

Willamette Valley Fire & Rescue Authority

Marion County Fire District No. 1

Turner Fire District

300 Cordon Rd NE, Salem

July 26, 2010

6:00 pm

Community Forum

Meeting Framework and Minutes

Purpose: To engage the community in helping strengthen the Authority in accordance with the principles of the WVFRA Way Charter.

Participating were Directors Ken Morin, Glenn Pennebaker, and Gene Schaefer. Also present were Chief Kevin Henson, Assistant Chief Dennis Robinson, Facilitator Bob McCarthy, Kris Boyer, Andrea Batchelor, Kathy Puckett, Zach Zielinski, Mark Wiesner, Gene Fiebeck, Mick Linder, Brett Peterson, Mike Anderson, Ron Rosgen, and Bob Palmer.

Facilitator Bob McCarthy presented the goals and framework for the meeting, including ground rules.

Goals:

- For individuals to feel heard.
- To answer questions and increase the accuracy of information.
- Help resolve misunderstandings and promote healing.
- Provide an opportunity for people to acknowledge their contributions to the present situation and their willingness to help make it better.

Format:

- The forum is for WVFRA personnel, district residents, property, or business owners.
- We ask that your participation is for the purpose of strengthening the Authority and your being willing to abide by these forum ground rules.
- Forum communication ground rules:
 - No speeches.
 - Speak only for yourself. Use "I."
 - Take responsibility for what you want and don't want.
 - Use questions for gathering information, not for hiding behind.
 - Listen to the other person's truth. Check out by feeding back.
- Summarize and make public the results of the meeting, including the questions and issues raised, context and facts to create an accurate synopsis of what took place.

Being Responsible Communicators (from WVFRA Charter)

We believe that open, direct and honest communication will aid us as we work together and as we manage our differences when they arise. We task the responsibility of being an effective communicator to each member because communication is a key principle of this organization. We believe a positive and healthy culture can only be developed and nurtured if we support ground rules for communication behavior in our organization:

1. Take responsibility for what you say, when you say it, and after you said it.
2. Show respect for each other in your choice of words and the tone you choose when communicating..
3. Be a great listener ... Listeners are powerful people.
4. Remember that body language is a powerful form of communication; use it wisely and effectively.
5. When all is said and done, be sure you can be proud of what you said.
6. Just as important as knowing when to start talking, is knowing when to stop.

Note: The reasons for and wisdom of creating the fire authority, as well as Kevin Henson as its Fire Chief, are issues that were reaffirmed in a Nov. 2009 joint meeting of the Boards of Directors. As such, while questions for clarity and understanding on these topics are welcome, debate to overturn them is not.

The room was arranged with chairs in a circle and without tables so participants could interact more directly. The below is a summary of questions, answers and discussion topics.

Issue:

The term adversarial has been used at several board meetings and by Chief Henson to describe labor management relations. Is this an accurate description of does it hinder making thing better?

Discussion:

Some felt adversarial accurately reflected the nature of the current climate of labor management relations, and labor relations generally. Others thought the term unnecessarily negative, divisive and an impediment to better communication. This led to a conversation about the cost of legal counsel to the Authority for assistance with personnel and related matters. Chief Henson committed to being transparent about all legal fees so everyone could see and understand the specific purposes for legal expenses. Several expressed the desire that no lawyers should be necessary in collective bargaining, and many agreed with this goal. However, when accusations are levied against the Board and the Chief, legal counsel is needed. Also legal counsel is needed to help with the complexities of the public employee collective bargaining agreement (PECBA), and comparable wages related to total compensation. That said, there was general agreement that all would like to see the trust level and communications improve in negotiations where attorneys were not needed.

Issue:

Are MCFD1 tax payers subsidizing employees to work at Turner Fire? This also led to a conversation about "TFD" vs. "MCFD1" instead of looking at the WVFRA as a whole.

Discussion:

No. Specific to the staffing of Medic 95, Chief Henson stated that TFD has consistently paid for four employees plus, the two personnel needed to complete staffing who were Qualified Tour of Duty (QTOD) volunteers. This arrangement continues although there has been the rotation and assignment of

QTOD personnel at the request of the Union, and EMS Quality Improvement division which benefits both districts and all personnel. Additional information is available for those wanting further details.

Issue:

Transparency of Board deliberations and decisions, and the public being better informed. It seems to some that there is little discussion among Board members, particularly on spending issues. Are decisions made ahead of time? How can members of the public be better informed and have information before Board meetings to review? This was followed by a request for more and better communications as well.

Discussion:

Board members stated their unconditional commitment to transparency of their decisions and support of open meetings laws. This includes abiding by the prohibition of meeting in groups larger than 2 Board members to deliberate district business. No deliberations take place in secret before a meeting, but it might seem so because Board members typically receive a board packet a week in advance of the meeting. This gives them a chance to read, think through, and ask questions of staff. This preparation can give the appearance of deciding without sufficient deliberation.

A suggestion was made to post electronic board packets on the web site for everyone to see before the Board meeting. The Board will have to decide if this is wise as it has been customary not to release documents to the general public before Board members have had a chance to review the documents. In some cases doing so could result in information being released before being adopted or edited for corrections (such as draft meeting minutes). One suggestion was that the entire packet could be marked as draft to resolve this concern.

Issue:

Is the MCFD1 Board of Directors committed to more sharing of information and dialogue with the public? How might this happen?

Discussion:

Yes. The MCFD1 Board of Directors has talked about how to have more dialogue. The meeting last week was an example of the kind of dialogue they want to encourage.

Issue:

How to have more information in common and dialogue? Is it possible to make more information available during board meetings?

Discussion:

There was agreement that it would be helpful to continue these forums, and post more information on the web site. Also posting all public meetings and Board agendas on the website would help and will be looked into.

Issue:

At what point in the McCarthy process, if any will everyone come together and work though issues together as a total Authority? Is this being planned?

Discussion:

Bob McCarthy talked about the sequence of the work so far and why it has taken this path. He was not sure if it was possible, given scheduling issues, if is possible to bring everyone together at one time.

There has been considerable pain and heartache over the past 18 month and a need for healing. In addition, the Authority needed to be better grounded with a clearer vision and foundation. The WVFRA Way Charter is that grounding. Following its adoption by the Boards, there have been meetings throughout the organization to discuss the Charter, and help determine next steps. The work now is for the Command Staff, all leaders, as well as every member to begin to model the behaviors in the Charter's Principle and Values. Each individual gets to decide if they want to be a part of a successful WVFRA? If you do, jump in the boat and let's get to work. If not, now is the time to explore other opportunities.

Issue:

Are we separating ourselves by using terms and titles such as "the Union", "the volunteers" in a context that implies one is good or bad (black hat versus white hat)? Isn't it time we move more to talking about "we" instead of us vs. them.

Discussion:

Yes. There was a clear consensus that we all need to focus more on the organization as a whole, and not subsections of a particular group.

Issue:

Should we get together the Presidents of the Volunteer Associations, the Union and Management to talk about ways to work through issues?

Discussion:

This might be a good idea. General consensus that we should talk more not less when people are feeling misunderstood. Trust rises when we spend more time together. A willingness to communicate is a big part of the barrier that we must overcome. People need to be willing to talk, improve working relationships and act in support of the Charter.

Issue:

Is their value in continuing the WVFRA Forums?

Discussion:

Yes, for a time. However we should look for other ways to improve communication throughout the organization. Training would help, particularly teaching people how to deal with conflict, how to better understand a paramilitary organization, and how to resolve old resentments. The forum may morph into another venue, and as long as communication continues, we should encourage it.

Other Suggestions:

- Provide PowerPoint presentations and visual data during public presentations at Board members that everyone can clearly understand.
- Post board meeting agendas in advance on the web site.
- Consider posting the entire board packet on the web site in advance.
- Consciously think about unifying language versus dividing language when speaking.
- Continue open dialogue at board meetings
- Facilitate one-on-one conversations to close off resentments.
- Look for opportunities to promote more positive accomplishments

The facilitator left at approximately 8:20, the meeting continued in a casual and relaxed forum for the next 45 minutes. This was recognized as what we can do when we all practice effective listening and basic communication skills.

“A change in interaction leads to a change in problem solving, resulting in a change in the organization. “

Future dates to be proposed.