

OLYMPIA TUMWATER REGIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEE
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CONVENE: 5:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair/City of Tumwater Councilmember Leatta Dahlhoff, Vice Chair/Olympia Councilmember Yén Huỳnh, Tumwater Councilmember Michael Althaus, Olympia Councilmember Lisa Parshley, Tumwater Councilmember Eileen Swarthout, Olympia Fire Union Representative Firefighters Steven Busz, Tumwater Fire Union Representative Firefighter James Osberg, Tumwater Fire Chief Brian Hurley, and Olympia Fire Chief Mark John.

Excused: Olympia Councilmember Jim Cooper

Staff: Tumwater City Administrator John Doan and Olympia City Manager Jay Burney.

Others: Karen Reed, RFA Consultant; Karen Meyer, The Athena Group, Faith Trimble, The Athena Group; and Bill Cushman, Fiscal Analyst.

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Dahlhoff welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members provided self-introduction and shared information about the first concert they attended.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

OVERVIEW OF THE RFA PLANNING COMMITTEE'S WORK AHEAD: PLANNING PROCESS AND TIMELINE Ms. Reed reviewed a draft of the committee's Mission Statement derived from the statute, major project components (7-year Financial Plan, RFA Plan, City Council support and engagement, and public education and input), a synopsis of the planning process, and election options and timeline.

Ms. Reed outlined specific deadlines for an April 2023 election, projected staffing needs, operating cash needs, and components of the RFA Plan:

- Background and Needs Statement
 - *General statement of anticipated need for and benefits of the RFA*
 - *May include vision statement or other more tailored content*
- Definitions
 - *What is the name of the RFA?*
- Formation Authority
 - *Statutory Citations, summary of process for approving plan*
- Jurisdictional Boundaries

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- Funding and Finance
 - *Effective date – when is RFA created?*
 - *When taxes will begin, what will be the initial levy rates*
 - *Revenues transferred to the RFA from the Cities*
 - *What taxes and financial tools the RFA will be authorized to impose (whether or not they are used initially)*
 - *Assets transferred by the Cities to the RFA, general terms for transfer*
 - *Reserve funds to be established*
 - *Liabilities retained by Cities, RFA*
- Governance
 - Governing Board*
 - *Initial Board must be composed of city elected officials. This can transition to a different board structure after the next general election*
 - *How many members from each City?*
 - *Plans typically identify the initial “transition” board, and the proposed longer-term board structure*
 - *How many seats*
 - *How selected*
 - *Districted or not?*
 - *Initial terms for each board seat (must be staggered, no term longer than 6 years)*
 - *May identify maximum number of seats*
 - *May want to anticipate how additional RFA jurisdictions would be added to the board*
 - *Plans typically allow the Board to change its structure*
- Organizational Structure – Personnel and Administration
 - *Organizational Chart*
 - *Designation of Fire Chief for the RFA*
 - *Confirmation of transfer of all personnel at their current rank, grade, and seniority*
 - *CBAs transfer as well*
 - *Administrative policies and procedures*
 - *Retained city responsibilities/rights (LEOFF)*
- Operations and Services
 - *Operations practices, service level confirmed – typically maintain current operational practices/service levels of each agency initially*
 - *Fire Marshal services*
 - *Emergency Management Services*
 - *Public Education Services*
- Appendices with organizational chart, maps, property lists,

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assets lists

- May include sections on Fire Marshal services, Emergency Management

The RFP Plan can be amended at any time by the RFA Board of Commissioners unless limitations are included in the RFA Plan. City Council support and engagement throughout the iterative process includes advancing recommendations by the Committee on specific issues, such as governance and finance. Charter includes terms for processing disputes, providing notice of impasse.

State law requires the Committee to “create opportunities for public input in the development of the plan.” Planning Committee to confirm the design, timing of the input, which should occur before the plan is submitted – and before the Plan is firmed up. If the Plan is adopted, the Committee may or may not choose to have a role in development of the public education campaign for the RFA ballot measure.

Some keys to success include:

- Understanding timeline
- Building a strong internal team to do the work required – fire, finance, HR, & legal
- Engaging with Labor throughout – support is key:
 - At each Planning Committee meeting, provide opportunities to comment
 - Engaged at staff team level as appropriate
- Engage legal counsel early and often
- Engage city councils early and often
- Goal: build a strong agency that can serve both communities very well, efficiently, effectively over time
- Willingness to compromise
- Remain flexible as there are many options
- Consider communication process to the communities on status and progress and the benefits /impacts of an RFA

Voter approval of an RFA requires a majority vote plus 1 of both jurisdictions if financing is a property tax levy. If the financing package includes a fire benefit charge, approval by voters requires a 60% approval to create the RFA. Most RFAs created in the state to date have included a fire benefit charge, especially in highly urbanized areas. All publicly owned government facilities, religious institutions and schools, as well as low-income housing are exempt from paying a fire benefit charge. The initial fire benefit charge sunsets after six years requiring another vote either to extend the charge for a specific period or to enact a permanent fire benefit charge. A fire benefit charge is not a property tax but is a fee based on square footage of a

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building (as well as the ability to impose other fees based on the perceived hazards a building poses to fire response teams).

Ms. Reed presented and described elements of a sample RFA Planning Committee Work Plan. She presented an outline of the Committee's Work Plan with proposed agenda topics with four updates scheduled with each Council over the next eight months and two sessions of public outreach. The consultant team offered to provide a binder to members containing committee documents and examples of documents from other RFAs in the state.

Ms. Reed presented a draft of the Planning Committee's Charter/Operating Rules for discussion containing sections on mission/goals, membership (voting/ex officio), committee process, prompt notice of impasse or desire to terminate process, public input, public communications goals, Chair and Vice Chair of Planning Committee, resignation and appointment of replacement members, Planning Committee meetings, decision making, staff support for committee, funding, and approval and amendment of the charter.

A majority of members supported scheduling two meetings each month from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. with members to be queried on preferred meeting day. An updated charter with recommended changes by members will be forwarded to members prior to the next meeting.

Ms. Meyer reviewed a proposed one-page Draft Communication Plan outlining dates and objectives for Phase 1 of the project:

- Key Messages – January – June 2022
- Audiences – Primary & Secondary
- Strategy
- Tactics

Based on comments surrounding recent news articles about the purpose of the committee and reasons for the two cities considering fire regionalization. Ms. Reed suggested the Fire Chiefs and each City Administrator meet and discuss internal and external statements/websites describing the process and purpose.

The draft Communications Plan will be updated based on feedback and forwarded to members prior to the next meeting.

**WHERE ARE WE
GOING?**

COMPARABLES AD HOC Firefighter Busz shared a spreadsheet of comparables. Previous

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SUB-COMMITTEE - STEVEN BUSZ, JAMES OSBERG:

contract negotiations have included 50% above the population in assessed valuation and 50% below the population in assessed valuation to determine a pool of comparables that are used during labor negotiations. Most other similarly size fire districts in the region have similar salaries and benefits. Valley Regional Fire Authority in Auburn, Marysville Regional Fire Authority, Lacey Fire District 3, Bothell as part of Snohomish County Fire District 10, Burien as part of King County Fire District 2, Shoreline King County Fire District 4, and West Pierce (Lakewood & University Place) were used for comparables for population and assessed valuation. He added that the comparables have been used by the Olympia Fire Department for the last four contract negotiations and are based on an 11-year employee.

CAPITAL ASSETS AD HOC SUB-COMMITTEE - BRIAN HURLEY, MARK JOHN:

Fire Chief John updated members on the task to provide financial data. The Olympia Fire Department staffing model includes funding for 105 positions with 102 positions filled. The operating budget is approximately \$18 million for 2022 with expenditures offset with approximately \$6 million in revenue from several different sources to include Thurston County Medic One. The department has 42 pieces of equipment of which 13 are suppression apparatus, 20 light vehicles for staff, fire prevention, and other services, 3 support vehicles, and 5 trailers. Facilities include four fire stations, one training center, and a vehicle repair facility (in cooperation with the Lacey Fire District).

Fire Chief Hurley reported the Tumwater Fire Department has 47 FTEs, an \$8 million annual budget, two fire stations, 13 vehicles (4 pumpers), and is also supported by a contract with Thurston County Medic One.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS UPDATE – BILL CUSHMAN, FISCAL ANALYSIS:

Mr. Cushman reported on progress with most of the information identified to date acquired and entered into the model.

RECAP OF ACTION AND PENDING ITEMS:

- City Administrator Doan and City Manager Burney to discuss internal and external websites, press releases, and the work plan
- Internal discussion with city attorneys for legal assistance
- Follow-up with Thurston County Assessor's Office on fire benefit charge
- Finalize purpose statement
- Define main update points for reports to councils
- Provide examples of RFA documents from Ms. Reed
- Survey members wishing to receive a binder
- Survey members on preference for second and fourth Monday meetings

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- Ms. Reed to provide new draft charter
- Ms. Meyer to forward a revised Communication Plan
- Firefighter Busz to forward comparables spreadsheet to Mr. Cushman as well as to City Administrator Doan and City Manager Burney for review by each City's HR

NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled on Monday, March 28, 2022.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Chair Dahlhoff adjourned the meeting at 7:34 p.m.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Puget Sound Meeting Services, psmsoly@earthlink.net