

## **Special Meeting – Fire Commissioners Meeting**

**May 20, 2019**

**6:30 p.m.**

Present: Commissioner Jackson, Commissioner Stamper, Commissioner Fund, County Manager Erik Martin

Guests: Various members of the Fire Commissioners Association, public and press

Recorder: Rieva Lester

The group had dinner at 6:30 p.m. The Fire Commissioners Association called its meeting to order at 7 p.m.

County Manager Erik Martin said Lewis County is looking at how best to govern the 911 communications center.

He said the county has the following four goals:

- Safety of the public and first responders
- Economics: Best use of taxpayer dollars
- Efficiency and effectiveness: Use of limited resources to create a positive work environment and attract and retain quality talent
- Unity: Work together to make decisions about the future of 911

Erik outlined three 911 governance options:

- Status quo, in that Lewis County would continue its governance
- Shared authority through which area agencies would share the authority
- Regional authority: Possible regionalization under a group such as the nonprofit Thurston 911 Communications (TCOMM)

Commissioner Jackson said he sits on the state 911 committee and that the conversation there has centered on regionalization due to funding issues. He said the state is looking at ways to consolidate public-safety answering points (PSAPs).

Commissioner Jackson stressed that the county is looking for feedback from all entities that use the county's 911 communications services.

Riverside Fire Authority Chief Mike Kytta, who serves as vice chair on the Combined Users Committee (CUC), said the interlocal agreement is up for renewal in 2019. He said the CUC has indicated it would like the interlocal to be approved again to allow time to work on current and future needs. He said the

county is implementing a technology study that will indicate how to phase in technology. He said the interlocal included a timeline for deliverables, such as costs of maintaining 911 equipment and hilltop infrastructure. Chief Kytta said the study will review what's needed at the 911 center.

Chief Kytta said another study will review the 911 center itself to give users a look at what's being sought, how long it will take to get there and how the costs will be allocated. Chief Kytta said the CUC also wants to weigh its options and review whether a regional authority would be prudent.

Chief Kytta described the makeup of the Combined User Committee. He said there are more than 30 entities that have signed on to the local interlocal agreement to use Lewis County's 911. Chief Kytta said the CUC has the ability to work with the county on budgets, etc., and that every entity has a vote.

In response to a question from Tom Crowson, Erik Martin indicated Adcomm did not respond to the county's request for qualifications for the infrastructure study. Tom suggested taking a neighboring county up on its offer to see what process it had followed when it switched to a regional authority.

Rich Bainbridge of Fire District 1 asked what "regionalization" would mean. Commissioner Jackson explained that it's up in the air but that the county would like to speak to neighboring counties to find coverage.

Randy Pennington said the smaller districts feel they will just go with whatever the big three (the Sheriff and Chehalis and Centralia) do. He applauded the commissioners' efforts to involve all entities.

George Kaech of Fire District 8 gave a brief history of communications in Salkum. He said he fears regionalization will leave the east end without communications coverage.

Commissioner Stamper said that's exactly why the commissioners need to hear from all entities: to help determine whether regionalization is even feasible. He said it's important to get input from all entities.

Chief McDaniel of Salkum said he's concerned there will be a repeat of the Mount St. Helens eruption, which left the county without communications coverage. He said the county has to consider how it will operate during a natural disaster. He said fiber optic cables are fragile and can be severed easily. He urged caution as the county builds its infrastructure.

Commissioner Fund said the 2019 "snowmageddon" was another example of how easily nature can wreak havoc on the county's lines of communication.

Jay Johnson of Riverside Fire Authority asked for clarification about the feasibility study. Commissioner Jackson said the study going on now is about infrastructure while the other will look at the possibility of regionalization.

Gregg Peterson of Boistfort urged the group to make sure no areas lack coverage.

Erik Martin said the county needs district-specific input because the fire districts know their needs and concerns best. He stressed the importance of the rural areas sharing their concerns with the county.

Commissioner Fund said there has been pressure on the commissioners to move quickly but that the commissioners have a responsibility to the whole county and want to make sure the rural areas have a voice. She noted that the whole county has to have a unified front on whatever it chooses.

Commissioner Fund discussed NACo's new Test It app, which lets users test internet strengths across the county. She also noted there were a handful of fire districts that did not have any candidates for the upcoming election. She said a special three-day filing period would be held May 22-24.

The Fire Commissioners Association continued its regular meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.