



BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

SNOHOMISH REGIONAL FIRE & RESCUE

SRFR Station 31 Training Room / Via Zoom

163 Village Court, Monroe, WA 98272

June 3, 2025, 1730 hours

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Elmore called the meeting to order at 1730 hours. Chairman Mills called the meeting to order for Snohomish County Fire District #4 (SCFD #4) at 1730 hours.

In attendance from SRFR were: Fire Chief O'Brien, Commissioner Alsin, Commissioner Edwards, Chairman Elmore, Vice Chairman Fay, Commissioner Schaub, Commissioner Steinruck, and Commissioner Waugh; and District Secretary Snure was an excused absence. Also in attendance from SCFD #4 were: Fire Chief Waller, Commissioner Erickson, and Commissioner Merritt; and via Zoom was Chairman Mills.

PUBLIC COMMENT

N/A

UNION COMMENT

IAFF Representative Ray Sayah thanked everyone for being here, goodwill to everyone for your good work. He commented that he appreciates the work we are doing here.

JOINT MEETING WITH SCFD #4 REGARDING 5/13 LETTER FROM SCFD #4 TO SRFR

Introductions & Backgrounds

All Commissioners and Fire Chiefs introduced themselves.

Joint Meeting Expectations

Chairman Elmore commented that both chairs worked together to determine the topics for discussion for this evening. He asked the commissioners to share their expectations for this meeting.

Commissioner Waugh commented that he would like to start formal talks and form a committee to work towards a merger or RFA. We would want all the various divisions within the departments to be a part of the discussions.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that he hopes we can put all egos aside and put the public's interest first. He hopes we can come together as one and work on this.



Commissioner Schaub commented that this is a good first start; and there is lots to be discovered about each of our districts. We are on a journey to find a new chief and hope to have someone in place by July.

Chairman Elmore commented that he believes in regionalization whenever possible and when it makes sense. The path that we take to get there is the challenging part.

Commissioner Alsin suggested that we go through the bullet points that Commissioner Mills had in his email.

D4 Chairman Mills commented that he hopes that we will have an opportunity over time to see whether this is a good time and if it makes sense to have a cooperative working relationship during this season.

Vice Chairman Fay commented that he would like to see us get the right group of people involved to draft a timeline for this. What do we want for the end result and where do we start to get there. His expectation is that we agree on how we want to move forward.

Chairman Elmore commented that once both boards agree that there is a reasonable benefit for both organizations, we can move forward with subcommittees. Longterm it will be very helpful to have a third-party help facilitate the process, as there will be a lot of moving pieces, and there needs to be a collection point for all the data.

Commissioner Steinruck commented that it is very encouraging to have everyone in the room to have the conversation. Previous mergers took a lot of conversations and trust; as merging the cultures is a huge challenge. Ultimately the people will have to vote for it, in order for it to happen.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that most anyone who looks at the map will see that it makes sense; as long as we can come to an agreement.

D4 Commissioner Erickson commented that we need to do the right thing for the public overall.

Commissioner Waugh commented that our employees, citizens and the boards need to define some structure on how to get where we want to go. How can we do this without overloading our staff that are already busy? We want each individual to have an opportunity to express their concerns. We will need a consultant to help keep the ball moving, so we continue to move forward.

D4 Commissioner Erickson suggested a visual board for ongoing reference, including the individual steps we take along the way and the goals we want to accomplish.



Q&A – Current Status Between Departments

D4 Commissioner Mills commented that it sounds like there are questions about the original intent of sending the letter and the expected outcome.

Vice Chairman Fay asked if the letter is a proposal or is the intent to open the door for discussions; and D4 Chairman Mills commented that it was meant to open the door for discussions.

Fire Chief O'Brien commented that the training divisions are working well together.

D4 Training Representative Hammer commented that we have been meeting together since September of 2024, at least one or two times per week. We are working with South County as well.

D4 Fire Chief Waller commented that RLB is the main training center for the east side; and the chiefs continue to meet together.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that our hope was to have the conversation.

1. *Having a brand new chief jump right into labor negotiations may not be wise or beneficial. Not knowing the culture, or the history, he/she would be at a distinct disadvantage.*

Chairman Elmore commented that the Fire Chief doesn't do the labor negotiations for SRFR.

2. *Having a brand new chief jump right into merger discussions could have similar detrimental effects, for the same reasons, and would likely slow that process.*

D4 Commissioner Merritt agrees, a new chief is going to have their own agenda.

D4 Commissioner Erickson commented that it will depend on the new chief and their background.

Commissioner Schaub commented that after two mergers, it is clear that each district has their own culture. When we come together, those cultures will shift and change.

Vice Chairman Fay asked Chief O'Brien for his perspective, as he was the new chief coming into District 7.

Chief O'Brien agreed with D4 Commissioner Erickson, it will depend on the chief and the process. Let them know you are committed to the merger process with District 4 and ask them for their thoughts on it. Merging is a very challenging process. Even with all the challenges, it makes sense for the communities.



D4 Commissioner Mills explained he was not trying to convince everyone of these statements we are reviewing. It was just an attempt to provide some background on where we are coming from at District 4.

Commissioner Alsin commented that he appreciates the talking points, and offered that a new chief could potentially expedite the process.

D4 Fire Chief Waller commented that he is confident in his own skills, and this is about a unique moment in time. Do we want to be proactive or reactive? One person could start to align the two organizations, and learn the culture. We could align our communication models, with a proactive nature, building trust and honesty. A consultant could do great on the plan, but not with the aligning of the cultures.

Vice Chairman Fay commented that the majority of the board would like to move forward with the recruitment process. Can we determine if we are going to go with an interim solution or not. District 7 created problems of their own with Monroe and Lake Stevens. Blending two administrative staffs is more than a tweak and then you are also working with additional commissioners. The first year was all consuming and we still made mistakes. We understand that you are an excellent administrator, however there are so many more elements to consider.

Chairman Elmore commented that Chief Waller's comments on culture were spot on. You don't know what you don't know; and you address things as you move through them. He likes the concept of merging divisions first.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that if the two boards can get in alignment on this, the workload shouldn't slow down the process.

Vice Chairman Fay commented that we cannot burnout our admin staff who are critical to our efforts. We need to protect our admin staff just as much as protect the rank and file.

D4 Commissioner Erickson commented that we need to have the discussion and see what they can take on.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that when the problems arise, we have very capable chiefs and very capable individuals to help with problem solving.

Commissioner Schaub commented as we go through the hiring process, the new chief will know we are working towards a merger.



Chairman Elmore commented that we have a very robust administration, there will never be enough members to accomplish what we want to do. We have a high-powered team, and they take on huge workloads and accomplish amazing things. This will be an additional workload for everyone. It is healthy for us to have the conversation. There are two fundamental questions. What are we going to do with our chief search? Do our two organizations, at the board level, want to begin down the path towards a merge?

3. *Having a brand-new chief jump right into either of the above could be a good opportunity to evaluate him/her.*
4. *I don't think you could find a chief officer in all of Snohomish County (possibly the whole state) who has more experience and knowledge in the area of labor negotiations and/or labor law than Chief Waller.*

Chairman Elmore commented that we recognize Chief Waller has an extensive background.

5. *If Chief Waller was to apply, in addition to sending a negative message to the FD4 people, if he was then to not be retained for whatever reason, well...*
6. *If Chief Waller was employed as a "contract" Chief for a selected period of time, the process of merger talks would be expedited due to him already knowing the culture of FD4.*

Commissioner Alsin commented that our last meeting had a suggestion to pause the chief recruitment process. Is there a path where Chief Waller could potentially step in as an interim?

Commissioner Schaub commented that at the last meeting we decided that we would go forward with the fire chief recruitment process.

D4 Commissioner Merritt commented that he thought we would possibly discuss it further at this meeting.

Chairman Elmore commented that unless a commissioner has changed their position, we will continue with the chief search process. At this time, our target for hiring is July 1, so there could be a two-week onboarding process.

Commissioner Schaub suggested that we share our search schedule with the SCFD #4 Commissioners.

Commissioner Waugh commented whichever direction we go, he still hopes that we won't deviate from the path of a merger. With the blending of cultures/divisions, we are probably talking about a one-year process.



D4 Commissioner Erickson commented that what he is hearing is that SRFR is going to hire a new chief and direct the new chief to move towards a merger with SCFD #4.

Vice Chairman Fay asked how we would determine whether we go with a merger vs an RFA.

Chairman Elmore and Commissioner Waugh confirmed that it will take further discussion.

Commissioner Schaub asked how a merger would affect accreditation.

Assistant Chief Messer commented that with two districts merging, nothing changes and we stay accredited. If we were to do an RFA, there would be different articles that we would need to write into the RFA and then our accreditation would follow us as well, as long as we document it correctly. Moving forward we would need to incorporate the new district with the rewrites of the Strategic Plan, Annual Report, Standard of Cover, etc.

Collaboration Opportunities

Chairman Elmore commented that we have previously discussed a number of possibilities. Is there collaboration when it comes to staffing? He asked for any collaborative ideas that we haven't already discussed.

D4 Commissioner Mills asked about our elections, levies and funding, and how they align. Additional opportunities for collaboration could include staffing and policies. He hopes that we could create smaller groups and then bring the issues back to the commissioner meetings for discussion.

D4 Commissioner Merritt suggested more meetings like this evening, whenever we can make it happen, and eventually consider joining board meetings.

D4 Commissioner Erickson suggested that we establish a dual path. What can we start doing together today? What is it going to take if we all decide we are going to be a joint fire department or RFA?

Vice Chairman Fay commented that it would be beneficial to do some vision casting, to learn the priorities and current projects for both districts.

Business Administrator Schoof commented that looking at a collaboration is exciting. We have a very strong administration, and it would be a pleasure to run an analysis. We continue to review our funding models and consider the options.

Chairman Elmore recommended that we consider working with a consultant in order to move forward.

D4 Commissioner Merritt asked if the districts would split the costs for the consultant.



D4 Commissioner Erickson agreed that a consultant would keep us focused and moving in the right direction.

D4 Commissioner Mills commented that he is divided about working with a consultant. It wouldn't be a bad thing for the districts to work together on their own for the first 3-6 months regarding consolidation discussions and identify those collaboration opportunities.

D4 Commissioner Erickson would like to see each organization put together a presentation on their current priorities and projects. It needs to be an open conversation on both sides.

D4 Commissioner Mills suggested small groups can get together for half a day and identify those collaboration areas, and then come back together to a joint board meeting once a month to review information from the subcommittees. It just takes a few people to keep the momentum.

Chairman Elmore reviewed that we have discussed creating the subcommittees, having the boards meet together monthly, and then eventually having a joint retreat with a State of the Departments.

Considering three subcommittees which would include one SCFD #4 member with each committee.

- Cultural Integration
- Finance
- Operations
- Capital Facilities

D4 Commissioner Merritt suggested that the two chairs get together to define the topics.

Both boards agreed to splitting the cost of the consultant when we get to that time.

Commissioner Schaub asked about adding SCFD #4 to our Darkhorse data; and Assistant Chief Messer confirmed we have already have access to their data.

Chairman Elmore asked at what point are we going to have labor in the room with us. He will discuss it further with D4 Chairman Mills.

D4 Commissioner Erickson asked if we are being restrictive in the boundaries we are looking at, are we limiting ourselves? Should we consider additional boundaries?

Commissioner Waugh asked if both boards are 100% supportive of moving forward with the merger discussion, and moving into the committee phase. There was no objection.

D4 Commissioner Erickson agreed there are some things that we can start working on together.

Vice Chairman Fay asked that everyone share their contact information.



D4 Commissioner Mills agreed it would be helpful to have a list of contact information for reference, and D4 Commissioner Erickson requested that we include each person's preferred method of communication.

Chairman Elmore asked that the contact list include our fire chiefs and division heads.

Future Meetings Schedule

Chairman Elmore asked how frequently we should plan to meet jointly.

D4 Commissioner Merritt suggested a monthly meeting would be great.

D4 Commissioner Mills suggested that we give the chairs an opportunity to get together.

D4 Commissioner Erickson suggested that we plan for a meeting in a month.

Chairman Elmore confirmed that the best day of the week for a joint meeting would be the second Tuesday of the month. We will plan to alternate locations, and our next meeting will be in Snohomish.

D4 Commissioner Mills commented that he is excited to have these discussions, and he thanked the SRFR commissioners for entertaining these ideas.

There was one question from the public about public involvement with the Meet and Greet on Sunday, Monday's chief interviews, and the next joint meeting.

Chairman Elmore confirmed that the Meet & Greet on Sunday is open to our public, to meet the fire chief candidates. Most of Monday's meeting will be behind closed doors as it is the testing process. Additionally, the joint board meetings will be open to the public with remote options available via Zoom.

SRFR Meeting Reminders:

- Special Commissioner Meeting, Sunday, June 8, 2025 at 1730 - Station 31 Training Room/Zoom
- Special Commissioner Meeting, Monday, June 9, 2025 at 1600 – Station 31 Training Room/Zoom
- Regular Commissioner Meeting, Thursday, June 12, 2025 at 1730 – Station 31 Training Room/Zoom

Chairman Elmore thanked everyone for their time this evening. It's great to see progress moving in a positive direction.

Commissioner Steinruck thanked everyone for joining us this evening.



ADJOURNMENT


Chairman Elmore adjourned the meeting at 1930 hours.



Commissioner Davin Alsin



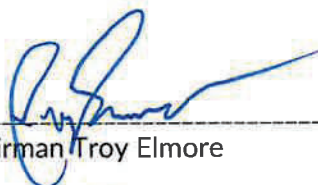
Commissioner Jeff Schaub




Commissioner Rick Edwards




Commissioner Jim Steinruck



Chairman Troy Elmore



Commissioner Roy Waugh



Vice Chairman Randy Fay