

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, Olympia Councilmember Jim Cooper, Tumwater Councilmember Eileen Swarthout, Fire Union Representative/Firefighter Steven Busz, Tumwater Fire Union Representative/Paramedic Lieutenant James Osberg, Tumwater Fire Chief Brian Hurley, and Olympia Fire Chief Mark John.

Excused: Tumwater Councilmember Michael Althausen and Olympia Councilmember Lisa Parshley.

Staff: Tumwater City Administrator John Doan, Olympia City Manager Jay Burney, Olympia Interim Fire Chief Todd Carson, and Tumwater Fire Department Administrative Assistant Erika Stone.

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

**WELCOME &
AGENDA:**

Chair Dahlhoff welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Karen Meyer reviewed the agenda.

At the request of Councilmember Cooper, Ms. Reed updated members on the status of the financial model. Some data points are pending prior to presenting the model to the committee. The model is intended to reflect how to maintain service levels over seven years and will include service enhancements. The model also includes an assumption of a fire levy of either \$1 or \$1.50 and a fire benefit charge and the amount needed. The first review of the financial model is scheduled at the committee's June 13, 2022 meeting.

Mr. Cushman reported on a pending meeting to complete the apparatus replacement and acquisition schedule, which is the remaining piece of the current budget. Information is pending on the CARES and BLS Transport programs for staffing and equipment necessary to provide the services. Following receipt of the information, the model will be presented to the committee.

Discussion ensued on the inherent conflicts between the committee's timeline and each city's financial implications for formation of the RFA to ensure each council is capable of making an informed recommendation. Ms. Reed noted that the next scheduled update to the councils is at the end of June following the committee's initial review of the financial model to track with the October timeline.

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Ms. Reed recapped the results of the first public meeting. Many people participated and offered questions and comments. The virtual meeting was recorded and is available online. Feedback from members included:

- Structure was appropriate with all panelists and speakers well prepared. Both cities participated to include fire department staff representing both cities. The panel comprised of fire chiefs and firefighters was appropriate.
- Panelists and staff were well prepared and were able to answer questions. The talking points on the schedule deserves more attention as it often conveyed that the committee is moving briskly and it is important not to convey to the community that the process is proceeding too quickly. It is important to communicate how the committee is moving forward in an informed manner with all information considered.

The next public open house is scheduled in August.

Ms. Meyer queried City Administrator Doan and City Manager Burney for the date of the June presentation to the councils. City Manager Burney advised that they would coordinate dates with each council.

GOVERNANCE:

Ms. Reed explained that the goal of the discussion is to identify three to four viable governance models to share with each city council. During the discussion she reviewed the parameters for establishing districts and an at-large district. All voters of an at-large district encompassing the boundaries of Tumwater and Olympia can vote in the primary and general elections. Districts must be equal in population and can number more than two; however voters in each district can only vote in the primary for that district and all voters of each district can vote in the general election.

Ms. Reed shared the updated governance template based on the discussion from the May 9, 2022 meeting:

- **Option 1:** 5 member board, 1 appointed by Olympia, 1 appointed by Tumwater, 3 elected by district
- **Option 2:** 6 member board, 3 appointed by Olympia, 3 appointed by Tumwater
- **Option 3:** 7 member board, 2 appointed by Olympia, 2 appointed by Tumwater, 3 directly elected – at large
- **Option 4:** 7 member board, 1 appointed by Olympia, 1 appointed by Tumwater, 5 directly elected – at large
- **Option 5:** 7 member board, 1 elected by Olympia, 1 elected by Tumwater, 5 directly elected – by district

Members offered the following feedback:

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- The board should be a seven-member board with one elected official appointed from Olympia and Tumwater with options to consider at-large members or district members. Another option is two appointed elected officials from each city with either at-large or district members.
- Prefer an option that includes two elected commissioners representing each city and one commissioner elected at-large. Ms. Reed noted that each district must have the same population. It is not possible to elect just one districted commissioner from each city. Based on that limitation, the preference is a seven-member board with two elected officials from each city and three commissioners elected by the districts.
- Members present supported a seven-member board.
- Several members preferred an at-large model rather than districting to increase opportunities to connect with different voices and to ensure equity.
- A three-district option might be more difficult rather than one large district.
- Consider an option of two districts (Tumwater and Olympia) and one at-large district.
- More information is needed on districting.
- Prefer option 3 as it is important to serve the entire RFA and not just any particular jurisdiction. Understand the desire to include councilmembers but prefer the at-large model as it enables a larger pool of candidates rather than forming separate districts
- Can support options 3 or 6 depending upon the most balanced approach. Including members at-large provides a tremendous amount of value.
- Prefer option 4 as both councils are extremely busy and city workload might be too much for governing the RFA.
- Support option 4 but prefer an at-large option rather than districting and it enables each city to be represented on the board.
- Prefer option 4 with a secondary choice of option 3. Not necessarily opposed to districting but believe the at-large is the better option.
- Councilmember Huynh shared Councilmember Parshley's preference of either option 3 or option 4.
- Chair Dahlhoff shared Councilmember Althausen's preference of an uneven number of seats and an at-large district (options 3 or 4)
- The committee should address the issue of majority of councilmembers or majority of commissioners. Ms. Reed offered that the pros and cons can be shared with the councils to receive feedback.
- Support option 4 as it mimics the Thurston County 911

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Administration Board.

- Given the enormous workload of each council, reducing the number of appointed positions is preferable. Given that fire districts or RFAs must continuously seek voter approval on a regular basis, it is important for the RFA to maintain a good relation with its base. It is important for the RFA Board to view beyond the boundaries of both cities and represent the entire community otherwise it will be difficult to pass measures.
- Agree with council's workloads but difficult to know the extent of the workload as a member of the RFA board. Considering those issues, prefer option 4 or even option 3. Share concerns that districting is difficult and might result in more representation from Olympia than Tumwater.
- In response to comments on commitment of time by elected officials, Ms. Reed offered to follow-up with other RFAs on the typical time commitment.

Ms. Reed summarized the committee's feedback as a preference of either option 3 or 4 understanding that the initial board would be option 2 transitioning over time to the recommended option. She will update the governance template for review at the next meeting to determine the final version for presentation to the councils in June.

Councilmember Cooper inquired about situations where councilmember assignments might change or a councilmember is not reelected. Ms. Reed explained that language could be included in the RFA addressing those types of circumstances.

Another consideration for governance is the number of votes afforded to each position. Staggering of terms is another topic of discussion by the committee. Options include 2, 4, or 6-year terms. Ms. Reed described some different iterations and the transition pattern of different terms. The RFA Plan will need to identify the initial positions and how they transition to the preferred longer-term governance model.

The committee discussed an option of scheduling a joint council meeting to review governance options and the finance model. City Administrator Doan and City Manager Burney agreed to meet to schedule a joint worksession of 1.5 hours with 45 minutes dedicated to the financial model and 45 minutes dedicated to governance options.

ADJOURNMENT: **With there being no further business, Chair Dahlhoff adjourned the meeting at 6:41 p.m.**