

Special Board Meeting Minutes  
West Valley Fire District  
825 N Main St.  
Willamina, Oregon 97396  
September 9, 2020 at 3:00 pm

Called meeting to order at 3:04 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

Board:

Chris Greenhill

Roy Whitman (virtual)

Gary Brooks

Rick Mishler

Connie Brown

EXECUTIVE SESSION authorized under ORS 192.660(2)(f) to consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection.

General Session:

Mishler stated the union has expressed concern for their job stability. Mishler expressed to them that they are already working with steady jobs without a consolidation. Brown stated that once the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (CTGR) establish their own services, those 6 positions would not be able to continue as West Valley employees. Brown states they could be hired by CTGR. Brooks adds those positions could be eliminated by attrition. Brown stated that the current West Valley budget could not support all 12 positions. The union has also expressed that the main draw for the staff is to be part of the consolidation project.

Mishler asks if programs allowing the staff to ride-along/shadow leadership roles, such as Battalion Chiefs, is something that is currently available. Hertel states this is possible but would require additional funding to implement such a program. Hertel also shared that staff is regularly notified of professional development training.

Brown asked about the elimination of the previous Lieutenant positions. Hertel stated the previous Lieutenant positions were replaced by the Battalion Chief positions that were created at a higher level to cover all three districts. The Chief met with each Lieutenant to work through that transition and they agreed to the change. Brown stated that she feels that staff are not always honest with administration. Hertel stated we have created an open and candid culture within the districts and that staff are frequently candid with administration.

Mishler expressed that the administrative team has 8 people with only 12 line staff in West Valley, which seems heavy in administration. Hertel stated the battalion chiefs are combination administration and response staff and there are two office positions included. Hertel added this administrative team may be excessive if the administrative team was only overseeing the West Valley staff, however this team oversees all three districts, not only West Valley.

Brooks stated the main community concern in Willamina was the lack of staffing. Brooks stated that he hopes this has been resolved after the three people were hired off the operating levy funds.

Brooks reiterated the concerns about the administration being excessive. Hertel reiterated the volume of work that the administration is managing due to the three districts not being combined yet. Brooks described the administrative work schedule as 60-80 hours per person per week. Brooks asks how that workload is managed while administrative staff are deployed on conflagrations. Hertel states the deployed administration continue to work on district business while they are deployed. Hertel states deployments provide a draw for volunteers and provides funding to the district. Hertel also states that the volunteers have been eager to help during wildland fire season and have continuously been available at stations. Mishler expressed board and community frustration with sending crews to help regionally and would rather keep resources in the community. Brown reiterated the frustration stated by Mishler. Brown stated that there are volunteers willing to come in and pull shifts with their EMS certifications that are not being asked to help. Hertel states administrative staff are working with those people they are aware of and are more than happy to have them pull shifts.

Mishler asked if CTGR has different standards than these three districts, follow different rules and different training standards. Hertel stated that he would have to discuss standards with CTGR Chief Warden and that CTGR does not have to follow the same rules, regulations and standards that we do. Brooks stated this should be looked into to make sure that they do not create a liability for the three districts. Breeden stated that this has been an issue in the past between West Valley and Sheridan, where West Valley's union had concerns about Sheridan's training and safety creating West Valley liability. Hertel clarified that the county mutual aid agreement covers any liability issues between districts.

Mishler asks Heidt if there has been any progress on the plan to get the three presidents and the Chief to meet to work through a couple topics a month. Heidt suggests that a monthly date and time needs to be set for the Presidents of each district to get together and bring topics to the Chief to get it on the agenda for the general meeting. Mishler asks if there have been topics established yet. Heidt states she is waiting for each president to bring a couple topics each to the meeting. Breeden states the topics should be developed by the boards and that the three presidents should not be working on topics without the rest of the board members. Heidt and Mishler clarify this was the intention.

Mishler asks if the regular monthly joint board meeting will still be held. Hertel confirmed this. Breeden stated we could do an abbreviated meeting and just approve the financials, if needed.

A letter was read by FF/Paramedic Jakob Sessa from the union expressing their support for the direction the districts are going and their support for the administrative team. A copy of the letter is attached to this meeting.

Brooks expressed concern regarding West Valley employees being stationed at SW Polk's station without SW Polk paying their wages. Hertel clarified that each district pays the wages of their employees and those employees are stationed on a rotating basis through all three districts' station. This allows the staff to all be trained at all the stations and creates a manageable system. Brown expressed concern that this is sharing funds more than should be shared at this point or that this system creates extra expense to the district with covering overtime in other districts. Brooks expresses concern regarding the wages of employees being rotated not being equal for all districts. Hertel emphasizes that this system is set up to be as equal as possible while still moving toward the long-term goal. Breeden states he agrees that if there is added expense to the districts by this system, it should be reconsidered. Hertel states the current system does not create additional payroll expenses to any district. Breeden states he is comfortable with the system we have if that is the case.

Hertel further explained that a possible exception to this would be overtime. Staff reviewed how to process overtime and identified three options: 1) The district with the vacancy 2) The district of the employee that created the vacancy 3) The district of the employee filling the vacancy. Finance staff chose the third option. This system was chosen because it seems to be equitable overall. CFO Selections is reviewing this process and will give a report soon.

Brooks expressed concern that funds are being commingled between districts. Greenhill disagreed that there is any commingling of funds. Brooks gave the example of West Valley credit cards being used for other districts' expenses as commingling. Hertel clarified that the expenses funds are tracked, reimbursed and exchanged appropriately. CFO Selections is reviewing this process and will give a report soon.

Whitman said thank you to FF/Paramedic Jakob Sessa and the union for their hard work during the Levy and for their support.

Meeting adjourned at 4:50 PM.