

Columbia River Fire & Rescue and
Scappoose Rural Fire Protection District
Scappoose Fire District Office
Joint Meeting of the Board of Directors
June 14, 2018 7:00pm

Special Meeting: After due and legal notice the joint meeting of the Columbia River Fire & Rescue and Scappoose Rural Fire Protection District Boards of Directors was called to order at 7:01 pm by CRFR Board President Hans Feige and Scappoose President David Grant.

Present: Mark Kreutzer, Hans Feige, Gary Hudson, Kelly Niles, Ron Schlumpberger, David Grant, David Sorenson, David Graham, Ron Cairns, Andy Krieck (7:42 pm)

Absent: Andy Krieck

Others: Chief Greisen, FD Nelson, DC Coombs, DC Marks, Janine Salisbury, Lt. Neilson, FF Chaffeur, FF Giff, Chief Ney, FF Liebig (7:07 pm)

Chief Greisen introduced Chief Ney who worked to create a Fire Authority in Lane County which eventually became a merger of two districts. He presented this information at OFDDA with Ken Jones a few years ago.

A fire authority can be an expansion of a current mutual aid agreement. The process he was involved in took 4.5 years. There is no statutory requirement with a fire authority. No public vote is required because no tax change takes place. It is easy to modify or dissolve and can be implemented in stages. There can also be cost savings by eliminating duplication and an increase of operational versatility.

There are more moving parts, however including multiple budgets, Boards and insurance policies. He stressed that the reason to change needs to be done for the right reasons (what's in it for us vs. the right thing to do) and combining different agency cultures will be an issue and hard to overcome. (Volunteer and career staff roles, staffing differences, rank structure) This option is not the solution to fixing a bad relationship.

Things to do in preparation include having support of both Boards, union buy in and volunteer support is important. The vision has to be shared often and decisions that affect the Districts should be transparent, i.e. joint Board meetings. There should be meeting with dissenters to discuss issues with the changes. It is good to have an outside company gather information and provide an outside point of view. There should also be a plan for change. IGA/Fire Authority does not mean merger.

Chief Ney felt the best investment Lane Fire Authority did was a consultant report to analyze both Districts and their needs. ESCI is one such company but LFA used Steve Abel. He cautioned who the Districts pick. The consultant will help create a checklist of next steps.

Implementation of a Fire Authority includes committee participation which can equate to ownership. Change can be easier if "everyone" has to make a change (different/same hose load for both agencies, different/same night for Volunteer meetings, different/same training day schedule, etc.) Stakeholders need to be willing to redirect things that are not working. It is also important to establish mission, vision and values as well as standardizing policies and SOG's. Branding is very important. Change the logo and give everyone "the t-shirt" on day one.

Chief Ney stressed having the right people in the right places. It is the opportunity to move people around, create new positions, etc. It is not personal but is a new reason to make change.

He discussed why creating a Fire Authority is preferred to merging. Merging happens all at once and can create animosity. Creating a Fire Authority allows for time to gradually make change and provides a way to reverse gears should it be needed. A Fire Authority softens the blow of a merger by maintaining individual departments. It allows for slower steps and the ability to take time to standardize procedures and equipment.

There are tasks in this process that are Board driven and Management driven. Board members need to stay at policy level and allow the management teams/fire chief make operational decisions. A Fire Authority has three Boards—One for each District and one for the Fire Authority, made up of two members of each District Board. The Fire Chief only answers to the Fire Authority Board. Chief Ney stated that LFA structured their Board meetings so that all three took place at the same time. It helped to create total transparency.

The downside to opting in to a Fire Authority include losing individual agency identity, common standards can identify those individuals who struggle to meet the minimum, communication becomes both more difficult and more essential and the bigger the ship, the harder it is to steer.

He recommends developing a vision for where the process is going and share it at every opportunity. It is okay to make mistakes and try something new.

There was discussion about how to give a consultant information about the agencies without clouding their judgement. The Districts want an honest assessment of the idea and not just told what they want to hear.

There were questions about vision statements, working on standardizing wages and negotiating with multiple represented groups. Additionally there was discussion about the organizational chart and internal structure of LFA. Chief Ney stated that the easiest tasks to start with are training and maintenance.

There was a short discussion about the failure of the Marion County/Turner Fire Authority. Lack of transparency and communication issues contributed to its failure.

Thank you to Chief Ney for sharing his experiences and recommendations.

Being no further business, the CRFR Board of Directors meeting adjourned at 8:49pm.

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