

Date: July 2, 2019

To: Integrated Steering Committee Delegates

From: Commissioners Frank Cardinale (SJI Fire District 3) and Rebecca K. Smith (SJC PHD 1)

Re: Integration - Elections/Levies/Taxes – Board Configuration

In the Citizen's Advisory Group (CAG) report to SJCPHD #1 and SJI Fire District #3, the recommendation was to increase the number of commissioners from 3 to 5 for 2 reasons:

1. "...it may be useful to expand the Fire District Board to encourage more representation from Town and for representatives with more medical background..."
2. "...commissioners are able to communicate with each (one on one) without violating the OPMA."

After careful consideration of these recommendations, the pros and cons of board size, and due diligence investigating all of the issues, it is our recommendation that the San Juan Island Fire District #3 Board of Fire Commissioners remain at three members for the foreseeable future. This is based on the following:

1. RCW 52.02.110 states "the candidate for each fire commissioner position who receives the highest number of votes for that position to be an initial fire commissioner of the district." As there are no specific qualifications for candidates to an office, and the position must be open to all district residents, (Per RCW 52.15.01 "candidates must be residents and registered voters of their district"), this precludes the CAG's recommendation of picking one commissioner with an EMS background and one commissioner from the town of Friday Harbor. Although someone from town and someone with a medical background *may* run for office, there is no guarantee that they will receive the highest number of votes. In addition, the SJI Fire District 3 Board of Fire Commissioners typically request input from members of the community with specific expertise prior to making decisions outside of their knowledge or experience.
2. While two commissioners on a five-member board are able to communicate with each other without violating the OPMA, it is also true that 'serial communication' can be problematic. One commissioner can discuss an issue with another and then go on to discuss that same issue with a third commissioner. On a three-member board, no single commissioner can talk with another without violating the OPMA. Both, of course, have their downside, but a strong case could be made that it is easier to comply with the OPMA in not talking at all with other commissioners about board issues.
3. Per Washington State Revised Code of Washington, "The affairs of the district shall be managed by a board of fire commissioners composed initially of three registered voters residing in the district, except as provided otherwise in RCW 52.14.015, 52.14.020, and 52.14.140."
4. Of 39 counties and 346 Fire authorities in Washington, 295 boards are made up of 3 members and 51 have 4 or more members. Most of the larger boards represent larger fire authorities such as West Pierce Fire and Rescue (100,000 population, EMS, 5 members) Puget Sound Regional Fire Authority (226,815 population, basic life support, 6 members), and Spokane County Fire District #1 (125,000 population, EMS, 5 members).
5. Increasing the board size would require an election (at a cost to taxpayers ranging from approximately \$10,000 to \$30,000), plus the added cost for each commissioner, which includes but is not limited to meeting stipends, conference costs, and email.
6. SJI Fire District 3 has functioned well with three commissioners since its inception, including during the time it was integrated with EMS.

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7. Other Pros and Cons

a. Small Boards

1) Pros

- Communication and interaction is easier. Board members get to know each other as individuals
- Greater ownership and accountability
- More time can be dedicated to tackling issues in greater detail
- Every person's participation counts

2) Cons

- Heavy workload may cause burnout (not a factor on this board)
- Fundraising may become a major burden (N/A)
- Important opinions or points of view might not be represented

b. Large Boards

1) Pros

- More easily manage workload (this is not currently a problem nor do we see one in the future)
- Fundraising less of a burden (N/A)
- More perspectives

2) Cons

- May not be able to engage every board member in a meaningful activity
- Meetings difficult to schedule
- Tendency to form cliques
- Loss of individual accountability
- Difficult to create opportunities for interactive discussions