't pass, districts normally have a chance to engage the community and bring up the ballot measure again before it has any budgetary impacts.

Director Cross appreciated all the data he's been shown and thinks that data needs to be in the messaging to the public.

Director Hawes explained that he's fiscally conservative and doesn't like asking for more money. He would ask his fellow Board members, if not this, then what? The other choice would be to go with the status quo and hope for the best. He does not see another alternative. His priorities are to first do what's best for the community, and secondly what's best for the organization.

Director Syring said he agreed with Chris. Although they just went through a tough budget process and are currently balanced, the District is not saving any funds for the future. There are still two stations that are unstaffed. These rural areas need to be served. The District is okay, but they have the ability to move forward. He trusts Director Hawes, the staff, the taskforce, and the consultant. They did a great job showing the need. He understands that there is still a range being discussed with the levy. He advised not to go forward with the lower possibility; it needs to be what is needed. In the past, they didn't ask for enough in bonds and they ran out of money. He

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checked on the recent elections in May, every fire department in the state passed what they were seeking.

Director Wall believes that the District needs to do something. She isn't sure if the numbers and needs they've shown are correct. They are confusing equity with equality. Equality is everybody needs to have the same, regardless of what they need. Equity is giving what they need. Every station has different needs. Does every station need to be staffed 24/7 with four people? Chief Browne noted that they do want to staff Station 12 and 13 24/7, but they haven't said it has to be four personnel. Director Wall respects Director Hawes and the taskforce and all the work they've done. She would be in favor of moving this forward to the next step, but she would like to see the numbers refined. She will be interested to see if the public is in favor of it. She has serious concerns over raising the taxes that go to the Fire District 18-20%.

Chief Browne explained that much of the data they have provided so far, has been at a higher level for the sake of this meeting. This recommendation was brought forward based on data and response needs. All the concerns that the board members brought up, have also been discussed by the taskforce. There is risk and fear connected to having personnel on a levy, especially when they project out how many people will also be retiring. They understand the potential hardship that this could be on investors. This levy is going to be a bridge so that CFD can deliver the level of service expected, until the AV improves.

Director Cross said that Chief Browne has shown him a great level of data backing up the needs that they are attempting to fill. There is ample, objective data available to support this ask.

Shop Steward Gordian that they stand for the safety that this levy will bring. They will be 100% collaborative on this endeavor, and they will put their full strength behind the ballot measure. Their members are fully behind this. If this collaboration continues, it will only further strengthen the relationship between the District and the Local.

President Joseph shared that this Board has a goal of inclusivity and he's proud of the collaboration that they've had with the Local 1159. The Board is not afraid to be transparent. He was impressed with the taskforce they formed. When he first came on the Board and wanted to speak with the Local, some had told him that they couldn't talk to him because he was on the Board. They have gone from that situation and progressed to working together on a taskforce and having a representative from the Local at the Board meetings.

Director Syring said that Station 12 used to be a District 54 station and Station 13 was a Clarkes Fire District station. Pre-mergers, these stations were fully staffed with career personnel. During

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the Estacada merger election, CFD was heavily criticized for merging and then not career staffing those stations.

Director Hawes commended Shop Steward Gordian on his work in this taskforce with his superiors.

Chief Browne explained that he doesn't need a vote, but a verbal consensus to move forward with the levy process. President Joseph said, from what he heard, Chief Browne has the support from all five board members.

Director Syring agreed with Director Wall and is looking forward to seeing more data and details behind the request.

CFO Whitaker said that a lot of his analysis and data were in the presentation. He agreed with Director Syring in that they shouldn't under-ask for the levy so that they don't run out of money for what they need.

AC Deters said that part of leadership is taking people places that they don't want to go. They've been able to avoid this position for many years, but now they are in it. He agrees with the Board members comments and concerns. He knows that they have the data to address some of their concerns and that will be shared in the near future.

Director Cross said that as they move forward, they all need to make sure they have the same message.

Chief Browne agreed and that part of the plan is creating that message.

AC Stewart agreed with the beginning sentiments of in order to know where you are going, you need to know where you are at. This also means an understanding of who they are and how they've gotten to where they are. They've grown from many smaller organizations to a larger entity. There is a lot of complexity from where they've been, and they need to be able to boil that down to a conversation that's consistent whether it's with a board member, staff member, or a member of the Local 1159.

## **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:46 pm.



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Minutes recorded by Executive Assistant Ariel Roberts and prepared by Administrative Technician Jessamyn Ode.

*thomasjoseph*

[thomasjoseph \(Jul 20, 2022 08:08 PDT\)](#)

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**President Thomas Joseph**

*James E Syring*

[James E Syring \(Jul 20, 2022 08:12 PDT\)](#)

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**Secretary James Syring**

# 6-7-2022 Work Session Minutes Final

Final Audit Report

2022-07-20

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