

SEATAC CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

November 14, 2006
5:00 – 5:45 PM

City Hall
Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER: The SeaTac City Council Special Meeting was called to order by Mayor Gene Fisher at 5:04 p.m.

COUNCIL PRESENT: Mayor Gene Fisher, Deputy Mayor Ralph Shape, Councilmembers Anthony (Tony) Anderson, Chris Wythe (*arrived at 5:22 p.m.*), Terry Anderson, Joe Brennan, and Don DeHan.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF: City Manager Craig Ward, Assistant City Manager Tina Rogers, City Attorney Mary Mirante Bartolo, City Clerk Judith Cary, Fire Chief Bob Meyer.

PRESENTATION:

•Regional Fire Service Authority (RFPSA)

Mayor Fisher opened the presentation with background on this issue. Since the Levy Lid Lift failed, he has been approached as to where to go from here. It makes no difference whether it failed by 40 or 4,000 votes, the citizens sent a message that the City needs to rethink the City's fire services. The world changed after 911 and the City also needs to change. Since then, the concept of public protection for both fire and police has changed towards a regional approach. Even the mandatory concept of training and grant money is now geared to the unification of all responders. The City has three fire stations and three jurisdictions within 2.4 miles of one another in the north end of SeaTac. Tukwila has even better access to the north end of SeaTac via South 144th Street, than SeaTac's station on South 152nd Street and they are only about half a mile apart.

Emergency Services Consulting Inc. (ESCI) Washington (WA) Coordinator Bob Merritt introduced ESCI President Jack Snook.

Mr. Merritt stated ESCI has been asked to replay a "Exploring Fire Department Cooperative Efforts" presentation that was made at the 2006 Association of Washington (AWC) Annual Conference. ESCI is working with the AWC, WA Fire Chiefs, and WA Fire Commissioners, through a number of programs to review cooperative efforts and ways to try and help organizations work together and regionalize.

Mr. Merritt reviewed the following: (1) cooperative fire services opportunities; (2) cooperative fire service options; (3) cooperative study methodology; and (4) keys to success.

Fire service throughout WA State has the same demands pulling them in many directions: rapid growth, demands for services, involvement in special hazards and special operations, staffing and deployment, workload, soaring costs, unfunded mandates, and labor issues. Mr. Merritt stated ESCI has put together a program of finding the best solution through cooperative opportunities.

He outlined the various options in WA State: (1) cooperation, (2) consolidation, and (3) integration. He reviewed WA State projects that relate to these options.

Mr. Merritt discussed the Regional Fire Authority (RFA). This was a piece of legislature targeted for cities. A RFA was first approached in 2002 and failed. In February 2006, it was rewritten to be very workable and conducive to cities. RCW 52.26 passed in February and enacted in July 2006. The first RFA has already gone to the voters with a 72% approval rate. The RFA goals are to provide regionalization, eliminate duplication, shift costs of emergency services, and provide services that are not available to certain individual jurisdictions.

Mr. Merritt reviewed the process for forming and implementing a RFA.

Linda Snider, citizen, stated before SeaTac incorporated, the fire services were provided by the fire district. She feels this is a step backwards with the driving force being finances. Upon incorporation, the City chose to take on its own Fire Department so that the City would have control of how, when, and why the department operates. Currently, the City is working with a term called mutual aid which is with the surrounding jurisdictions.

Deputy Mayor (DM) Shape stated he is skeptical but willing to listen and keep an open mind. Upon a question posed by DM Shape, Mr. Merritt stated that the City of Algona has contracted fire service from Auburn for a number of years. The City of Pacific has its own Fire Department with career and volunteer Firefighters. Mr. Merritt stated Auburn will save \$9 million from the fact that the funding of the RFA is no longer the responsibility of the City of Auburn. Some portion of what they are currently paying to run their Fire Department, they get to keep. The RFA becomes its own entity. Mr. Merritt detailed the costs savings for Auburn and how the RFA is being funded.

PRESENTATION (Continued):

RFPSA (Continued): Normandy Park Mayor pro tem George Hadley stated the Auburn, Algona, and Pacific tax payers will end up with higher payments to government. Mr. Merritt stated taxes paid by the average household will increase by less than \$60 per year. Mr. Hadley questioned whether the Port of Seattle (POS) was invited to participate in this study with SeaTac. Mayor Fisher stated they were.

Councilmember (CM) Wythe stated he has reservations about creating another taxing district. The City now supports its own fire services. If another taxing entity is created, SeaTac will not necessarily lower its taxes. Based on Mr. Merritt's presentation, CM Wythe stated his understanding that SeaTac does not need to create another fire tax or district, but can explore how to work more efficiently with other jurisdictions to share resources. He stated he is in favor of moving ahead to explore the options if other jurisdictions are interested.

Joe Dixon, SeaTac resident, stated he favors exploring the options.

POS Fire Chief Mike Mendella applauded Mayor Fisher for the progressive thinking for exploratory purposes. Upon a question posed by Mr. Mendella, Mr. Merritt stated when the plan was put together for the Auburn, Pacific and Algona RFA, the elected officials said for 2007 the level of service (LOS) would stay as is with a strategic plan to look at standards of coverage. In 2008, a process will begin to meet the LOS identified in the strategic plan.

CM DeHan stated he previously served as the Civil Service Commission Chair. It was remarked that the regional provision of services for public safety and fire was the best way to go. SeaTac has done that with police, but not with fire. He does not know yet if he is convinced this is the right thing to do, but he does believe it is a good idea to research this and not have duplication.

Mr. Snook stated ESCI does not have a bias in this. ESCI does a lot of cooperative effort work throughout the United States (US). The observations and questions stated tonight are valid. Of the 40 or 50 cooperative service studies ESCI has conducted, all of them to some degree have been successful. He stated if SeaTac elects to move forward, having a third party review the City's organization will help the Fire Department, Fire Chief, administration and community to take that information and come up with some type of strategy for the future, even if SeaTac were to stay independent. He stated he is confident based on his experience that more cooperative effort opportunities will be discovered for these agencies.

Upon a question posed by CM Wythe, Mr. Merritt stated ESCI's total bill to Auburn was \$42,000. ESCI was hired as a facilitator only.

ADJOURNMENT:

MAYOR FISHER ADJOURNED THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SEATAC COUNCIL AT 6:05 P.M.

Gene Fisher, Mayor

Judith L. Cary, City Clerk

After the meeting adjourned, discussion continued in the courtroom with ESCI and Fire Department personnel.