

Fire District 3

“more than fire...”

MINUTES

**Joint Board of Fire Commissioners Meeting of
Clark County Fire District 6, Clark County Fire District 3, and Clark-Cowlitz Fire Rescue
Station 151, 6:00 p.m. November 8, 2023**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Commissioner Chunn.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Chunn.

Attending is:

CCFD6: Commissioners Pfeifer and Lothspeich.

CCFD3: Commissioners Thornbury, Couture and Steele.

CCFR Commissioners Ayers, Bartel, Bourke, Chunn and Town.

Chief Nohr began by stating the current ambulance contract with EMS District 2 is coming up for renewal in January 2025. The contract is currently piggybacked on the city of Vancouver contract.

Division Chief Ben Peeler stated he has a good understanding of the contract and has put some information together for the Boards. He said some questions cannot be answered today as they remain secret due to the upcoming RFP process.

Vancouver collects extensive data on the AMR operations.

2024 is the last year of the contract, which is in the last year of a five-year extension.

He said he thinks everyone would agree the current system is not optimal. The citizens and the crews are under served, the response times are too long and there are too many level zeros. He went on to state they are being told by the consultant that even if the new contract were the same as it is now, it would require a substantial government subsidy to continue. When asked what substantial is, he said they are not allowed to talk about it.

Chief Nohr stated EMS District 2 is comprised of unincorporated Clark County and the cities of Battle Ground, Ridgefield, La Center and Woodland. The fire districts are not part of EMS District 2. The cities and Clark County are. We are the only first responders serving the area. As fire districts, we do not have the ability to change anything in EMS District 2.

Chief Peeler went on to discuss the RFP process, which is conducted by the city of Vancouver.

Currently, AMR averages about \$500 per transport.

Methods of subsidizing the ambulance were discussed. One method of a non-cash subsidy is to reduce response times, however that results in fire agencies subsidizing the system as we would be on the scene longer and less available for other emergencies.

Chief Maurer pointed out one key player is not present – Clark County Fire District 5.

Chief Peeler said since District 5 is served by Vancouver, it is not considered part of EMS District 2.

The three fire districts comprise about 33% of the EMS calls in the county. Eight percent for CCFR, 8% for Fire District 3 and 17% for Fire District 6.

AMR has been funding the Nurse Navigation Program which has resulted in fewer calls and transports.

A lot of agencies are hiring now which impacts AMR as they lose paramedics.

Chief Maurer stated even though we do not have ambulances or ambulance licenses at District 6, and at District 3, according to the Department of Health, any of us can transport in an emergency, such as Level Zero or long response time. We cannot, however, bill for that service as CCFR can. Because the current contract has exclusivity and AMR is the only transport agency allowed in the County, none of us could transport. That is the part of the contract we are looking at to make changes.

Commissioner Chunn stated he has a hard time when we have apparatus and the trained personnel and the equipment to transport someone and we are handicapped by this contract to not do it. A change he would like to see in the next contract is at least some terms and conditions when we can do this to the public's betterment.

Chief Peeler stated CCFR will be staffing an ambulance the first quarter of next year staffed with two and will operate like other districts squads.

Chief Nohr clarified by stating it may be called a rescue or a squad, but it is not an ambulance. Ambulances take people to the hospital and ambulance transports are done by American Medical Response (AMR). We are going to put a unit in service that is transport capable, but until we figure some of this stuff out, it is not an ambulance.

Chief peeler stated AMR has a mutual aid agreement with Camas and North Country EMS, so in 2024 we would like to see AMR have a mutual aid agreement with Clark-Cowlitz Fire Rescue. He said we want to be able to transport in Level Zero situations. Right now, because of the contract, we can't.

Chief Sorenson stated a good solution would be for all agencies to have a transport license and approach it from that angle. Because just one fire agency having one is not going to do what we need.

Chief Maurer stated it was a good point and stated what one District does could negatively affect the other two. She went on to say a consideration for the Boards is whose responsibility is this subsidy. Is it the County, EMS District 2 or is it the fire service? We are public service entities and we collect taxes. It does not seem right to use the tax dollars to subsidize a private agency.

Commissioner Steele stated it sounds like Vancouver is open for us to be involved in this. Having a seat at the table and being part of fixing the overall system is needed.

Chief Nohr feels it is important to have a meeting with one or more of the County Counselors to explain the situation. They need to understand what their role is and our concerns.

Chief Peeler stated in Clark County year to date, there have been 414 occurrences of Level Zero.

There was discussion of trying to get fire representation on the EMS District 2 Board.

There was discussion of the geofence in CAD which creates artificial borders past which Camas Ambulance and North Country EMS will not cross. Therefore, neither agency will respond to CCFD6 if AMR is at Level Zero.

Commissioner Chunn recommends each Board appoint a Commissioner to serve on a committee to keep abreast of this process as it proceeds.

Chief Nohr suggests the Chiefs reach out to Counselor Marshall to start the conversation with her.

There was discussion of how much voice fire districts should have in the system.

Chief Nohr stated if the Commissioners are good with it, he appreciates the suggestion that we have one elected representative and one Chief from each agency to form a committee to start making the contacts to get a better understanding of where it's going. As we work with Vancouver, we also want to make sure we are working with EMS District 2.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

Fire Commissioner Jon Couture

Fire Commissioner Rick Steele

Fire Commissioner Dean Thornberry

Fire Chief Scott Sorenson