

NEWMAN LAKE FIRE & RESCUE
Spokane County Fire District No. 13
Minutes for July 16, 2024
BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING
COMMUNITY MEETING

CALL TO ORDER

The Board of Fire Commissioners of Spokane County Fire Protection District No. 13 met on July 16, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Station No. 1, 9324 N Starr Rd., Newman Lake, Washington.

ROLL CALL

Board: Commissioners Eileen Weyrauch, Teresa Phelps, and Ben Kaiser
Others Present: Chief Daron Bement, Captain Josh Ambach, Captain Bob Kolva, Lieutenant Carleen VanDerostyne, Secretary Robin Harbin, Dave and Kathy Pfeiffer, Scott Inch, Dennis and Sue Gleckler, Jerry Le Grand, Charles Stocker, Karl Wallman, Jim and Ann Parman, Deb Davis, Jim and Mary Kaiser, Maureen Parry Eloa, Alan and Aurora Kelly, Devin and Jill Prewett, and Miguel Valencia.

COMMUNITY MEETING OPENING & INTRODUCTIONS:

Chair Weyrauch opened the meeting with the pledge of allegiance, welcomed attendees, and introduced the meeting. Beginning with the board, all in attendance introduced themselves and stated where they live in Newman Lake.

REVIEW OF BALLOT MEASURE IN VOTERS' PAMPHLET

Secretary Harbin summarized and reviewed the August 6, 2024 Proposition No. 1 ballot measure, providing history and previous community input leading to the formation of the current ballot measure proposed to the voters of the Newman Lake Fire District.

Chief Bement explained that the proposed fire levy increase of \$0.31 per thousand of assessed property value is par with the average levy increase requested by fire districts across the state. In response to a question regarding the possible results of not passing the levy lid lift, Chief Bement stated the biggest impact would be potential insurance increases of \$1000 to \$1200 on a \$700,000 home. According to the Washington Survey and Ratings Bureau, (WSRB), the staffing and other cutbacks required will move a protection class 6 zone to a protection class 8.

Secretary Harbin stated at our last survey by WSRB at the beginning of 2021, we came close to achieving a protection class of 5. At that time, we had a resident program with full time coverage at the station. With sufficient funding, our goal will be to implement the requirements necessary to achieve a protection class of 5 to achieve better insurance rates for the community. This will take some time as our next WSRB survey

will be at the beginning of 2026. Protection class rating improvements may take months to result in lower insurance premiums.

OPEN FORUM DISCUSSION:

Questions and comments included the following –

▪ **Which properties in our district have a protection class of 6?**

Properties within 1000 feet of a fire hydrant are currently at a protection class of 6. Scott Inch of Moab Irrigation stated new developments in the district will have hydrants placed every 500 feet. Homeowners who wish to request a fire hydrant installation can contact Scott Inch. The cost to install is greater than \$5000. Nearby property owners may agree to split the cost. Fire hydrants cannot be based off a well.

▪ **What was the district's budget in 2023?**

Secretary Harbin explained that prior to 2024, the budget included the money necessary to carry over into the following year to cover the first five months of expenses until receiving the first half of the taxes. Including this carryover made it appear the district was planning to spend more than what was to be received in tax revenues. The 2023 budget was approximately \$908,000. However, actual 2023 expenditures were less than \$750,000, leaving money to carry over into 2024. Beginning in 2024, the budget is now written based upon expected tax revenues only and does not factor in the carryover which will go on from year to year.

Are the demographics of the district impacting the need for emergency services?

Chuck Stocker commented there are many retired and aging members in our community who will require more and more emergency services as time goes on. Captain Josh Ambach confirmed that our call volumes have increased dramatically. We have experienced a 33% increase in emergency calls year-to-date. Our call volume in June of 2024 was 60% higher than June of 2023. Community members stressed their desire/need for 24-hour coverage at the station to assure quick response times. Captain Ambach stated we have improved our average response times from approximately 15 minutes ten years ago to an average of 6 minutes in 2024. Response times can be improved further by having a resident program. Captain Bob Kolva affirmed the importance of funding a resident program, describing the recent example of a rollover car fire where volunteers had to come from Otis Orchards to get an apparatus to bring to the incident because no one was at the station. Thankfully, the driver was already out of the vehicle and the field was green and extra wet. Otherwise, the extra wait time could have been tragic. Commissioner Kaiser commented that this resident program was one that had to be cut to reduce budget for this year and having the lid lifted it would allow the program to be reinstated, and we have people waiting and interested in the program.

▪ **What will happen if the levy doesn't pass?**

Alan and Aurora Kelly related their recent medical emergency. Aurora never imagined she would need our services at her age and expressed sincere thanks for our timely response which assured a favorable outcome. Alan and Aurora emphasized that a mere \$0.31 per thousand increase in taxes is very little to ask to keep emergency services available. Aurora stated that "you feel young and never think you will need the services of the fire department or emergency services, however when you need them you want them to be there right away!" (Published with permission from Alan and Aurora Kelly.)

Chair Weyrauch conveyed that SVFD may or may not be available to respond to our district emergencies if cutbacks result in our inability to cover responses. Per SVFD Chief Soto, if Valley Fire is responding in lieu of our district, they will charge for their services to the Newman Lake resident.

▪ **How can community members have a voice in district decisions?**

Our fire commissioners are voted in to represent the best interests of the community. Commissioner meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at 1:00 p.m. This day and time was selected to allow attendance by the command staff. The annual budget meeting is held in the evening each November and is publicized on our website and on the front door of the station. The public is welcome to attend and speak at these meetings.

▪ **Does the department take advantage of any DNR resources?**

Chief Bement replied that the department is able to purchase some needed wildland tools, gear, and equipment at a discount through a DNR grant. Captain Josh Ambach introduced the DNR Neighbor Ready Program the department has just started participating in. Captain Josh Ambach and Kelli Lemley conduct surveys of properties toward creating adequate defensible space against wildfires.

▪ **Why did the department need a burn building?**

- Firefighters are required to complete live fire training at least three times per year. Previously, the district had to send personnel, volunteers, and apparatus out of district to Spokane or Spokane Valley to conduct this training. This left the district vulnerable and without adequate immediate resources for local emergencies. Lieutenant Carleen VanDerostyne stated a burn building was planned and saved for since 2015. Previous Chief Stan Cooke was able to get an excellent burn building constructed for minimum costs.
- Several community members understood that Chief Stan Cooke said the burn building would generate revenue for the department. Although the district hasn't charged for use of the burn building, just as our department was never charged when using other district's burn towers, Chief Bement

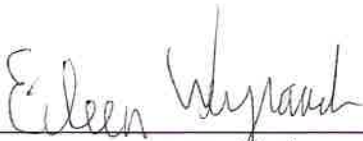
stated we have reaped numerous benefits by allowing other agencies such as Valley Fire to use the burn building, such as these include; mutual training and the use of SVFD's maintenance garage, saving the district hundreds and possibly thousands of dollars.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

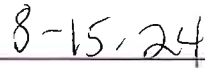
A community member summarized the burn building discussion by saying, "Construction projects aside, we need this levy to keep a viable fire department."

ADJOURNMENT

As there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:29 p.m.




Eileen Weyrauch, Chairperson



Date



Robin Harbin, District Secretary



Date