

**Excelsior Fire District Board  
EFD Governing Board Work Session  
Wednesday, February 28, 2018**

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

## MINUTES

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

### **ROLL CALL**

Present: Excelsior Fire District (EFD) Boardmembers: Chair Erickson; Boardmembers Fletcher, Miller (arrived at 6:10 p.m.), and Sundberg (departed the meeting at 7:40 p.m.); Alternate Boardmember Ansari; and, EFD Chief Gerber (departed the meeting at 7:00 p.m.)

Also present: Deephaven Administrator/EFD Fiscal Agent Young; Excelsior City Manager Luger; Shorewood City Administrator Lerud; and, Tonka Bay City Administrator Crawford

EFD Assistant Chief Pat McCarthy; and, Captain Jesse Steinwand

Absent: Boardmember Jennings

### **2. AGENDA APPROVAL**

**Ansari moved, Sundberg seconded, to approve EFD Governing Board meeting agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.**

Boardmember Miller arrived at 6:10 p.m.

### **3. DISCUSSION ON EFD STAFFING TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE**

Chair Erickson stated this will be an informal discussion relating to staffing needs.

Chief Gerber presented the staff report, noting the purpose of this discussion is to provide guidance for policy and operational development to staff the EFD and allow for effective service delivery for the EFD. He summarized past Board discussions and stated his perspective that as you look at the EFD as a whole, it has two awesome Fire Stations, super effective operations, and today with geography, population, and service, he does not see them changing in the near future. He indicated that in 2024, both bonds will be paid off. With regard to the EFD's apparatus, it is state-of-the-art and provides service for medical, fire, and/or special response incidents. Chief Gerber noted that by the next time the Board meets on March 28<sup>th</sup>, there may be new ladder truck as well.

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Chief Gerber noted there has been a lot of investment by the Board and community in apparatus. The EFD has state-of-the-art apparatus and personal protective equipment. In addition, great training is a core part, inside and outside of the organization. Chief Gerber stated the EFD has all of those areas.

Chief Gerber explained the issue, as we move forward, relates to staffing and how to provide for what the EFD does as those services are dependent on staffing. Foundationally, that is the piece under discussion. Also, there are financial components relating to staffing so it is important to discuss. Chief Gerber explained the EFD can talk and discuss this matter as a Board, noting its job is to set the policy. He stated that in 2018, the EFD can't be thinking about staffing for 2019 but instead needs to think about staffing in 2020 to 2028, and to set guidance on how it will look going forward.

Chief Gerber displayed a pie chart identifying the demographics of the EFD, noting more are getting older. In addition, the cost to train a firefighter is \$10,000 so even though volunteer, there is a cost. The cost to train and equip a firefighter is \$27,095.

With regard to 2013 Minnesota Fire Service statistics, Chief Gerber noted Minnesota is in the 47 percentile for spending per household fire cost and 21<sup>st</sup> in population. He clarified this does not compare to quality of service, which we believe is top notch across State of Minnesota and possible with the volunteer firefighter model. Minnesota has the second highest percentage of volunteer fire departments in the nation at 93%. Chief Gerber stated most firefighters are volunteer, not career. He reviewed comparisons with regional states, differences in per capita, and costs.

Chief Gerber noted the January Board packet included a draft future staffing plan, which was discussed and has been provided again tonight so it can be further discussed. He asked if there were specific points the Board would like him to address tonight, noting he had received feedback from Boardmember Fletcher and Chair Erickson so those items have been answered in slides and handouts.

Hearing no questions or comments, Chief Gerber proceeded to present key points raised by Boardmember Fletcher that has positive effective feedback. Boardmember Fletcher explained he offered feedback to get some ideas out on the table.

Chief Gerber addressed the issue of retention, noting there are 39 paid firefighters and between 2008 and 2009, 13 firefighters were hired but none are still here, which is part of what Boardmember Fletcher is suggesting needs to be addressed. Chief Gerber stated the goal had been to get firefighters to stay 20 years but now if the EFD can get firefighters to stay 10 years, it is a good investment. Otherwise, the EFD is losing money.

Boardmember Fletcher stated his issue is not the money, but the practical standpoint to get and keep good people.

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Boardmember Miller noted on the money side, it is important to note that turnover is very expensive and costly for the organization. He noted the EFD may think that saving money with certain techniques is good; however, retention is a key item as it will reduce costs.

Chief Gerber stated career firefighters and paid on call firefighters are paid differently and it needs to be addressed how they compare as a money piece. He noted the unique challenges raised by Boardmember Fletcher are having two Stations, limited call volumes, and a smaller population. He stated the duty crew models have been compared and it was found the Eden Prairie's model is different as is their population and tax base. Chief Gerber commented it is important to know it is not just using Minnetonka and Eden Prairie as the basis for duty crew comparison. Staff is regularly talking with fire departments in Chaska, Chanhassen, Mound, Loretto, Long Lake, and others to learn what they are doing.

Boardmember Fletcher stated he just wanted to point out that it is difficult to make a duty crew comparison with Eden Prairie even though the EFD has a better participation level.

Chief Gerber presented options for pension changes (i.e., 0-10 year vesting schedule for experienced and trained firefighters that join the district) and asked whether that should be addressed as part of the retention piece. He noted if changes are made, it may require a larger city contribution as a whole. He raised the point that if firefighters come to the EFD with 0-10 years of experience and/or training, then maybe vesting should be considered differently. Chief Gerber noted depending on where we are with the number of employees, the pension piece looks different and is part of the retention piece.

Boardmember Fletcher noted with a reserve standpoint, if 130% funded and the City reduces the schedules, it drops the future increases. So, another group to discuss those implications with would be the Fire Relief Association. Chief Gerber agreed as it would require a Fire Relief Association vote with ratification by the Board.

Boardmember Miller asked if the suggestion is to consider faster vesting if the firefighter has training. Chair Erickson stated if the firefighter comes with some experience, that could be considered.

Boardmember Fletcher noted if the firefighter is very qualified, they don't need to be brought up-to-speed so it also benefits the EFD. Chair Erickson stated that is a good discussion point.

Chief Gerber stated another consideration is to do something different with wages. Currently, a firefighter's wage is \$12.75/hour and it is increased every year. Boardmember Fletcher suggested consideration phased increases to \$15 to \$25/hour. He noted when looking at work versus home, if the pay is meaningful from a financial standpoint, it may make a difference in firefighter retention.

Boardmember Miller stated if talking about paid firefighters or increasing the rate paid to part-time firefighters, then it is taking a step. He noted if going to a full paid force, it would be much higher than just raising the hourly pay by \$5/hour. Boardmember Miller stated the EFD would need to address that with the firefighters to see if that would be attractive to enhance retention.

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Chair Erickson stated the EFD has 39 firefighters who are working at the rate they are and when we talk about where the next firefighter is coming from and what it takes to bring them in, it is towards developing a long-term retention model. Chair Erickson stated he is not saying we don't raise firefighter's pay, but they are working at the current rate and if not happy, they may have left. He believed pay is not only for guys in the field but also what it should be to retain a new firefighter.

Boardmember Sundberg stated that line of thinking is concerning because we have to be fair to our current firefighters and just because they are willing to work at that rate, it does not mean it's fair if willing to give a new firefighter more.

Chair Erickson clarified he was not suggesting to give a new firefighter more but if the EFD needs to go to \$15/hour to bring in new talent, then it needs to go to \$15/hour for everyone as a base pay level.

Boardmember Miller stated we know the challenge with hiring and retaining employees, noting a lot of things come into play. He stated when discussing money and when looking at this problem, it comes down to how to be competitive with others who are trying to take their employees on the money aspect. Also, there are environmental considerations as it is attractive to retain high-quality experienced firefighters the EFD already has and that is the most important mission of the EFB.

Boardmember Sundberg stated one observation from firefighters is the cost of living here is high so the EFD has to keep that in mind. She noted the disparity between pay and cost of living may be forcing some decisions because the two don't meet.

Boardmember Fletcher stated that is the underlying issue, in making pay attractive it makes the cost of living less of an issue.

Chair Erickson agreed it is a package of good pay, good equipment and facilities, and this is another piece of the package.

Assistant Chief McCarthy addressed retention of existing members and questioned if the EFD has asked them what they'd prefer, a bump to \$15 or \$18/hour or increasing the pension. He commented he does not know what the answer would be.

Alternate Boardmember Ansari referenced her experience with another company, from the vesting year point, and stated across the boards all wanted the earlier vesting because they felt it was a place good enough to stay. However, that is not an incentive now as it is too far away.

Chief Gerber reported that Eden Prairie has tactically changed vesting from 20 years to 10 years and increased the amount to hire and retain firefighters. With duty crews, hours, expectability, and training, their Chiefs are strategically talking about how it recruits firefighters. Chief Gerber relayed a past discussion that in 8-10 years, as recruiting firefighters, departments will be competing against each other and that is the challenge.

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Chair Erickson pointed out that duty crews allow competition across the districts.

Assistant Chief McCarthy stated if you talk to Eden Prairie firefighters, they move to different fire districts. He asked whether Eden Prairie is all or nothing at 10 years. Chief Gerber stated they have to make it to 10 years to get anything. Bloomington Fire is one of the largest paid on call fire departments in Minnesota, with few paid staff, and vesting is 20 years. In Bloomington, once vested, they get the same as a sergeant PERA payment and it is a monthly annuity for the rest of their life. He stated they have to commit to 20 years and if they leave earlier, they get nothing. Bloomington firefighters get significantly more than the EFD gives at 20 years.

Boardmember Fletcher stated an annuity is a substantial piece and highly attractive. Chief Gerber agreed Bloomington has taken an aggressive approach.

Chair Erickson stated Bloomington is in essence a full-time department with pay and call volumes that run on few staff.

Chief Gerber stated Minnetonka is struggling with some of the same proportional issues as they have an allocation of 80 firefighter and are currently at 63.

Boardmember Sundberg stated she has the sense that younger employees are not motivated by a 20-year plan they have to wait for.

Chief Gerber relayed a conversation with his Millennial daughter who indicated bonuses are a larger plus for her generation. He stated some may want the additional hourly pay but others would much rather have the larger pension. Chief Gerber noted the EFD has a relatively senior group of firefighters that may prefer the pension increase.

Alternate Boardmember Ansari stated the Eden Prairie plan at 10 years had inherent problems because at 10 they are done so bonuses may have to kick in. Boardmember Miller felt that signing bonuses are a huge attraction in today's hiring.

Assistant Chief McCarthy stated signing bonuses have to be paid out a year and a half after hiring, not immediately, to assure retention.

Chair Erickson stated it is a lot of work to change the investing model but not a lot of work to pay out a bonus, which also doesn't involve the Relief Association. He agreed Millennial employees are motivated differently. Chief Gerber described the changing social environment within the Fire Station.

Boardmember Miller stated with regard to paying a bonus, a lot of CEOs in the software business say they pay out a hiring bonus and then they're gone in 6 months. Because of that, it should not be a signing bonus but instead a periodic bonus for milestones reached and could be an incentive versus just a signing bonus.

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Chair Erickson stated a signing bonus is a recruitment tool but typically if spending a fair amount on training, the new employee is liable for training on the back side if they leave. He noted if the EFD is paying \$10,000 in the first year for training and turn out gear - that is an investment. He preferred paying a signing bonus when they complete Firefighter I or Firefighter II, and then going out to another milestone (decided by the Board). In that way, the firefighter knows what lies ahead after training to receive a monetary bonus.

Boardmember Sundberg stated support for that option since it is based on something of value to the Fire Department.

Chief Gerber stated another option raised was to pay a bonus if living close to the Fire Station so the firefighter can respond quickly. He noted that concept is good but hard to administer. Boardmember Fletcher stated there are also ramifications with trying to get to the Station quickly (i.e., speeding).

Chief Gerber asked about a housing subsidy for those living close to the Fire Station, or a land trust where the Fire District would own the land and the firefighter own the house. Then when the firefighter sells their house, the EFD would retain the land. Chief Gerber stated this is an interesting concept in how to deal with the housing issue in our five cities.

Boardmember Fletcher stated if living close to the Fire Station, then they can get there quickly. He explained he does not know if that is a good concept but wanted to throw it out for consideration.

Chief Gerber stated another option raised was to focus on requirements, response, and training with everything else being secondary. With that option, non-emergency items would be paid accordingly to get voluntary sign-ups.

Chief Gerber explained that the EFD bills \$400 per special event for 6 firefighters and equipment. Boardmember Fletcher stated our firefighters are a bargain at that price and asked why that rate is isn't higher. Chair Erickson stated if the police are being paid more for the same event, then he is willing to discuss whether the EFD should raise its rates.

Chief Gerber stated with July 4<sup>th</sup> we have tried to make it more incentivized and today with special events they use everybody instead of just volunteers, so that is using our workforce effectively. He explained our core pieces and three key parts are response, training, special events. The parts under that are community risk reduction and inspections.

Chief Gerber addressed response change where an experienced firefighter wants to cover special events and are only expected to attend training and cover daytime calls. Boardmember Fletcher stated the shift schedule is harder to handle the older you get so he wanted to throw it out for discussion.

Chief Gerber stated Chair Erickson raised some key questions and asked about medical calls versus suppression calls related to each city. He displayed a bar chart depicting calls in 2017, broken down by data for each member city.

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Chair Erickson stated in a past discussion on the role of the Fire Department and what we have available as a community, we have police, fire, and ambulance service. In looking at Station 1 versus Station 2, the lake is in the way and creates a pinch point, requiring the need for two Stations. He described a heart attack scenario and how that call would be handled if in Deephaven or this side of the lake and response times for police, firefighters, and medical. Also, it could be discussed where our expenses come from, utilization of resources, and better ways to support the call volume and balance services.

Boardmember Sundberg stated another factor will be with the two new senior living facilities. Chair Erickson agreed, noting there are currently not many calls from the Deephaven Woods, which offers a phased approach. Chief Gerber estimated less than 20 calls a year to Deephaven Woods.

Upon receipt of an active house fire call, Chief Gerber departed at 7:00 p.m.

Chair Erickson stated another question is related to how our respective fire departments interface and similarity of training throughout the District. He noted that with medical calls, they need to arrive as quickly as possible because they need to assess. That is why some calls for the fire truck are canceled. He stated roughly the same police services are available throughout the District so all in all, it balances out, which is important as we all pay for police services and they will be the first ones on the scene whether validating a fire or medical emergency.

Boardmember Miller noted Excelsior and Shorewood have a difference between suppression and rescue but not so much of a difference between the other three cities. Chair Erickson stated it may be due to the number of bars and restaurants selling liquor so they consume more health-related services.

Boardmember Fletcher stated others come into the Excelsior downtown area, which creates more liability.

Boardmember Miller stated it would be interesting to look at that data further and determine if it is establishment related. Chair Erickson agreed that would be interesting information to drill down.

Chair Erickson asked whether the Police Departments may better serve than the EFD for medical calls and/or whether the paramedics should handle it. He noted that has been discussed previously but the issue is that police officers do not assist paramedics or ride in the back of the ambulance. The EFD needs to remember that as useful as the police officers are for first response, they do not assist paramedics in any ride-along needs.

Boardmember Fletcher asked about an arrangement where another police department assists a community should their officer assist paramedics and be pulled out of the area. Boardmember Miller noted they would do that anyway with mutual aid.

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Boardmember Miller asked whether Chair Erickson wanted to again discuss whether the EFD should not respond to medical calls. Chair Erickson stated that has already been discussed, and he has talked about it with Chief Gerber. He stated his understanding that if someone calls in a medical call (not feeling well) it is not coded as a heart attack but instead as a general medical. In that case, police officers and paramedics respond and the EFD also rolls unless it is in Deephaven.

Excelsior City Manager Luger stated a lot of the calls are from the apartments, not businesses. Chair Erickson stated that may be the reason for the differential since Deephaven does not have much multi-family. Excelsior City Manager Luger stated they are also properties that have more senior residents, some of which maybe should be in a different type of facility. She stated she would like to talk about the reason for the call differential between cities.

Boardmember Miller stated the data tells him it is a significant number of calls so he would ask if the quality of service is equal and if it is, then the other cities should look at the same level of response to bring down costs.

Chair Erickson stated it is worth another discussion in the future, noting it involves a lot of layers to consider including location of the call and distance from the Station.

Administrator/Fiscal Agent Young stated in Deephaven, police officers respond to more medical calls as that is historically what the departments have decided to do. Chair Erickson stated some comes from historical because when it was Excelsior Fire, they relied more on their police officers and less on the Fire District. Over time, that has started to play out with more calls but still not at par with the calls on the other side of the lake.

Boardmember Fletcher stated this may tie into staffing and it would make sense to have Chief Gerber pull the data together for several months to consider whether dispatch was appropriate and determine if there is a pattern to show something should be done differently with dispatch.

Boardmember Miller agreed that multi-family and senior housing may need to be considered in the equation.

Administrator/Fiscal Agent Young stated they are also a responder to Medicals and the differential is less than it used to be but on the auto calls, there is still quite a difference.

Boardmember Miller asked about the training that Deephaven and South Lake get. Chair Erickson stated they are all trained to the same level and in par with each other in what they are capable of doing. He explained there may be a difference in number of police on the road versus call volume versus area to be covered. That needs to be kept in mind in how it plays out to call volumes, staffing, and other needs.

Alternate Boardmember Ansari asked if this information shows multiple first responders from different jurisdictions. Chair Erickson explained with auto calls, the call will get a police, paramedic, and fire.



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Administrator/Fiscal Agent Young agreed it is not uncommon for a call to get all three. Chair Erickson noted it is better to have too many responding than not enough.

Boardmember Fletcher stated with CPR, you can only do it for so long, but the Fire Department bought a Lucas device for Station 2 that takes over the CPR so then you don't need so many people responding. He asked whether they should consider getting a Lucas device for Station 1.

Tonka Bay City Administrator Crawford explained they got a grant last year to pay for one Lucas device. Chair Erickson stated that is correct and described a call when the Lucas device was borrowed by another department to assist with the trip downtown. He noted that everything done at the EFD impacts staffing and if a new piece of technology can be brought in, then it impacts staffing.

Chair Erickson addressed the issue of response times from one side of the District compared to the other, noting it is reality that it takes longer to get a paramedic in Shorewood than in Deephaven due to the physical location of where the rig sits. He noted that in Minneapolis, their fire department is only 4 minutes from every doorstep but it takes 25 minutes for the paramedic to arrive. In Minneapolis, the police officers do not respond to those types of calls. Chair Erickson stated he wanted to call out the EFD model and how it can be best managed.

Chair Erickson displayed a bar chart depicting 2017 average on scene times for duty crew (4.05), duty officer (6.96), Station 1 (5.91), Station 2 (7.45), and for all calls (10).

Boardmember Miller stated that is a significant service level improvement for duty crew, and 3 minutes can be the difference between life and death. Chair Erickson agreed, noting on this side of the lake, if the paramedic is at Deephaven and there is a heart attack at 2 a.m., there is a 12-minute wait to arrive for a heart attack call and they were needed to carry out the person.

Boardmember Miller stated duty crews should be covering the most critical time slots. Chair Erickson stated that is being transitioned towards. He stated it is seen from the data that duty crews give a better response time so they are scheduled to cover peak call volume times but Chief Gerber is having a difficult time getting those times covered.

Administrator/Fiscal Agent Young noted that only officers fill duty crews.

Boardmember Fletcher stated it is important to have an officer on the duty crew but asked why it is comprised of only officers.

Chair Erickson stated that is a good discussion to have when Chief Gerber is present. He noted other options are whether to raise pay or point value for duty crew work, coming back to the idea that you need to incentivize the work until there is a favorable response. The other choice is to make it a mandate.

Boardmember Fletcher agreed with incentivizing because if mandated, an experienced and trained firefighter may not be interested and leave the department. He noted some think it is easier if they can sleep at the Station so they are already there when a call comes in.

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Chair Erickson stated this topic will come up at a future meeting, in how to go to overnight duty crews so you cover Friday and Saturday nights.

Administrator/Fiscal Agent Young stated there are duty crews, people who come to the Station for 'x' number of hours during busy times. But the slide relating to response times, is about duty officers in a vehicle driving around responding to calls. Chair Erickson clarified that is the duty officer, and duty crew.

Chair Erickson stated if the duty crews are filled and at each Station, they respond to all medical calls and if needed, call for more or outside help. The reason it is 2 and 2, if there is a fire during a duty crew model, both Stations will respond with trucks but that is not enough firefighters to run both trucks so the mutual aid call goes out. Then at the 6-minute mark, you have two trucks and a crew for suppression. If a bigger fire, the call has gone out and the others are in route. Chair Erickson stated he thinks the duty crew model has to be a big part of filling duty crews, incentivizing them, and growing it going forward.

Boardmember Miller asked why the response is longer. Chair Erickson explained they respond direct from their house so it is almost 7 minutes. Boardmember Fletcher stated they are covering the whole district. Chair Erickson agreed, noting their location and the location of the call will make a difference.

Tonka Bay City Administrator Crawford stated currently there is not additional pay but you get points. She referred to the Survey Monkey about what would incent you to be on the duty crew, noting some said points.

Chair Erickson stated the 24/7 duty crew model is not manageable in the next year or so but at some point in the future, some full-time staff (8-5 daytime model) with duty crews handling the off hours is becoming part of the discussion.

Boardmember Sundberg departed the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

Boardmember Miller stated he would be interested in seeing an analysis addressing if a duty crew was in place, would the outcome of an event have been better. Chair Erickson stated it is difficult to prove the negative (i.e., person would not have died if arriving one minute earlier) but it is an interesting analysis. Boardmember Miller agreed it may involve a subjective analysis.

Chair Erickson stated it is clearly seen that a 4-minute response on average compared to a 7-minute response on average does make a difference. He suggested looking at higher call volume times and covering them as best we can and to fill lower call times last.

Boardmember Fletcher stated he would like to hear more from Chief Gerber about his plans.

Chair Erickson agreed.

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Alternate Boardmember Ansari and Tonka Bay City Administrator Crawford both expressed interest in getting more information and discussion on the Survey Monkey information.

Boardmember Fletcher asked whether there should be an earlier meeting.

Chair Erickson stated he can ask the Chief to add that topic to the next meeting.

Tonka Bay City Administrator Crawford noted the next agenda includes the year in review, pension, and audit.

Chair Erickson stated in that case, he would suggest pushing the Survey Monkey discussion to the next meeting.

**4. NEXT MEETING**

**A. Regular Board Meeting – March 28, 2018**

**The next regular EFD Governing Board Meeting is scheduled for 6:00 P.M. Wednesday, March 28, 2018, at Station 1.**

**5. ADJOURNMENT**

**Fletcher moved, Miller seconded, adjourning the EFD Governing Board Work Session of February 28, 2018, at 7:44 P.M. Motion passed 4/0.**