The Reno City Council, Washoe County Board of Commissioners, Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) Board of Fire Commissioners and Sierra Fire Protection District (SFPD) Board of Fire Commissioners held a meeting at 1:38 p.m. on Tuesday, May 26, 2015 in the Washoe County Commission Chambers, 1001 East 9th Street, Building A.

PRESENT: Council Members Bobzien, Brekhus, Duerr, Delgado, McKenzie and Jardon and Mayor Schieve.

ABSENT: None.

ALSO PRESENT: City Manager Clinger, City Attorney Hall and City Clerk Turney.

WASHOE COUNTY COMMISSIONER MARSHA BERKBIGLER PRESIDED.

Assistant District Attorney Paul Lipparelli requested that the Fire Commissioners to be mindful during today discussions that there is litigation pending between the City of Reno and the Fire District and not discuss matters involving that litigation. Generally speaking those matters are issues concerning accounting under the old interlocal agreement and Workers Compensation and performance under the former interlocal agreement.

Reno City Attorney Karl Hall encouraged the Reno City Council Members not to discuss the pending litigation referred to by Mr. Lipparelli.

4. Public Comment.

George Newell, Warm Springs resident, said that they have a volunteer fire department and he opposes consolidation.
4. **Public Comment** – continued

Gary Gamroth, Washoe County resident, discussed best practices and Reno’s insistence on a four-person crew.

Carole Fineberg, Reno resident, discussed her concerns about consolidation.

Jane Lyon, Reno resident, discussed her concerns about consolidation, and support for using volunteer firefighters.

Cliff Lowe, Washoe County resident, discussed emergency services concerns.

Ken Keppe stated his opposition to the amendment.

Dr. Robert Parker discussed his opposition to consolidation.

Cathy Brandhorst discussed several subjects.

5. Overview of current fire department organization, governance, funding and operation:

a. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff on the City of Reno Fire Department.

Dave Cochran, Interim Reno Fire Chief, provided an overview of the Reno Fire Department’s (RFD) operations.

Commissioner Vaughn Hartung asked if a call is counted as a single incident regardless of how many apparatus are sent out on the call.

Chief Cochran stated that a call is counted as one incident regardless of the number of apparatus sent out on the call.

Council Member Brekhus noted that approximately 23% of Reno’s General Fund is committed to the Fire Department.

b. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff on the Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection Districts.

Charlie Moore, TMFPD and SFPD Fire Chief, presented the report.

Council Member McKenzie said that during the downturn in the economy everyone saw a reduction in assessed value. If there was no tax increase involved in raising the assessment for the Fire Districts, will that be returned as the assessed value comes back?
5.b. Presentation … Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection Districts – continued

Chief Moore said that the tax rate was increased from 47 cents per $100 to 54 cents per $100, but that did not increase the net aggregate amount of tax revenue. What it did was reduce the decline, so without that tax rate increase we would have lost 9%. With the tax rate increase we were still down 7%. On average no one saw a tax increase on their tax bill.

Council Member McKenzie said that the tax rate was increased even if it was increased to offset the fall in assessed values. He asked if that means the Fire Districts plan to return that as the assessed values return.

Chief Moore stated that it is too far in the future to be able to answer that question.

Council Member Brekhus said that she was not aware that Consolidated Tax (CTAX) helps fund the Department, and asked if they have authority to receive CTAX or if it flows through the County’s CTAX distribution to the independent fire agencies. And if it does come from the County, is the origin of that CTAX strictly from the unincorporated areas?

Chief Moore stated that they are a separate taxing district from the County.

Vicki Van Buren, Fiscal Officer for TMFPD, said that the Department of Taxation distributes to the County CTAX that is dedicated to the District. The County then distributes it to the District.

Robert Chisel, City of Reno Director of Finance and Administration, and Council Member Bobzien discussed the collection and distribution of CTAX monies.

Council Member Duerr asked if Reno is in the minority with a four-person crew, and if a three-person crew is the norm for cities of a certain size.

Chief Moore said that with the size of the structures in downtown Reno and the urban core it is not inappropriate to have four-person crews. Where the risk is concentrated you need to concentrate your fire resources. There should be a match between the size of the structures and the density, and the amount of resources you can apply. Factored in is the frequency of calls you have and things like the age of the structures and whether or not they have sprinklers. If I were your Chief I would want four-person crews in your downtown. On the peripheral it is probably less necessary. A lot of the structures we protect, particularly in the North Valleys, are single-family residential structures and do not require a ladder truck. By and large most of our structures are not high rises. I believe the strategy to protect this area should be on concentric rings where firefighter resources are concentrated in the downtown core and as you get out farther in the
5.b. Presentation … Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection Districts – continued

rural areas you drop that to three. In the very rural fringe you use volunteers, at least as a first response, supplemented then by the career responses that are coming. As far as I know, Reno is the only department in northern Nevada that uses four-person crews. Carson City, North Lake North Tahoe, Sparks, Truckee Meadows and Clark County all use three-person crews. Had we not gone from four to three we would have faced the closing of stations. All of our stations must remain open because of the geographical area we serve – we are more spread out than the City of Reno.

Chief Cochran said that there are four-person companies in Henderson, Clark County, the City of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas. Reno has an ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating of 2, which is largely driven by the fact that we have four-person companies, and that rating is city-wide.

Council Member Delgado asked if the Districts support SB185, noting that the City opposes it. You seem to be doing so well and I wonder if you see consolidation or automatic aid as something we should not pursue.

Chief Moore said that automatic aid is what we can do right now to help the citizens. There are places where we can help the City and no doubt there are places where the City can help the District. I personally support SB185, and so does our Board.

Mayor Schieve asked what the start-up costs were to the District after deconsolidation occurred.

After seeking legal counsel’s advice, Chief Moore replied that he did not have the information on hand, but it is documented in the internal auditor’s report. There was some equipment we had to buy and some that was not returned that we had to replace, and there were other ancillary costs of repairs. The internal auditor did confirm that in the first year we saved just shy of $3 million from the costs that we were paying the City to the costs of standing up our District.

Chief Cochran said that the original budgeted amount was approximately $1.2 million which climbed to approximately $2 million, but he was unsure what the actual final cost was.

Commissioner Lucey said that according to the presentation Stations 7, 11 and 19 showed a significantly smaller number of responses in 2014, and asked where they are located and why the numbers were lower at those stations.
Chief Cochran said that Station #7 is on Skyline, Station #19 is in the Somersett area towards Del Webb, and Station #11 is on the east edge of Somersett on the west edge of town. Those areas usually generate a lower volume of calls, and while Station #11 was open 100% of the time, Stations #7 and #19 were browned-out a portion of the time.

Commissioner Hartung asked if Reno has areas without hydrants and if they have water tenders.

Chief Cochran said that Reno does not have water tenders but does have roughly 10,000 hydrants throughout the City.

Commissioner Hartung asked how fire detection times factor into the use of three and four-person companies.

Chief Moore said that every fire is different and it is not true over the long term that more firefighters responding quicker will result in less damage. Some fires are detected quickly while others are not detected until there are flames coming out a window. Fire detection is the key to getting the fire department on the way quickly. The chance of surviving a fire doubles with a working smoke detector.

Commissioner Hartung said that it does not matter what kind of response you throw at it, it will burn more quickly if you have accelerants involved.

Alison Gordon, Washoe County Internal Auditor, said that the transition costs to start up the District were estimated at $1.4 million, which did not include station development at Mogul or Hidden Valley.

Mayor Schieve asked what it costs to build a station, and Ms. Gordon replied that she did not have those numbers available at this time.

Discussion ensued regarding the possibility of staffing the Sun Valley or other of the District’s stations with four or six-person crews; the 3% cap on assessed values and the ever increasing cost of wages, health insurance and fuel; regionalizing dispatch services; and truck and rescue unit response.

Sarah Chvilicek, Washoe County resident and former Chair of the Blue Ribbon Committee for Regional Fire Services, discussed the absence of the cities of Reno and Sparks and the Reno Tahoe Airport Authority in the discussions about regional fire services. She stated that automatic aid must happen because it is in the best interests of the citizens.
5.b. Presentation … Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection Districts – continued

Sam Dehne, Reno resident, presented his views on this issue.

Vicky Maltman, Sun Valley resident, discussed her support for volunteer fire departments.

Russell Earl, Washoe County resident and retired Oakland Fire Lieutenant, said that financial well-being is not the same as safety well-being, and there are areas that can be improved. We need regionalized fire service and it should be a cooperative not forced effort.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THIS ITEM.

6. Overview of Automatic Aid: opportunities and challenges:

a. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff regarding the City of Reno Fire Department.

Dave Cochran, Interim Reno Fire Chief, made the presentation.

Council Member McKenzie and Chief Cochran discussed the availability of water tenders and fire hydrants in the City and County, and the fact that the firefighters do not train together, nor does Reno train with volunteer firefighters.

Council Member McKenzie stated that the existing language of SB185, as introduced, does not provide an opportunity to talk about or resolve these issues, it just says it is going to happen. The amendment that was proposed gives us a chance to hash out all these issues, and if are going to make this work we need the professionals that have to fight the fires bring those issue to us so we can find ways to resolve them.

Discussion ensued regarding Reno’s browned-out fire stations; Reno’s automatic and mutual aid agreements; best practice of having unified dispatch for automatic aid; 60-90 day timeframe for enacting an agreement if SB185 goes into effect as currently penned and without amendments; technological challenges with implementing an automatic aid agreement; International Fire Service Training Association standards; the County’s automatic aid and joint training agreements with the City of Sparks; making contractual agreements that provide for a safer community; defining mutual versus automatic aid; and the prospect of including dispatch services in an automatic aid agreement.
AGENDA
ITEM
NO.

6.a. Overview of Automatic Aid … City of Reno Fire Department – continued

Commissioner Berkbigler stated that bigger government should stay out of lesser government’s way and business. My preference is a piece of legislation that is open enough to allow us to work together, and allow us to trust each other enough to do what is best for our constituents.

b. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff regarding the Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection Districts.

Charlie Moore, TMFPD and SFPD Fire Chief, presented the report.

Commissioner Lucey and Chief Moore discussed exclusive right to serve, training and ISO issues involved in automatic aid with the cities of Reno and Sparks.

Discussion ensued regarding average response times for the District and City of Reno; fire service to Boomtown; factors considered by the District before calling for aid from Reno and/or Sparks; delays by the District in calling for assistance from Reno and/or Sparks; automatic aid for emergency medical services; volunteer fire services under the framework of an automatic aid agreement; crew size determinations; services provided by volunteer firefighters; issues involved in implementing the District’s automatic aid agreement with the City of Sparks; developing a framework for automatic aid negotiations; and the possibility of adopting the amendment.

Commissioner Berkbigler stated that since the amendment was not agendized, the County cannot at this time take a position on it.

Discussion ensued regarding including the proposed amendment provided by the City of Reno in the public record.

Cliff Lowe, Washoe County resident, presented his views on deconsolidation and the City of Reno’s testimony to the Legislature.

Tom Garrison, Sparks Fire Chief, discussed why a consolidated dispatch system is not required in order to provide automatic aid and why it is not an obstacle to implementing an automatic aid agreement. We should not wait for consolidation to do automatic aid.

COMMISSIONER BERKBIGLER ABSENT AT 3:36 P.M.  COMMISSIONER HARTUNG PRESIDED IN COMMISSIONER BERKBIGLER’S ABSENCE.

Sam Dehne, Reno resident, presented his views on this issue.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THIS ITEM.
7. Overview of Regional Fire Services:
   
a. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff regarding the City of Reno Fire Department proposal for fire consolidation.
   
Dave Cochran, Interim Reno Fire Chief, presented the report.

b. Presentation, discussion and potential direction to staff regarding the Truckee Meadows/Sierra Fire Protection District proposal for fire consolidation, including but not limited to, an overview of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Regional Fire, 2014 – Truckee Meadows-Sierra Fire Protection Districts/Washoe County, prepared by Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI).

Charlie Moore, TMFPD and SFPD Fire Chief, presented the report.

Commissioner Vaughn Hartung said that the District’s 2015-2016 Budget is $23,300,000, not $26,211,121.

Michele Hobbs, Reno Fire Department Administrative Services Manager, explained that the District’s budget for fire operations is $23,300,300, but development of a regional model must include support and indirect costs. The difference between the two in the Reno and Truckee Meadows budget includes those indirect costs. If the departments were to be self-sufficient, they would need to include legal, Human Resources, and personnel services.

Council Member Brekhus said that consolidation of fire services is not the answer and will lead to more fragmentation and uncoordinated governance for this region. Reno and the County Commission need to determine what to do with Sparks and Incline Village and consolidate so we are one legislative body. That is how we will get the best results. The combination of our land use patterns, our patchwork, jurisdictional boundaries are difficult to resolve. I thought they could be resolved through planning agreements. I do not think they can. The fact that the County is in the sewer service business, which you do not see ever, with us having a plan and the County having one. I think it is just too far gone and this region deserves one consolidated legislative body for Reno and the County.

Commissioner Lucey and Chief Moore discussed the impetus for the 2014 Blue Ribbon Committee and Regional Fire study. Chief Moore said that one of the most glaring issues was how many fire departments there were. We had some ten autonomous volunteer fire departments, and the agencies were not coordinated.
7. Overview of Regional Fire Services – continued

Commissioner Lucey discussed the results of the 2012 Public Safety Automatic Aid Advisory Ballot Question (WC1 – 81% yes to 18% no).

Commissioner Lucey asked why Reno did not participate in the Blue Ribbon Committee study and Chief Cochran stated that it was a policy decision by the City.

Reno City Manager Clinger said that the City was not invited to participate in the process of selecting those who would sit on the Committee, and felt it was not a fair process for the City.

Commissioner Lucey said that obviously there were some discrepancies felt by the City Council that the Blue Ribbon Study did not convey the thoughts and insight of the City with regards to a regional effort, and Reno City Manager Clinger said that was correct.

Mayor Schieve and Chief Cochran discussed the multitude of studies that have been done since 1989. Chief Cochran stated that all of the studies land pretty much in the same spot – the Reno Fire Department has the best and most efficient service, consolidation is the best answer, and the only way Reno could get better was to add Sierra Fire, which has been done.

Council Member Duerr, Chief Cochran, and Chief Moore discussed why the interlocal agreement was dissolved. Chief Moore stated that 99% of why the interlocal agreement could not be sustained was financial. He said that one obstacle is staffing and the cost associated with staffing. It costs Reno $3.12 million to staff each station, and it costs Truckee Meadows $2.38 million.

Discussion ensued regarding three-person crews; determining all of the variables before merging the entities; and determining a management structure.

Dr. Robert Parker discussed why Reno cannot afford its Fire Department.

Cliff Lowe, Washoe County resident, presented his views on this issue.

Larry Simcoe, Reno resident, presented his views on this issue.

Cathy Brandhorst discussed several issues.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THIS ITEM.
8. Discussion and potential direction by each governing board to its respective staff on possible dates and items for agendas for future Concurrent meetings relating to fire services.

   It was moved by Mayor Schieve, seconded by Council Member Delgado to direct staff to begin working on automatic aid agreements including developing terms of cost reimbursement, defining areas of coverage, and the coordination of dispatch services. Timelines should be defined and fire stations should not be built too close together.

Council Member Jardon suggested that staff seek feedback from the City of Sparks during the process with regard to their automatic aid agreement and financial statistics.

Council Member Bobzien stated that this mirrors the City’s proposed amendment to SB185 and Reno’s commitment to work on this issue. This is an important first step.

Council Member Delgado requested that staff, in addition to working towards automatic aid, also continue the conversion with respect to consolidation.

City Manager Clinger said that included in the motion should be direction to staff to work with the TMFPD to examine staffing models and the financials of the plan. Under this agenda item we can also request that both the City Council and County Commission set future dates for getting back together to either review those automatic aid agreements or progress on looking into the merger from a financial and staffing standpoint.

   Motion carried.

   It was moved by Council Member Delgado, seconded by Council Member Duerr to direct staff to work with the County to examine staffing models and the financials of the plan.

   Motion carried.

   It was moved by Council Member Duerr, seconded by Council Member Delgado to direct staff to schedule a joint meeting for Monday afternoon, June 15, 2015.

   Motion carried.

The County Commissioners passed a motion agreeing to discuss the issues with the City of Reno.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THIS ITEM.

THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 5:58 P.M.