

**AGENDA
SAN RAFAEL FIRE COMMISSION
VIRTUAL ZOOM MEETING**

Wednesday, December 14, 2022 @ 4:00 P.M.

Watch on Zoom: <https://cityofsanrafael-org.zoom.us/j/83441506482>

Webinar ID: 834 4150 6482

Listen by phone: +1 669 900 9128

Link to follow via Zoom email for Fire Commissioners only

Members of the Public May Speak on Agenda Items

1. Open Time for Public Expression

The public is welcome to address the Fire Commission at this time on matters not on the agenda that are within its jurisdiction. Please be advised that pursuant to Government Code Section 54954.2, the Fire Commission is not permitted to discuss or take action on any matter not on the agenda unless it determines that an emergency exists, or that there is a need to take immediate action which arose following posting of the agenda. Comments may be no longer than two minutes and should be respectful to the community.

2. Approval of Minutes – November 9, 2022

Recommended Action: Amend and or approve as submitted.

3. Fire Foundation – Verbal Update from Appropriate Commissioner(s)

Recommended Action: Accept Verbal Report and take appropriate action.

4. Chair and Commission Member Reports:

- 🗣️ Larry Luckham – Chair
- 🗣️ Nadine Hade – Vice Chair
- 🗣️ Thomas Weathers
- 🗣️ Ken Johnson
- 🗣️ David Fonkalsrud, Alternate
- 🗣️ Stan Burford
- 🗣️ Donna McCusker, Alternate

Informational only. No action to be taken on these items.

5. Fire Chief Report

Informational only. No action to be taken.

Any records relating to an agenda item, received by a majority or more of the board or commission less than 72 hours before the meeting, shall be available for inspection at San Rafael Fire Department's Administrative Office, 1375 Fifth Avenue, San Rafael, CA. Sign Language interpreters and assistive listening devices may be requested by calling (415) 485-3066 (voice), emailing Lindsay.lara@cityofsanrafael.org or using the California Telecommunications Relay Service by dialing "711", at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting. Copies of documents are available in accessible formats upon request. Public transportation is available through Golden Gate Transit, Line 22 or 23. Paratransit is available by calling Whistlestop. Wheels at (415) 454-0964. To allow individuals with environmental illness or multiple chemical sensitivity to attend the meeting/hearing, individuals are requested to refrain from wearing scented products.

City of San Rafael Fire Department

Fire Commission Meeting

Minutes of the Regular Meeting

November 9, 2022

Via ZOOM

Present:

Chair Larry Luckham
Stan Burford
Ken Johnson
David Fonkalsrud – Alternate
Donna McCusker – Alternate
Deputy Chief Bob Sinnott

Absent:

Vice Chair Nadine Atieh
Thomas Weathers

Chair Luckham called the meeting to order at 4:00 P.M.

1. **Open Time for Public Expression**

There were no members of the public in attendance.

2. **Approval of the Minutes** – October 12, 2022

Chair Luckham called for changes or additions. There were none. Commissioner Burord moved to approve; Commissioner Fonkalsrud seconded. The minutes were approved by unanimous vote of those present.

3. **Fire Foundation Report** – Commissioner McCusker

The FF got approval for military style Tee shirts for firefighters and family to wear to public events. Those have arrived as Chief Sinnott has one. Dr. Mizroch contributed \$2,500 for this project. Fund raising is underway with Dr. Mizroch and Pat Kendall preparing letters to go to corporations in December asking for donations to the Foundation. The FF is working on an “adopt a fire station” program for neighborhoods. The FF is investigating a new technology face mask that the Foundation might be able to get for the department and is looking at a proposed grant of \$9,000 for swim gear. Chair Luckham asked if the new Tee shirts will be available for FC members. Commissioner McCusker will check. She also reminded those who have not picked up the earlier shirts to do so.

Chair Luckham once more expressed a thank you to Len Thompson who brought the idea of creating a foundation to San Rafael and who spearheaded its creation. The work of the FF is greatly appreciated.

4. Commission Member Reports

- a. Commissioner Johnson reported on an insurance industry meeting where he noted several bills in the legislature that pertain to firefighter workers compensation. Ken sent out an email to the Commissioners with the details.
- b. Commissioner Fonkalsrud reported on seeing a lot of vegetation management activity around the city including Peacock Gap and McNearns. He also mentioned working with city staff on public information related to fire safety. Chair Luckham offers thanks to the Marin Wildfire Prevention Agency and the voters who approved that for providing the funding to make these things happen. He also recommended that we keep in mind on line advertising in addition to “dead tree” advertising since that’s the way many people get their information today.
- c. Commissioner Burford reported that he echoes David’s comment regarding the vegetation management effort in his neighborhood where there has been chipper activity. He also commented on a recent full page ad in the Marin IJ by the MWPA about fire safety. And he suggested that if Commissioners had ideas for fire prevention ad messaging we might try to form a relationship with MWPA that would allow the FC to suggest ideas, like the Lithium battery risk, with MWPA to be included in their advertising. Commissioner McCusker pointed out that the FF has resources and if the FC has ideas she could take them back to the FF. He also reported that in his neighborhood, Fairhills, some neighbors are skeptical about the parking boxes, but he’s working with his HOA to answer questions and point out the need. Commissioner Johnson then pointed out that most insurers, like CHUBB, are now asking at every renewal if the insured has any of those batteries on their premises. Chair Luckham pointed out that lithium ion batteries are almost everywhere these days. Referring to an article about a high rise fire in New York that also involved a spectacular rescue of a resident, that the fire was started by a lithium ion battery when a resident was repairing an electric bicycle. He then went on to discuss the chemistry of lithium ion versus regular alkali batteries and why the risk is greater with lithium ion. Commissioner McCusker asked if there is any restriction on disposing of lithium batteries in the collection boxes at fire stations. Chief Sinnott confirmed that there is not.
- d. Chair Luckham reported on the history and accomplishments of retired Fire Mechanic Steve Rutkowski who was a genius at not just apparatus maintenance but also at designing and fabricating solutions to problems. He recently presented Steve with a trophy made from a special wrench Steve had made to service the turret on the aerial ladder trucks. He also got himself trained to do the annual maintenance on firefighter air packs (SCBA’s) which can otherwise cost \$160 a year for inspection and maintenance.

I created the Photo 50 website years ago after a discussion with Chief Gray about department history, or lack thereof, to document the current history. It started with going on fire calls and taking photos. I did the same with other department events. Later after being asked to take some photos at fires for our then Fire Investigator Brad Mark, I got interested and got trained as an investigator. Along the way I added a few things of historical interest including a digital copy of the Daily Fire Log Book from January, 1911 to December, 1921. More recently I’ve scanned and added several booklets on fire prevention and fire investigation that belonged to my predecessor as Chair of the Fire

Commission, Chuck Daniels, who was an investigator for the San Rafael Fire Department, the Marin County District Attorney and other Marin departments. You are invited to take a look at <http://www.srphoto50.com>.

Next, I would like get back to in person meetings. The county has lifted most restrictions. The San Rafael City Council is now meeting in person. Not sure who has to authorize that. Chief Sinnott agreed to bring it up with Chief White next Monday. By show of hands it appears that most of us would like to resume in person meetings. The conference room at the PSC has the capacity to connect to Zoom so hybrid meetings are possible. The request was then made formal with a proposed start date of January, 2023.

I also want to discuss the article in the IJ recently announcing that the Marin County Sheriff is withdrawing from the agreement to provide dispatching services to SRFD and other Marin agencies. It took me by surprise. SRFD switched from providing fire and medical dispatching in house to the county communications center on March 2, 2009. Prior to that date we had relied on primitive dispatching equipment and 2 dispatchers to cover 24X7X365. The switch was the result of a lot of consideration and planning. The county has a new and well equipped communications center in a hardened building and the move was another step in the direction of consolidating emergency services in the county. With all due respect, Marin County has way to many chiefs including both fire and police. The county should have only two fire departments, maybe even only one. We have been slowly moving toward consolidation for years, Chief Gray was instrumental as was Chief Sinnott when he was Larkspur Fire Chief in helping with boundary drops and coordinated response. I think the direction should be toward consolidation rather than breaking things up which this seems to be. If we should be paying more, we should do so.

5. Fire Chief's Report

Chief Sinnott started by pointing out that the two antique hose carts are now in a building at Gerstle Park along with a large fire alarm panel. It's all been untouched for years. But everything is in excellent condition. He took Chief White up to see them last week. The hope is that we might be able to put the smaller hose cart on display in the lobby of the PSC. That might even include moving it by hand with a procession and ceremony.

In addition to Chief's written report he mentioned that Station 55 might be ready for occupancy before the end of the year, Station 54 probably in February. The 55 crew will be very happy to have the construction over and back to a new station with the temporary quarters gone. The Station 54 crews are however quite happy being dual housed at Station 52 where Engine 52 runs some of their calls, call volumes are down. However, the BC's are stuck in a windowless room in order to make room. Old Station 54 was such a decrepit mess the crews will be very pleased with the change. Station 55 has always been a great place with nice views, etc. Chief Gray is really to be thanked for pushing through all these new stations and the PSC.

Academy 25 was an extended academy aimed at giving the new folks more training before they get out to the field since although they are all paramedic qualified coming in many have had no field experience after training. The hope is that this will cut down on early washouts. The training staff including Nurse Educator Katie Pannell were celebrated for their contribution to the success of the academy.

The comm center news came as a shock to all the fire agencies. The comm center dispatches for all Marin County fire agencies except Marin County Fire which has its own dispatch center. They justify having their own dispatch because they are also a Cal Fire contractor which imposes certain requirements, including that there be an on duty Captain that can override any dispatch decision. But the Marin County Fire dispatch is outdated and Chief Weber sees this as a possible opportunity to upgrade their dispatch and take on dispatching for all of the Marin fire agencies possibly run by Marin County Fire, but this would be run by fire agencies for fire agencies without the distraction that sometimes comes with a mixed police/fire/medical center.

Chief Sinnott pointed out that although we have multiple fire agencies in the county we all work as one, with the same training, the same standards, and the same equipment so that personnel in the county can go to work on any other agencies calls working seamlessly.

Fire on October 27 on Woodland, was a cooking fire that the occupant tried to extinguish, unsuccessfully. It completely burned out the origin unit on the first floor with heavy smoke damage on the unit above. Both of those were uninhabitable. The rest of the units in the building were undamaged. It was determined that there were 9 occupants in each of the damaged 2 bedroom, 1 bath units. Nine each! Snapshot of the housing issue out there.

November 2 we had a single family house fire on First Street an unoccupied residence, hoarding situation, where the resident had been living elsewhere for months. The fire appears to have been incendiary, that is intentional. There was evidence of multiple point of ignition in a hallway. MCFIT and SRPD CSI are investigating.

Chair Luckham called for any additional comments. Hearing none he closed the meeting at 5:17 P.M. after acknowledging personal responsibility for talking way too long and running the meeting into overtime.

Prepared by: Chair Luckham



To: San Rafael Fire Commission

From Darin White, Fire Chief

Date: December 14, 2022

Re: Monthly Report

Special Boards and Commissioners Reception Today at City Hall

I placed this at the top of the report as just a reminder to all that on Wednesday December 14, 2022 (today) the City of San Rafael is hosting a reception for Commissioners and Board members at the Falkirk Cultural Center (1408 Mission Ave) from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. We look forward to seeing all who can make it!

Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority-Vegetation Management

The planning process for the 2023/2024 Work Plan is underway. The Work Plan Portal is being fine-tuned and the Advisory/Technical and Operations Committee meetings will be starting up again in early December. RESIDENT GRANT PROGRAM: The grant programs were launched in July 2022. To date, 767 grant applications from residents have been either initiated, submitted, or awarded. Over the fiscal year \$435,000 has been distributed to homeowners in Marin County for home hardening and defensible space work bringing the cumulative total to \$540,000 thus far.

The MWPA [Strategic Plan](#) and [Annual Report](#) are now online and available to view. In addition, there are multiple means through which information about the MWPA can be accessed by the Commissioners, Board of Directors, and interested community members. Please see the bullets below:

- [News Article on MWPA website](#)
- [Gallery image on MWPA homepage](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [Twitter](#)

Guidelines/COVID-19:

An estimated 94% of people in the U.S. have been infected with the COVID-19 virus at least once, according to a new paper from researchers at Harvard’s School of Public Health. The high infection rate is attributed to the omicron variant’s record-shattering case rates early this year and booster rates that failed to reach levels that experts had hoped would be achieved. However, the good news is that as of the early part of November, the percentage of people with some protection from new infections and severe disease is “substantially higher than in December 2021,” according to researchers. Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, a professor of

medicine at the University of California San Francisco who specializes in infectious diseases and did not participate in the study believes we are in the best position thus far in the pandemic. This is not to be confused with COVID being less prevalent than before or people are less susceptible to it. In fact, public health officials are warning that cases are rising again. The findings are not completely certain since the information is based on statistics as opposed to actual testing of American persons. The researchers have opted to rely on diagnoses, hospitalizations, and vaccinations data from the Centers for Disease Control. The team of researchers estimated that 29.1% of Americans have been vaccinated and infected, 55.7% are vaccinated and re-infected, 2.4% are unvaccinated and infected, 7% are unvaccinated and re-infected. Of those who have never been infected, about 63% are vaccinated: 3.5% of Americans, as opposed to 2.1% who are unvaccinated and never infected.

In December 2021, 59.2% of people had been infected with the COVID-19 virus, they estimated. The study estimated that since that time there have been 116 million first infections in the country and 209 million reinfections, with nearly all resulting from omicron sub-variants.

During each year of the pandemic, the largest surges in California have happened over the winter holidays, but the fact that so many people got COVID earlier this year means fewer might be vulnerable this holiday season, the researchers found. At the beginning of this year the first omicron wave smashed all previous case records, sickening millions but also raising the level of immunity in the population, for at least a while. Despite the reportedly high levels of immunity, COVID continues to be a killer virus and infection rates are climbing.

Recent reports indicate that the significant increase in COVID infections and hospitalizations in Los Angeles County are leading to a potential reinstatement of the mask mandates that had been rescinded months ago. In the South Bay, officials in Santa Clara are reportedly seeing higher levels of COVID in wastewater than during the Omicron phase of the pandemic. It is unclear what actions, if any, may be taken in response to the increased infection rates and hospitalizations. Given the amount of flu, RSV, and COVID infections thus far it is recommended that all continue to wash their hands, wear face masks, and obtain COVID boosters and/or vaccinations to evade the severest symptoms of the COVID virus.

Marin County Fire Dispatch Update

On Monday August 22, 2022, the Marin County Fire Chiefs met with the new Marin County Sheriff, Jaime Scardina. Sheriff Scardina advised the Fire Chiefs that he would be making a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors that all fire agencies in Marin County establish a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) amongst themselves as opposed to the existing contract for services agreement that is in place.

It appears that there are a variety of reasons this has become the preferred solution, including, but not limited to:

- Prior history of complaints from the fire chiefs when asking for some technological components the previous Sheriff was either unwilling or unable to entertain.
- The Fire Chiefs identification and questioning of charges that are being incurred for services that aren't delivered occasionally, if at all.
- The Sheriff's Office has experienced some challenges with recruitment, selection, hiring, and training of new dispatchers.
- They stated they have not cost recovered at least \$300-\$500k worth of annual employee leave and training costs for fire dispatch personnel.
- The Sheriff's Office was aware that the Fire Chiefs Association investigated joining REDCOM as a possible alternative to the current contract. However, joining REDCOM proved to be a non-

starter due to multiple factors involving American Medical Response's (AMR) role and price points for a joint Sonoma-Marin County regional dispatch center, and recent legislation pertaining to this type of contractual arrangement between private and public entities.

Since my arrival to the SRFD in 2020, both myself and Chief Tyler of Novato, have expressed satisfaction with the actual fire dispatch services as they are provided now. However, both of us did express concern to the previous Sheriff (Doyle) about significant cost increases we had faced during the past 2 years. At the August 22nd meeting with newly elected Sheriff Scardina, we again reiterated our satisfaction with the current dispatch services as coordinated by Heather Costello. Unfortunately, that did not garner much of a reply. The Sheriff said he would recommend the JPA model become operational by July of 2023. The Sheriff said he is willing to allow staff to utilize the CAD system and other facilities at the MCSO Dispatch Center. In that instance, we would be co-located with law enforcement dispatchers but more as tenants than partners at the Dispatch Center.

I've reached out to San Rafael Police Department (SRPD) Chief Dave Spiller to gauge his interest in providing fire dispatch services using existing and additional staff to provide services to San Rafael Fire Department, Marinwood Fire Department, and maybe other agencies in the County. We discussed the value of a feasibility study which could take into consideration a conceptual view of a San Rafael centric fire and police dispatch model. This will be a long-term study that will be completed in the next couple of years. I also reached out to the Information Technology Director to conduct a rough estimate of costs to provide services internally.

An interesting development occurred when we met to discuss the situation again over breakfast (in Sacramento) before the first session of the Cal Chiefs Conference on Wednesday September 14, 2022. MCFD Fire Chief Jason Weber revealed that he might be willing to enter a contract for services to provide for our countywide fire dispatch services and thereby keep everything unified. Additionally, costs will be capped at 3% increases annually during the 5-year contract.

During our monthly MCFCA meetings we continue to meet and discuss the staffing model and projected costs. Since the September meeting I have reiterated that we would likely conduct a cost analysis of the contract for services model versus seeking to have SRPD perform this service. This will inform what we should do as San Rafael bears the largest expense due to our use of the system (call volume, projected increase in price, population served, etc.). Coming out of the initial meeting with the Sheriff we all agreed that a win for the Fire Chiefs consists of:

- 1) Significantly more time than the Sheriff proposed (10 months) to find and implement a solution
- 2) We need to be able to provide a strong rationale for whichever path is chosen
- 3) Attempt to work cooperatively with the MCSO in our efforts to stand up a functional dispatch capability at the Los Gamos site
- 4) Being able to accurately project, forecast, and even control costs.

Another stakeholder meeting will be held just prior to the Christmas Holiday break to further discuss impacts, costs, and operational needs.

Station 54 and Station 55 Renovations

Station 54



Station 55



Construction crews continue to work tirelessly at both sites to complete the projects ahead of schedule.

A Look Back in Time (148th anniversary)

According to multiple sources, the San Rafael Fire Department was first organized on December 5, 1874, when William Miller and J.B. Rice posted a notice in the [Marin County Journal](#), calling for volunteers to serve as firefighters. The organization was first named the "San Rafael Hose Company Number One" but was then renamed the "San Rafael Hose, Hook and Ladder Company" to show the range of their equipment. There were 45 volunteers from a variety of trades including a justice of the peace and a school superintendent and were led by sheriff James Tunstede. Their first major appliance was a [hose cart](#) which was pulled by hand to a [hydrant](#). The water supply of San Rafael at that time relied on gravity to provide pressure and so a pump was not required. By the 1890s, the company had 90 volunteer members, two hand pulled hose carts, two hose carriages and one hook and ladder wagon that was pulled by a rented team of horses when needed.

The department's first horses, Tom and Jerry are pictured below, circa 1910.



The San Rafael Volunteer Fire Department at the fire station's original location, circa 1910.

Courtesy of Marin History Museum

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the department had hose carts that had to be pulled by volunteers to the scene of the fire. By the 1890s, there were more than 50 fire hydrants that were fed by a gravity-water system and the hose carts were pulled by horses rented from local stables. This rental process and system came under a great deal of criticism in 1907 as being too slow and antiquated. A pair of iron-gray horses named Tom and Jerry were purchased for the department, along with a hook and ladder carriage, and an alarm system that rang a bell at the firehouse and in the volunteers' homes. The horses became quite popular as they were always the first on the scene when a fire broke out.

This method of firefighting often involved residents who would come to the aid of the volunteers. One night in June 1913, a fire broke out in a shed behind William Lichtenberg's mansion across the street from the Dominican Convent. Aroused from their slumber by the fire alarm, scores of female students joined other neighbors in forming a bucket brigade and helped extinguish the flames before it consumed the entire house.



The SR Fire Commission in 2014: (l-r) Steve Mizroch, Len Thompson, Pete Martin, Aaron Golbus, Larry Luckham, Carolyn Lenert and Tom Weathers.

