

San Juan County Public Hospital District No. 1
San Juan County Fire Protection District No. 3
360-378-2857
849 Spring Street Unit B-5

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 5, 2019

Friday Harbor, WA

When community member Chuck Dalldorf first agreed to serve on the Citizen’s Advisory Group (CAG) looking into a potential integration of EMS and Fire services on San Juan Island, he probably didn’t realize it would take almost a year. He said: “the most challenging part of the CAG experience was the need to do much more in depth research and analysis than what I initially thought we were going to do.”

But the CAG did finish and delivered their 117-page report to the two sponsoring boards: Fire Protection District No. 3 and Public Hospital District No. 1 (which runs local EMS services) on April 2, 2019 in a well-attended public meeting. Although a long read, the first chapter summarizes their recommendation succinctly: “the two Boards... and the Town of Friday Harbor... will integrate SJIEMS and FD #3 into one organization with a single leadership structure.”

The CAG report was advisory but was well received, and the two Boards agreed to establish a steering committee to begin work on determining how the project would unfold. The steering committee will include a Town representative, a commissioner from both boards, and both Fire Chief Collins and EMS Chief Kuetzing from the respective agencies.

CAG Members developed a strong rapport over their nearly two dozen public meetings that fostered, as member Dan Paulson put it, “A great collaborative working arrangement, where everyone was very open minded and not afraid to challenge ideas.” All meetings were open to the public with audio and minutes posted online.

Dalldorf expressed appreciation with how the boards handled the process: “I appreciated the elected officials and staff from the Hospital District, Fire District and the Town to leave us to work independently and without interference, even when we continued to work many months beyond our initial tasking.”

Many CAG members expressed that their opinions evolved over the course of their meetings, with George Johnson expressing it well saying, “At the beginning, I was not convinced that integrating EMS and Fire would be successful, given the history that brought EMS out of the Fire District and into the Hospital District in the first place. I have since become convinced that it is the right thing to do.” Dan Paulson put it succinctly when asked if his opinion changed: “Yes.”

During public comment in the April 2nd Joint Board Meeting, Community member Richard Grout expressed: “When the commissioners initiated it [the CAG] I was very skeptical... their meetings were all public, and I only missed a few of them... my opinion changed, and I support it...” Others expressed concerns or had questions, which the Boards hope to address as a part of general outreach through this process.

At the April 2nd meeting Commissioner Anna Lisa Lindstrum said it was “very important to have feedback from the community, and community feedback as we move forward.” Recognizing the concerns of employees who serve the public is also important, and she later quoted Dr. Sullivan as saying in reference to EMS that “the most valuable instruments are always people... there are valuable people at EMS.”

As CAG Member George Johnson said, “At the end of the day, the value will be in the results.” Members of the public are invited to read the report at <http://sicphd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CAG-Report-on-Possible-Integration-of-EMS-and-Fire.pdf> and to participate as the project moves forward.