

**Excelsior Fire District Board
EFD Governing Board Work Session
Wednesday, June 27, 2018**

**24100 Smithtown Road
Shorewood, Minnesota
6:00 P.M.**

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Erickson called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL

Present: Excelsior Fire District (EFD) Boardmembers: Chair Erickson; Boardmembers Fletcher, Miller (arrived at 6:05p.m.), Sundberg, and Alternate Boardmember Gerry De La Vega

Also present: Excelsior Fire District (EFD) Chief Gerber; Shorewood City Administrator Lerud; Excelsior Operations Committee Luger, Greenwood Fiscal Agent Young; Tonka Bay City Administrator Tingley; Excelsior Fire District (EFD) Assistant Chief McCarthy; Greenwood Mayor Kind; Deephaven Mayor Skrede; and Shorewood Councilmember Siakel

Absent: Vice Chair Jennings

2. AGENDA APPROVAL

Fletcher moved, Sundberg seconded, approving the EFD Governing Board meeting agenda as presented. Motion passed 4/0.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE PROPOSED 2019 CIP PLAN AND THE 2019 OPERATING BUDGET WITH THE CITIES

Chair Erickson asked if anyone had any questions.

Mayor Kind inquired whether the board was shifting their protocol in light of the increase in the number of medical calls versus the number of fire calls. Chair Erickson explained that there have historically been more medical calls than fire calls for this organization. He stated that the board has addressed this question many times and commented that the question should be focused on the department's role and/or focus rather than whether the department is properly adjusting protocol. Chair Erickson asked Chief Gerber to speak more to the matter.

Chief Gerber stated he felt the belief that there are more medical calls than fire calls is more of a perception than a reality. He explained that EFD is unique in the fact that from 2011-2017, the percentage of calls for the EFD has remained fairly consistent. He stated that other communities' calls are typically 70-30 percent, or 80-20 percent, for EMS calls versus fire calls. The EFD has been 55-45 percent EMS calls to fire calls consistently and he has some

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graphs to show if anyone was interested. Chief Gerber explained that neither staffing nor training would drastically change if the department stopped responding to medical calls because they would still need to have the training in place. He also stated that he felt the aging population in the area would have an effect on the number of medical calls in the future and the department is already aware and planning for that.

Mayor Kind stated that Boardmember Fletcher shared with her a study from Egan, which he received from Chief Gerber. In that study, the police responded to medical calls and then police were responsible for determining whether or not fire was needed. She inquired if that is something the EFD should consider as an option and if that model would reduce stress on the firefighters. Chief Gerber replied that he did not believe that police response was the standard across most communities, noting the City of Minneapolis does not operate that way. He further explained that EFD has always had a role in responding to EMS calls since they started back a number of years ago. The Board continues having the discussion and looking at EFD's role in responding to EMS calls. He stated that the board had the discussion in 2007, 2011, and 2014. He stated that the board can certainly discuss options again but he would not support the idea of removing EFD's responsibility to respond to EMS calls for numerous reasons.

Mayor De La Vega stated that he has always been interested in this topic of discussion and in looking at the budget, he was concerned with bullet point number four, the aim to hire more full-time firefighters. He suggested that the board slow down and conduct a study to determine if moving in that direction was the best option for the organization. Mayor De La Vega pointed out that EFD was doing a great job of meeting the needs of the community but he was concerned there could be ways to increase efficiency. He suggested that the board consider hiring an outside agency to conduct a study to determine if the highest efficiency was being achieved.

Boardmember Sundberg asked Chief Gerber if he saw this as a recruitment or retention issue. Chief Gerber asked Boardmember Sundberg to clarify what issue she was referring to. Boardmember Sundberg replied, she was asking if he felt that the issue of responding to medical calls had an adverse effect on recruiting or retaining firefighters. Chief Gerber replied that it was one of the many issues affecting recruitment and retention efforts but it was not more or less than other factors.

Chief Gerber inquired whether Mayor De La Vega was even questioning that or if he was more concerned with bringing in an agency to conduct a study. Mayor De La Vega agreed that he was asking about bringing in an agency to conduct a study regarding efficiency in responding to medical calls. Chief Gerber stated it would be up to the board and pointed out that it would cost approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 to hire an agency to conduct such a study.

Mayor De La Vega stated he felt that hiring an agency was the first step in the process. Chief Gerber stated that they have discussed medical response a number of times since 2011 and because of that, the organization has compiled a lot of data and research. Mayor De La Vega responded that was great and asked if there has been an overarching effort to work with the data to evaluate the questions regarding how responding to EMS calls affects the origination in terms of recruitment and retention. He was concerned that responses to EMS calls were

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negatively affecting retention rates. Chief Gerber disagreed and stated that he did not feel the medical responses were hurting retention or recruitment.

Boardmember Sundberg asked Mayor De La Vega where his perception regarding EMS response calls was coming from. Mayor De La Vega replied that it was coming from his own personal experiences in business. He stated that all organizations need to be well structured to handle the demands they face and commented he felt that EFD was facing a demand for medical. He further explained he felt EFD was dealing with the demand but wondered if they could be better organized to increase efficiency in responding to EMS calls, especially in regard to equipment.

Boardmember Sundberg asked Mayor De La Vega why he thought that EFD was not as organized and efficient as possible. Mayor De La Vega replied one reason was that the number of responders on an EMS call was sometimes more than needed. He inquired if the duty crew model had any influence on this. Boardmember Sundberg replied that she was not seeing the problem that Mayor De La Vega was trying to be addressed.

Chair Erickson pointed out that the Board's previous discussions regarding the overnight sleep rooms was one way to address the concern. Therefore, the Board has been trying to allow for calls to be directed to the crew versus going to "all call" and to avoid burning out the firefighters. He felt the issue warranted further discussion but stated he was unsure if having an outside agency conducting a study was the best method.

Mayor De La Vega referred back to the budget and stated the idea of budgeting for more full-time firefighters implies a direction of movement for the organization. He questioned whether there was any supporting evidence for moving in that direction. Chair Erickson replied that full-time staffing is incorporated into the budget with the assumption that it will not be utilized unless circumstances warrant.

Boardmember Miller stated that he appreciated all of Mayor De La Vega's comments. He agreed with Chief Gerber's point that the Board discusses these concerns extensively. He pointed out that the duty crew model is an effort to increase efficiency and while it is very efficient, it also costs more money. Board member Miller pointed out that the Board, management, and administration are all very talented. He stated the Board has typically avoided conducting outside studies because they are costly and increase taxpayer contributions. However, he would not be opposed if that would make people feel more comfortable.

Mayor De La Vega commented that it is important for organizations to evolve with the market and pointed out that incremental changes are important. He questions if the incremental changes were enough or if possibly something was being missed. Boardmember Miller replied that he felt that the Board was doing a good job of making sure the organization was evolving with the market but agreed that obtaining outside confirmation would not be a bad idea.

Boardmember Fletcher stated the Egan report was very different from EFD's situation but pointed out that it referenced the same issues in regard to paid on call firefighters and the difficulty in filling duty crew shifts. He stated that the report referenced speed and weight. He

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stated he was concerned that the duty crew model would increase speed but would decrease weight, weight being the number of responders. Chair Erickson replied that filling the duty crew and having sleep rooms would support the goal of guiding and filtering calls to avoid that issue. He explained that if you are not on a duty crew shift, then you would not get called for an EMS, but you would still get called for a fire.

Boardmember Fletcher stated that volume is important.

Mayor Kind asked for clarification on the term 'standby crew' as used in the Egan report. Chief Gerber replied that standby is the same as the paid on call model used by EFD.

Chief Gerber stated the Board has spent a lot of time in meetings and work sessions discussing all of these things. He welcomed the questions and discussion from the Mayors and Councilmembers but stated he did not want to get too off topic from the budget discussion.

Mayor Kind stated that she was supportive of Mayor De La Vega's idea to have an outside agency conducting a study. She stated, however, that \$30,000 to \$40,000 was too costly. She inquired if the board could see what a study would actually cost. Chief Gerber replied that he has talked with the State of MN and other working with consultants and that is where he got the \$30,000 to \$40,000 estimate.

Mayor De La Vega stated he was also concerned with the pay rates and asked if a pay rate increase would help with recruitment and retention. Chair Erickson replied that they have discussed this specifically in relation to the 2019 budget. He also stated the Board has found that changing times and changing generations have shown that stipends have worked better than increasing the base pay rate.

Mayor De La Vega stated that he talked with Vice Chair Jennings regarding the stipends and asked for further clarification on that process as there was a significant amount of money in the 2019 budget allocated for that. Chief Gerber replied that they have compiled data over the last few years and explained that the point system helped them determine the amount of money to allocate.

Chief McCarthy stated they recently changed from the percentage system to the point system. He explained that the initial change over in systems increased the participation level, but after time the same individuals were more involved. He stated that he felt the same thing would happen if pay were increased, recruitment levels might increase for a little while but then they would level off. Mayor De La Vega agreed.

Assistant Chief McCarthy stated that he would not be opposed to conducting an outside study but voiced his concern that outside agencies may not be experts on their organization and how it best operates.

Boardmember Miller stated the EFD has excellent management and that management provides great feedback. He noted the Board determined that monies were better spent in incentives and stipends rather than in increasing the wages because it proved to be more effective.

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Mayor De La Vega asked if that was more beneficial for retainment and if the stipends were enough to get recruitments. Chair Erickson replied they don't know the answer to that question. He stated they try incremental changes often and monitor them closely to evaluate their effectiveness.

Mayor De La Vega commented the Board was making incremental changes and evaluating the success levels but he did not feel that was a long-term solution.

Boardmember Miller stated that retention, recruitment, and service level discussion come up often and the board focuses heavily on managing costs. He agreed with Assistant Chief McCarthy that an outside consultant might not know the organization as well as they do.

Mayor De La Vega agreed that people inside the organization might know things better and suggested the board might consider doing a zero-base budget similar to what the police department did when their department reorganized.

Councilmember Siakel stated that Mayor De La Vega's idea sounded more costly than some of the other ideas that she was hearing. Mayor De La Vega agreed but stated that he viewed it as an investment.

Boardmember Sundberg stated that all departments are having similar issues. She stated that in order to consider supporting such a study she would have to be convinced that the study would result in new fresh ideas that aren't already available.

Mayor De La Vega said he was struggling with being convinced that a full-time model is the way to go.

Boardmember Fletcher inquired if the Board ever discussed how calls are dispatched. Boardmember Miller replied that they did have a similar discussion right before Boardmember Fletcher joined. He stated that the discussion could certainly be revisited.

Boardmember Fletcher voiced a concern with the value of time and stated that over dispatching to calls would not be as concerning if it weren't for the value of the firefighters' time.

Boardmember Sundberg asked Boardmember Fletcher if he was concerned with the budget. Boardmember Fletcher replied no and stated he was more concerned with wearing out the firefighters. Boardmember Sundberg commented that Chief Gerber did not see that issue as a major concern.

Chief Gerber agreed and said he did not believe that was the case. He stated that the number of paid-on-call firefighters has changed slightly over the years and the paid on-call model is very important.

Mayor De La Vega inquired how the medical piece would be addressed directly in the budget and stated he did not feel the organization was being as efficient as possible. Chief Gerber

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replied that medical response was a core part of the mission and he did not see that changing in the future. Chief Gerber stated that he would be open to further discussion regarding the organization's ability and efficiency as related to medical but commented that tonight was dedicated to the budget discussion specifically.

Mayor De La Vega inquired if they had their own ambulance. Chief Gerber explained that they did not but have good partnerships. He described some of the barriers to owning their own ambulance and stated he did not believe it would be in the best interest of EFD to get out of the business of responding to medical calls.

Boardmember Miller stated that he likes the ideas. He commented that he was not opposed but still not sure if bringing in an outside agency to conduct a study would be better than doing a study internally.

Boardmember Sundberg stated she would be opposed to bringing in an outside agency.

Boardmember Miller stated the Board is not trying to create a full-time staff organization but it is in the budget as an anticipation for future planning. He suggested they continue looking at things. He stated he is satisfied as a Boardmember with the service level provided. Mayor De La Vega argued that the industry is changing. Boardmember Miller replied that the EFD and EFD Board are continually responding to the industry changes and has for a long time.

Mayor De La Vega stated there are fewer fires as fire prevention efforts increase and medical needs are increasing with the aging population. Boardmember Sundberg stated she does not fully see the problem and commented that if staff begins to raise concerns about the organization's ability to handle medical calls either in terms of equipment or in terms of recruitment and retention, then she would be happy to start discussing ways to change and make adjustments at that time.

Boardmember Miller stated that he is open to strategies and open to discussions.

Assistant Chief McCarthy stated that Chief Gerber has done a great job of helping with recruitment and retention by reducing the number of special events. He pointed out that the industry focuses heavily on staffing and medical discussions and lift assist is a hot topic in the medical piece.

Chair Erickson inquired if there were any further questions on the 2019 budget. He stated that there would be no action taken by the Board at this work session meeting but suggested they recap the discussion at the next regular board meeting.

No Mayors, city council members or EFD Board members present has any concerns with the proposed 2019 budget.

Councilmember Siakel thanked the Board for all the hard work that they do.

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4. NEXT MEETING

A. Regular Board Meeting – July 25, 2018 6:00 pm

5. ADJOURN

Sundberg moved, Fletcher seconded, adjourning the EFD Governing Board Work Session meeting of June 27, 2018, at 7:08 P.M. Motion passed 5/0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Natasha Lukacs, Recording Secretary
TimeSaver Off Site Secretarial, Inc.