

**MINUTES**  
**SAN JUAN COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT #4**  
**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Special Meeting**  
**June 26, 2024**

Chair Duane Bordvick called the Special Meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners for SJCFD #4 to order at 9:32 A.M. The meeting was held with all participants in-person at the Station 41 Fire Hall and a Zoom meeting was open for public participation but there were none.

Those present were Commissioners Duane Bordvick, Rebecca Smith, and Cathy Doherty; Fire Chief Adam Bigby; Paramedic Caleb Pal; Firefighter/EMT staff David Rucker & Justin Hagge; EMT volunteer Rob Nou; Firefighter volunteer Mariah Honeywell; Logistics volunteer Monte Midkiff; and Secretary Summer Hagge.

Chief Bigby went over the agenda and noted that the meeting is scheduled from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Chief Bigby had provided everyone with a copy of the agenda, pages 1 through 12 of the most recent Washington Survey & Rating Bureau (WSRB) report, and an article, documentation from the Noth Mason Fire Authority, and a flier for their Mobile Integrated Health Program.

The Chief's goals for the meeting were to provide an update on the last three year's strategic planning goals which had focused on facilities and equipment; discuss opportunities for improving the District's fire protection rating based on the results of the 2022 WSRB survey (which is released every 5 years); and then have discussions about staff and volunteer recruitment, retention and staffing models. The Chief presented a power point with detailed slides.

## **HOW ARE WE DOING BASED ON PRIOR STRATEGIC PLANNING GOALS?**

As part of past strategic planning meetings, work groups identified apparatus, equipment, training and personnel priority lists.

### **Apparatus** – Update on prior strategic planning meetings

Of the District's prior goals, Aid 44 was replaced with a new Aid apparatus in 2022 and Medic 48's rig was replaced with a new Chevy Colorado in 2023. The District still has no shared reserve ambulance, and Engine 42 was replaced with a used 1997 Freightliner. The District has submitted an AFG grant to replace Tender 42 which is a used, re-purposed Public Works truck that is not suited for emergency response. Rescue 41 is currently being rebuilt. The Chief detailed the acquisition of the Ford F-600, which will be our mini-pumper, which will go to bid this summer. The District will be adding a 4<sup>th</sup> engine back to the fleet. The District will apply for surplus tender from BLM when available.

Washington Survey and Rating Bureau (WSRB) is a non-profit, non-governmental agency. The Chief provided a refresher about who they are and how they do their ratings. The District's overall rating affects all property owner's insurance rates.

The age of the District's apparatus is considered by WSRB and apparatus older than WSRB's replacement schedule receives deficiency points. The Chief went over WSRB's general replacement schedule for fire and EMS apparatus.

### **Equipment** – Update on last strategic planning meetings

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### EMS

- The District's older Lifepak 15 units were replaced with certified re-conditioned units.
- The District's gurneys are a priority and if a third Aid apparatus is added, another gurney will be needed. The District's current gurneys are aging, and new ones cost about \$20,000.
- The District obtained some transport ventilators, but they broke and were too expensive to fix.
- The EMS Association bought Binder lifts and they have been working well.

### FIRE

- Accomplishments since 2021 include new pumps for Engines 41 and 44, a pump rebuild for Engine 42, and Rescue 41 is due to be delivered this week.
- Bunker Gear has been the District's top priority and as such, one new set has been purchased for each Firefighter. Standard best practice is for each Firefighter to have two sets of bunker gear so that one can be washed meanwhile a second set would still be available. The District's older bunker gear serves as the second set at this point. The plan is to slowly rotate the older ones out and have a rotation schedule to eliminate the need to purchase many sets at one time.
- An Extractor washer has been purchased and is in operation in the bay at Station 41.
- The District only has one good set (electric) of extrication tools and one gas one that is in rough shape. A Firehouse Subs grant application has been submitted for replacement.
- There is a need for newer/better saws for the smaller engines; potentially electric chainsaws.
- Better lighting at scenes – the District has acquired some new scene lighting from IOSA as well as purchased Dewalt tripod lights and Honda Tele-light Generators through the Ecology grant.
- Hose replacement is funded and the District is working on purchasing.

### Training – Update on prior strategic planning meetings

Priorities for training include:

- Firefighter/EMT Justin Hagge will work to use the tracking module in ESO to formally track attendance.
- The Chief contacted Jason Kramer to put together a non-certificate flagger safety class this fall.
- The District's in-house fire academy graduated 7 new firefighters and 2 students in April 2024. These academies are planned for every other year.
- The District has added a 40-foot shipping container and port-a-potty to the county property off Port Stanley Road to use for fire training on the island.
- It has been discussed that firefighters would be able to attend live fire trainings in North Bend twice a year. The Chief asked if anyone present saw value in this, and Firefighter volunteer Mariah Honeywell expressed that there are lots of props and resources available at the North Bend and utilizing it has great potential; but it depends upon what the District brings to it. Commissioner Becky Smith inquired about the Anacortes fire training facility, but the Chief recounted that only 3 specific fire departments are allowed to use the facility at this time.
- No one is sure if the State Mobile Trailer still exists currently.
- There will be an EMT class starting up in November. The District did have one person attend the San Juan EMT class and one person who audited it after doing training in Bellingham.
- The Chief stated that Rescue drills had been longer and meeting more frequently during Fire Academy.

**Facilities** – Update on prior strategic planning meetings.

- A top priority need that arose from our WSRB rating was sprinklers at the stations.
- Some operational facilities needs include more bays and better areas/facilities for decontamination of bunker gear.
- Another concern is the lack of exhaust systems for the buildings to expel the diesel exhaust. One way that the District has found to resolve this issue is adding point-source capture exhaust systems to each rig. This is a filter on the exhaust system that captures particulates for a period after start-up. The new engine will have this system and this system will be added to Tender 41 after some associated repairs are finished.
- The District has been working with TCA Architects, starting with some site visits, and leading to some cost estimates for predesign of all of the District's stations. After the initial estimates came back extremely high (around \$30 million), some major cuts were made, and the focus is only on the most immediate needs.

Station 41:

The priority for the Station 41 remodel is to build a steel structure to add an additional apparatus bay with higher doors for all of the bays. The current estimate for this is about \$6 million. After this is complete, stage 2 will look at remodeling to add living quarters and create a larger training room.

Station 42:

The priority for the Station 42 remodel is to build a steel three bay station with better lighting and higher doors, a bathroom and cleaning facilities. The current estimate for this is about \$3 million. The water issue for this station is still unresolved since the county's well does not produce water, but the current discussion is on running water from Islandale's water system.

Hummel House:

The 2-acre Hummel house property was discussed. This land is village zoned and thereby subdivisible into quarter acre lots but cannot be non-commercially zoned. The current District thought has been to add an ADU to the property, with garage space on the bottom level and housing space (for per diem medics, instructors, etc.) on the top. This can be accomplished relatively quickly and would make up for the delay in remodeling Station 41 to include such living quarters. The current estimates for this have ranged from \$350,000 to just under \$1 million.

Eventual additions to the property may include a training room with apartments above it.

The plan for the house on the property, after the Chief moves out, will be to keep it open for potential backup office space during the station remodel and/or temporary housing.

Some discussion was had on this topic and the idea was brought up to potentially sell Station 43 to help offset the costs of the other station remodels. EMS volunteer Rob Nou proposed the addition of a large training facility to the Hummel property as opposed to the Station 41 remodel. Firefighter volunteer Mariah Honeywell proposed that the upper and lower floors of the existing house on the property could be separated to provide 2 housing options rather than only one. Honeywell also mentioned that it may

be difficult to transport training materials stored at Station 41 to the Hummel property if that housed the training room. Paramedic Caleb Pal reiterated that there is not any pressure or rush to build something on the Hummel property and suggested that it is wise to keep the options open. The year-to-year rental agreement with the Sherriff's office was discussed; Chief is meeting with the County Facilities department in July.

## **REVIEW WASHINGTON SURVEY & RATING BUREAU (WSRB) RATING**

The Chief discussed how he would be going over the District's most recent WSBR Rating report which was provided for this meeting. He noted that on page 7, the gold portion of each line on the *Percent of Credit* table indicated opportunities for the District to improve by getting more credits to obtain a better overall rating in the future. The District's overall score was a 6.1 which rounded up to 7. So, the District is very close to getting a score under 6 which would then be rounded up to a rating of 6.

It was discussed that training is very important and even though the District has been doing the training, it has not been sufficiently documented. The Ambulance Driver program was discussed, which has now been implemented. Also discussed were the agreement the District has for the use a reserve pumper, the number of Firefighters at each station, and the importance of documentation on maintenance. Commissioner Bordvick inquired if this WSRB rating was better than prior years' ratings, to which Chief Bigby replied that there have not been significant increases to our ratings thus far, but the District's goal is to get to a 6.

Logistics have been very helpful on fire calls by bottle filling and hose rolling. However, they are not credited, as they are not firefighters, in this rating.

### **Working Lunch –**

#### *How do we determine success?*

The District can determine its success through various medical and fire outcomes as well as per NFPA response standards & Washington Survey and Ratings bureau requirements.

## **TRAINING AND STAFF STANDARDS**

### **Staffing**

#### *EMS*

The current number of EMS staff and volunteers in the District is 19, which is down from 21 last year. It is agreed on that the department is pretty low on EMTs right now. There is one EMT on leave right now, 2 new EMTs that are still onboarding, no student EMTs for the 2024-2025 school year, 4 lieutenants and two career EMT/Firefighters (compared to 1 last year). The District has implemented the Ambulance Driver Program with 7 drivers, one per 24-hour day of the week.

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### Fire/Recue

The District currently has a total of 29 Firefighters of which 2 are firefighter students, 2 are career EMT/Firefighters, and 4 are lieutenants.

### Logistics

The total number in the Logistics group is 10 which is a good number and works well. Logistics volunteer Monte Midkiff inquired as to whether there could be student Logistics volunteers.

### **Chief's Preferred Staffing –**

The Chief presented a slide listing his preferred staffing positions and counts which included a total of 33 EMS staff and volunteers and 46 Fire/Rescue staff and volunteers (including student firefighters) and no changes to the number of Logistics volunteers.

Commissioner Bordvick inquired as to the shortage between what the District has and its ideal. To this, the District has 14 less EMTs and 27 less Firefighters than desired. Are these numbers possible now? No, but after a couple of academies and classes, this could be achievable.

There was a slide of the District's current organization chart which displays who reports to whom, but it has not been updated with the current staff/volunteer counts or with the Chief's preferred numbers from the prior slide.

### Minimal Staffing Needs Per Call Type

#### Minimum Staffing Needs Per Incident (assumes basic calls) – Per Chief

BLS: 3

ALS: 3

CPR: 9

Car accident: 10

Structure Fire: 16 (for quick knock down) – does not include Logistics, rehab (EMS) or staged resources.

### **RECRUITMENT**

Past recruitment strategies were discussed including the sandwich boards, interest cards, and newsletters. All of these were valuable, but it is difficult to measure the success rate from each avenue. Likely, the most valuable recruitment tool is word of mouth from current volunteers. The District has a table at the Saturday Lopez Farmers Market, this has not been used yet, but staff Firefighter/EMTs Justin Hagge and Dave Rucker plan to man the table along with a volunteer after they start alternating Saturday schedules in July.

The Chief asked if there are any other ideas on recruitment. Commissioner Doherty mentioned the Open House on July 11<sup>th</sup> would be a good place for this. Logistics volunteer Monte Midkiff suggested that there should be information available on First Aid and CPR classes at the Open House. Firefighter/EMT

Justin Hagge mentioned that these classes are a good opportunity to recruit, and Secretary Summer Hagge suggested sending a follow-up email to the class participants to share about volunteering.

## **INITIAL TRAINING**

The current training model was discussed including initial and ongoing training as well as both on-island props and off-island resources. The Chief inquired whether there is anything else the District can be doing. Paramedic Caleb Pal suggested a focus on larger class sizes for EMT class. The Chief reiterated the proposed Spring and Fall annual trips to North Bend live fire exercises. Logistics volunteer Monte Midkiff asked if there are good alternatives for potential volunteers for attending the fire academy or EMT class that the District teaches. The lack of camaraderie as well as additional supplemental training required were brought up as deterrents for relying upon outside academies and classes. The shift in demographics of the island was discussed, as it has and will continue to lead to less volunteering.

## **RETENTION**

The District has been providing \$30 credits for both drills and calls, air ambulance membership, and 100% pension coverage to volunteers. The monetary value is getting towards the threshold as a single volunteer can only be paid in total less than 20% the lowest paid union staff position at the Fire Department. While most of the District's volunteers have not been getting close to this amount, last year there was one volunteer who almost broke the threshold. Firefighter/EMT Dave Rucker inquired as to what happens once the threshold is met, to which the Chief answered that the District would need to retroactively pay that volunteer a part time hourly wage for the time worked, which could be less than the stipends received by the volunteer.

Logistics volunteer Monte Midkiff recalled that a few years ago it was discussed that there could be health insurance benefits for volunteers. The Chief stated that while access to healthcare is provided, a benefit paid would lead to more overall income. EMS volunteer Rob Nou recalled that a few years ago when the department was short on EMTs, stipend credits were given for shifts available for rather than calls attended. The Chief detailed that last year the Summer Hire program was used instead of doing this and that if the District were to go back to the stipend per shift program, it would have to be structured and budgeted for.

Secretary Summer Hagge inquired as to why stipends are only paid out annually. The Chief stated that this is the vast majority of volunteers' overall preference. Firefighter/EMT Justin Hagge suggested that a volunteer EMS shift schedule change could likely retain some current volunteers who are thinking about leaving the department. The Chief asserted that this would be a decision made by EMS Association, not the Chief. Paramedic Caleb Pal suggested that the County give tax breaks to volunteers. The Chief confirmed that this has been done in other states, although it is unclear if this is something that can be done at the county level, or if it needs to be a state program.

Secretary Summer Hagge suggested reaching out to local businesses to see if volunteers who show their EVIP ID card could get a discount or benefit.

## STAFFING MODELS

### Is our staffing model working for us & Ideas for the future

Commissioner Smith questioned if since housing is the issue it is for us, has the District tried to reach out to obtain a list of residents with guest housing? Paramedic Caleb Pal stated that there should be a long-term rental tax break from the county.

## NEW IDEAS

### Mobile Integrated Health Program

Chief Bigby had provided a copy of a Seattle Times Article, *As WA emergency rooms overflow, here's one possible fix*, about the North Mason Mobile Integrated Health Program. Commissioner Becky Smith had brought this article to the Chief's attention at the June board meeting, so she went on to detail the premise of the article for the Strategic Planning group. This program is similar to the community-based paramedicine program that San Juan County EMS has been doing. The intention of the program is to bridge the gap between local health services, i.e. the UW Clinic on Lopez, and emergency services, with the intended consequence of reducing the number of patients flown by air ambulance off-island for treatment.

Commissioner Becky Smith detailed the discussions she has been a part of as a member of of the Lopez Citizens for Health Care Committee with both the Hospital District as well as between San Juan Fire District 4 and the current Medical Director, Dr. Corsa. The theme of these discussions has focused on creating a branch, separate from the fire department, fully funded from outside sources, including but not limited to the hospital district, which would provide home visits to include follow-ups after surgeries, doing sutures and reaching out to homebound citizens on Lopez Island.

The discussion with Dr. Corsa has centered around the possibility that he could work shifts on Lopez Island each week and then potentially have other PA's and medics under his supervision to work the days he is not on Lopez. The agreed upon consensus is that the lack of urgent care/ emergency services from the UW Clinic is not going to change as their mission is to treat ongoing health issues rather than emergency health issues. The goal of introducing a program like the Mobile Integrated Health Program would be to support, and not burden, the Fire District's primary mission with the current EMS staff and volunteers. Paramedic Caleb Pal reiterated that community health is the hospital district's issue and tax burden, not the fire departments. Commissioner Becky Smith repeated that the commissioners of the hospital district believe this is an EMS issue. The Chief stated that this program creates a roadmap for funding, and assured the group that the funding for such a program would not be from district dollars, but rather from private sources, state sales tax and the hospital district.

The Chief concluded the discussion by summarizing that this article was presented for informational purposes only and that he appreciates all the group's input. The bottom line is that the Fire District does not want community members coming to the fire station looking for services and so if something like this is rolled out in the future, clear communication with the public on setting the expectations will need to be structured and managed. Firefighter/EMT Dave Rucker stated that the community thinks very highly of the department, and we do not want to damage our reputation, even if it is by trying to help them more, with unclear communications.

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The Chief asked if anyone had any other new ideas to bring to the table. He then thanked everyone for their time and help at this meeting. Secretary Summer Hagge will be sending out the draft Minutes from this meeting for everyone present to review once they are available.

Commissioner Bordvick adjourned the meeting at 1:43 PM

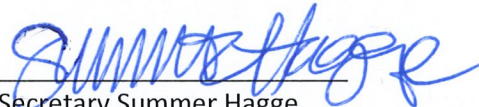
**NEXT MEETING:**

Regular Meeting – July 16, 2024, at 4:00 P.M.



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Chair Duane Bordvick



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Secretary Summer Hagge