

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 McNeers. 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

