MINUTES

Eugene City Council
Work Session
McNutt Room – City Hall
777 Pearl Street—Eugene, Oregon

January 20, 2010
12:00 p.m.

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Chris Pryor, Mike Clark, George Brown, Andrea Ortiz, Alan Zelenka, Betty Taylor, George Poling, Jennifer Solomon

Mayor Piercy called the work session meeting of the Eugene City Council to order at 12:00 p.m.

A. WORK SESSION – Functional Consolidation of Fire Departments

Ms. Piercy noted that although a motion regarding the functional consolidation of the fire departments was included in the agenda item summary materials, the work session was only intended to serve the purposes of discussion surrounding the matter.

Ms. Piercy noted that the council had not had any significant opportunities to discuss the fire department consolidation before the public.

City Manager Jon Ruiz reminded those present that a second City Council goal-setting session had been scheduled for January 23, 2010.

Mr. Ruiz noted the importance of the consolidation discussion to the community and noted that it represented an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to the public how the fire department services of Eugene and Springfield could be better coordinated. He further noted that the functional consolidation discussion was comprised of three distinct elements: 1) the ambulance fund; 2) the implementation of operational consolidation strategies designed to improve system efficiencies, and 3) the actual merger of the Springfield and Eugene fire department. Mr. Ruiz noted that staff was primarily interested in the council's feedback regarding the actual merger of the two entities.

Eugene Fire/EMS Chief Randy Groves described the basis for the proposed consolidation of the Eugene and Springfield Fire Departments. He further noted that staff intended to continue the use of the Three-Battalion System which had been successfully implemented in June of 2007, for the purposes of a consolidation of Eugene and Springfield's respective emergency response capabilities.

Chief Groves described how elements of the operational consolidation of the two departments had progressed thus far.

Chief Groves reported that Emergency Services Consulting International (ESCI) had been commissioned in 2009 to perform a feasibility study on further consolidation efforts. Chief Groves briefly described the results of the ESCI study for the benefit and information of those present and noted that those results strongly endorsed the functional consolidation of the two fire departments.

Chief Groves stated that the next step towards functional consolidation involved the integration of the administrative and support functions of the two fire departments. He further stated that the consolidated

administrative functions included the fire marshal's office, training programs, ambulance billing, the designation of a single deputy chief to oversee shift operations, and an alignment of each department's special operations. He proceeded to describe the remaining elements of the proposed functional consolidation.

Chief Groves stated that the governance evaluation of the proposed functional consolidation might be performed under a metro-governance model or the formation of a special purpose district. He further stated that the ESCI study had favored the creation of a special purpose district.

Mr. Clark thanked Chief Groves for his presentation and commended him and his staff for their efforts regarding the proposed functional consolidation.

Mr. Clark noted that Chief Groves and other Fire/EMS staff had recently had the opportunity to review the Tualatin Valley Fire Department's district model and asked how the service delivery elements of that district-based model differed from a municipality model. Chief Groves maintained that the service delivery levels for residents from the two models were essentially the same.

Mr. Clark appreciated the savings that had been suggested by the personnel efficiencies that were involved in the functional consolidation. He remained cautious but optimistic regarding the remainder of the functional consolidation and hoped that both agencies would proceed in incremental steps toward full consolidation.

Chief Groves clarified for Mr. Clark that the first steps of the functional consolidation of the Eugene and Springfield Fire Departments would come in the form of an intergovernmental agreement similar to the one that had been used in 2007, to consolidate emergency response capabilities. He expressed that the remainder of the functional consolidation would indeed be carried out using a "phased-in approach" for each main element of the functional consolidation.

Ms. Ortiz recognized that Springfield Fire Chief Dennis Murphy was in attendance at the meeting as was EWEB Commissioner Bob Cassidy and the president of the local Eugene firefighter's union.

Ms. Ortiz maintained that the one of the main challenges faced by both Eugene and Springfield was that one part of the community often wanted "to grow faster than the other." She hoped that such a challenge would be carefully considered as the functional consolidation progressed. Chief Groves recognized Ms. Ortiz's concerns and noted that he and other staff had carefully considered the growth management policies of communities similar to Eugene/Springfield such as Livermore and Pleasanton, California.

Ms. Ortiz asked if compensation for leadership positions within a consolidated fire department would increase. Chief Groves responded that compensation for leadership positions within a merged organization would fall in line with the wage parameters already set up by similarly sized fire departments.

Chief Groves expressed that a merger of the Eugene and Springfield fire departments would mean significant cost savings to each organization which would result from increased efficiencies and the elimination of various redundancies.

Ms. Ortiz thanked Chief Groves for his responses and input.

Mr. Pryor indicated he had been reassured by Chief Groves' presentation that overall fire department service levels would be enhanced by the functional consolidation. He further indicated that the benefits of further consolidation had already been demonstrated by the successful implementation of the Three-Battalion System at various levels.

Mr. Pryor maintained that Chief Groves had made a strong case for the consolidation of core services for the cities of Eugene and Springfield.

Mr. Pryor believed the functional consolidation would ultimately result in better service, increased accountability, and significant cost savings. He further suggested that the Eugene and Springfield City Councils would need to carefully consider the opportunities that came out of the fire department consolidation.

Mr. Poling believed that the timing and financial considerations for the functional consolidation were ideal. He hoped that the Eugene and Springfield organizations would continue to work closely with one another in order to determine the best possible solutions regarding funding and governance.

Mr. Brown expressed that the projected savings from the functional consolidation were very attractive.

Chief Groves, responding to Mr. Brown's comment, briefly reviewed and detailed the projected savings from the consolidation that had been enumerated thus far.

Mr. Brown asked if there was any significant difference in the pay scale for the firefighter unions for Eugene and Springfield. Chief Groves responded that the compensation packages for union members from each municipality had evolved over time and were ultimately "not that far apart."

Mr. Brown referenced Chief Groves' earlier comments regarding the Livermore and Pleasanton fire departments and asked if the proposed consolidation might involve a similar joint powers authority (JPA). Chief Groves responded that the Eugene and Springfield fire departments did not have the authority to form a JPA as part of the functional consolidation although most of the functions of a JPA could be adopted under ORS 193.

Chief Groves, responding to a request from Mr. Brown, noted that he could send the council members a link to the Livermore and Pleasanton fire department website if they so desired. He further noted that site visits to that department and the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue District for interested parties might be possible.

Chief Groves briefly referenced the growth management concerns of Eugene and Springfield and maintained that a municipality that tended to grow upward instead of outward generally demanded more resources with respect to fire safety and emergency response services.

Ms. Piercy agreed with Chief Groves' comment and further hoped that the council's conversations regarding the proposed consolidation would continue to be respectful of the policy differences and public concerns of both Eugene and Springfield.

Mr. Zelenka appreciated the collaborative nature of the consolidation efforts. He was concerned that the cost savings, while real and appreciable, did not appear to be very large.

Mr. Zelenka asked if the consolidation would send a merged fire department into a new group of wage comparables for department personnel. Chief Groves responded that the market that the Eugene and Springfield fire departments currently occupied was similar to many of the same jurisdictions they would be compared to as a merged organization. He noted that Senate Bill 750 had resulted in certain restrictions on public collective bargaining processes and that the Eugene and Springfield departments were limited in the number and nature of markets to which they could compare themselves.

Mr. Zelenka noted his concern that large unforeseen pay discrepancies between the two jurisdictions might wipe out any potential savings.

Mr. Zelenka asked if the efficiencies regarding the proposed consolidation had been quantified in any way. Chief Groves responded that certain quantifications regarding training efficiencies had already been quantified and enumerated.

Ms. Taylor believed that certain training and purchasing efficiencies might be achieved between the two jurisdictions without formally consolidating them.

Ms. Taylor was concerned that the functional consolidation of the two fire departments would result in "more governments" and that it would be harder for the public to be involved in such processes.

Ms. Taylor asked if the functional consolidation would result in a significantly increased work load for Chief Groves. Chief Groves believed that the consolidation might change the focus of some of his duties as fire chief but that his overall workload would remain about the same. He added that some of his responsibilities might be assumed by deputy chiefs of the consolidated fire department, but that it would not be necessary to add completely new deputy chief positions.

Chief Groves, responding to a comment from Ms. Taylor, stated that no pay raise for his position had been built into the plans for the functional consolidation process for the two fire departments.

Chief Groves, responding to a question from Ms. Taylor, noted that the chief of the consolidated fire department would report to the City Managers of both Eugene and Springfield. Ms. Taylor maintained that such an organizational structure sounded complicated.

Chief Groves, responding to a comment from Ms. Taylor, maintained that although the fire departments of Eugene and Springfield had provided very good service separately, the functional consolidation would allow for even greater improvements.

Mr. Ruiz noted that the enhanced training protocols for a consolidated fire department would result in a significant number of increased efficiencies.

Ms. Taylor asked for an example of the operational efficiencies that were expected from the functional consolidation. Chief Groves responded that the implementation of the Three-Battalion system had created a "managed web of coverage" and had already resulted in faster emergency response times in both jurisdictions.

Chief Groves noted that merged training functions would also result in a number of efficiencies for a consolidated fire department.

Ms. Taylor noted her concern that the future development and growth of Springfield over a larger geographic area might mean it would take more time and money for a consolidated fire department to respond to emergencies. Chief Groves responded that as the territories and population of Springfield grew in the future, newer fire department stations would be added into the fire department. He added that those new stations would be paid for by whatever jurisdiction was experiencing growth.

Mr. Ruiz noted that the conversation surrounding the functional consolidation would shift as issues of governance related to the merger were discussed in greater detail.

Ms. Piercy understood from the council's discussion that it was important to definitively determine the benefits of a consolidated fire department structure against the current capabilities of the current Eugene and Springfield fire department agencies. Chief Groves responded that a consolidated fire department would show immediate benefits in the fire chief's office, the Eugene/Springfield ambulance system, and several other areas.

Ms. Piercy recognized that there were significant funding issues involved in a functional consolidation process and hoped that the discussions surrounding the consolidation would result in innovative solutions that would result in improved services.

Chief Groves noted that a consolidated fire department would be able to shift personnel in a manner that was not currently possible between the two jurisdictions. He noted that such a capability would reduce the amount of overtime hours that might be required by the individual fire departments in order to provide sufficient coverage.

Chief Groves, responding to a question from Mr. Clark, noted that the larger ladder trucks for fire departments currently cost in excess of $1 million. Mr. Clark expressed that a consolidated fire department would lessen the need for expensive redundant equipment.

Mr. Clark briefly addressed the funding that would be required from the two jurisdictions with respect to the functional consolidation. He hoped that the City of Eugene would be sufficiently prepared for what he believed would be a higher drain on City resources than that of Springfield.

Chief Groves responded to Mr. Clark's concerns about the current urban growth projections for Eugene and noted that Eugene's ISO rating with respect to its fire department had recently been downgraded from a two to a three because it had not kept up with various current staffing levels and technological standards. He noted that the City of Eugene continued to maintain a strong and efficient fire department but that it had "lost ground, from a grading perspective."

Mr. Clark asked what Chief Groves considered the key logical checkpoints surrounding the functional consolidation of the two fire departments. Chief Groves suggested that six- and twelve-month periods would be logical checkpoint times for the review of the functional consolidation's progress.

Mr. Ruiz responded to Mr. Clark's comments and recognized the importance of having the City of Eugene plan and balance its future resource needs with respect to the City's fire department, regardless of any plans to consolidate with the Springfield fire department.

Chief Groves, responding to a question from Ms. Ortiz, noted that Eugene's fire department billing office staff was under an AFSCME contract. He further noted that Eugene and Springfield staff had been in contact with AFSCME regarding the proposed consolidation and that the unions had generally been supportive of the merger.

Ms. Ortiz briefly noted her concerns regarding the various ambulance billing agencies used by Eugene, Springfield and other areas of Lane County. She hoped that the functional consolidation process would not have a negative effect on those partner agencies.

Ms. Ortiz was pleased there was a commitment to continue investigations into mass purchasing strategies for equipment with respect to the functional consolidation plans. Chief Groves added that he hoped that the functional consolidation process would result in a standardization of specifications for all equipment being used throughout the two jurisdictions.

Chief Groves believed that the jurisdictions of Eugene and Springfield were better situated to consolidate than they had ever been before, primarily because of the success of the Three-Battalion System. He noted that the system had fostered an increased understanding and respect for the relationship between the two jurisdictions and had indicated ways in which a merged system would continue to provide exceptional life safety and emergency response services.

Mr. Ruiz noted that more detailed examinations into how the various governance, technical and administrative processes of the Eugene and Springfield organizations related to one another would occur as the functional consolidation process for the fire departments progressed.

Chief Groves responding to Mr. Ruiz's comment, noted that the functional consolidation process represented numerous opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between Eugene and Springfield.

Mr. Zelenka hoped that the proposed functional consolidation might be performed under the metro-governance model rather than a special purpose district. Mr. Zelenka worried that a special district might compete with other demands on Eugene's general fund.

Mr. Zelenka felt that more public input regarding the proposed functional consolidation was needed as many members of the community had only just recently become engaged with the functional consolidation process.

Mr. Zelenka hoped that any problems involved with ambulance funding would be solved before the functional consolidation process for the fire departments moved forward.

Chief Groves responded to Mr. Zelenka's comments and noted that the Ambulance Transport System Joint Elected Officials Task Force conducted a series of nine public forums during which it was determined that the merger proposal was a higher priority than the ambulance funding concerns. He noted that other public engagement events had yielded similar findings.

Ms. Piercy recognized the need for further public input regarding the proposed functional consolidation and noted that the public's feedback would continue to be heard and carefully considered.

Mr. Pryor briefly discussed the various methods in which a consolidated fire department might be funded.

Mr. Pryor asked for greater clarification regarding the manner in which a special purpose district for a consolidated fire department might be funded. Chief Groves responded that the funding for a special purpose district would primarily come from a shifting of Eugene and Springfield's funding resources rather than from tax increases. He briefly described a funding example that had been provided by ESCI with respect to a special district that had been formed in Clackamas County.

Mr. Pryor assumed that a consolidated fire department would utilize a funding structure based on the populations of the Eugene/Springfield service areas.

Chief Groves briefly commented on how Eugene's Fire/EMS Department already provided fire and rescue protection to five contract areas while the Springfield FLS division provided service to three contract areas.

Chief Groves, responding to Mr. Pryor's comment, noted that an evaluation of how the Eugene/Springfield populations would affect the funding of a consolidated fire department would be part of the next steps after the functional consolidation process.

Ms. Piercy thanked Chief Groves for his presentation and comments.

Ms. Piercy commended the staff members of the Eugene and Springfield fire departments for their work in developing the functional consolidation planning process.

Ms. Piercy reiterated that both she and the City Council wanted to hear more from the public about how they felt about the functional consolidation of the Eugene and Springfield fire departments.

Ms. Piercy adjourned the meeting at 1:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Ruiz
City Manager

(*Recorded by Wade Hicks*)