

# TUMWATER PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF MEETING

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**CONVENE:** 8:06 a.m.

**PRESENT:** Chair Tom Oliva and Councilmember Michael Althausen.

Excused: Councilmember Leatta Dahlhoff.

Staff: City Administrator John Doan, Assistant City Administer Heidi Behrends Cerniwey, Fire Chief Scott LaVielle, Police Chief Jon Weiks, Fire Captain Brian Hurley, City Clerk Melody Valiant, and Recording Secretary Valerie Gow.

**UPDATE ON IDEA  
TEAM PROJECT IN  
THE FIRE  
DEPARTMENT:**

City Administrator Doan briefed the committee on the status of activities by the Inclusive, Diverse, Empowered and Accessible (IDEA) Team.

Currently, the Tumwater Fire Department has five firefighter openings as a consequence of personnel moving and retiring. The Fire Department is committed to hiring a diverse group of men and women who are ready to become the next class of extraordinary firefighters. It is important the City's workforce is free of discrimination and has diversity policies and beliefs that strive for a diverse workforce that is empowered and reflective of the community.

The assembly of the IDEA Team illustrates a new concept in the fire service. Creating a diverse workforce is not just about creating good intentions, but recognition that hiring involves many steps that can often unintentionally serve as limitations for some individuals to succeed through the hiring process. The City decided to pursue a strategic and holistic process to improve diversity and changes in the Fire Department. The IDEA Team was created based on a model with Fire Chief LaVielle and City Administrator Doan serving as the sponsors and responsible for establishing goals and providing resources. Team members implementing the changes in the Fire Department include the Fire Department leadership of the Fire Chief, Assistant Fire Chief, three Fire Captains, Fire Lieutenants, Fire Training Officer, City Administrator Doan, Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey, and Paula Dillard, an organizational development consultant.

One of the first steps was creating an atmosphere of communication to enable team members to discuss issues, share concerns, and speak to future changes in cultural at the Fire Department and its affect on the workforce.

The team is considering obstacles preventing a diverse workforce, such as considering the necessary requirements of a firefighter today rather than 40 years ago. Redesigning organizational behaviors was

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identified as important to embrace and support diversity and inclusion.

Chair Oliva asked whether the Fire Department has any female firefighters. City Administrator Doan replied that at this time, the Fire Department has no female firefighters.

Fire Chief LaVielle shared with the committee how the fire service is changing in terms of expectations of new hires in the future, the changing nature of calls for fire to emergency medical services, and changing human service interactions.

The IDEA Team illustrates a new concept in the fire service even though many fire departments throughout the nation are implementing similar programs. The new concept spoke to the importance of seeking support from the City Administrator, Assistant City Administrator, and the Fire Chief. It was also important to consider public perception of the Fire Department to ensure the community perceives the Fire Department as inclusive.

Fire Chief LaVielle referred to a new flyer developed by staff with input from the IDEA Team. The flyer outlines the hiring process and steps involved for applying for firefighter positions.

Today, the fire service no longer focuses on how much weight a firefighter can lift or how physically fit a firefighter might be. Rather, it is about building relationships with others, respecting unique differences, and exhibiting character and critical thinking skills all while being open to change. Diversity in the fire service drives innovation. Research demonstrates diverse groups are more productive and reach more creative solutions to complex challenges than homogenous groups do.

Some expectations of new hires include each new hire being responsible for shaping the department's culture. The Fire Department sets high standards of fairness, respect, ethics, honor, and transparency. New hires will be challenged to practice the core values of character, professionalism, integrity, and compassion. Those values lay the foundation for the service provided by the Fire Department. New hires will be socialized by the organization and leadership that fosters an environment of acceptance while cultivating diversity throughout the organization.

The changing nature of calls from fires to emergency medical services (EMS) has been documented by the National Fire Protection Association with the number of EMS calls to fire departments increasing by nearly 300% since 1980. This increase in medical calls paired with fireproofing advancements and stricter building code

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requirements, built-in fire protection systems, and smoke detectors has reduced fire responses significantly. Additionally, an aging population, longer life expectancies, fire prevention improvements, and the increase in EMS calls also reflect a decline in preventive care. Today, the EMS system is used as a source of primary care rather than visiting the doctor creating situations of medical emergencies. The steady rise in incidents often has firefighters responding to multiple calls during each shift. The changing nature of the EMS system provides personnel more continuous patient interaction than experienced in the past.

As the human population is very diverse and the community is changing, the Fire Department must be ready to serve and understand the population it treats. Individuals joining the Fire Department take an oath to help those in need regardless of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. It should not matter whether the firefighter responding to an emergency has a different or diverse background. However, those differences make the Fire Department what it is and helps to create the strongest team possible for the Fire Department. Differences help to foster an inclusive, diverse, empowered, and accessible team that is dedicated to each other and the community they serve and protect.

Fire Captain Hurley provided information from the Fire Union and employees' perspective, as well as his role as the Project Manager of the IDEA Team. The Fire Service has often been referred to as 200 years of tradition unimpeded by progress. It is timely to take a close look and make some changes within the system.

The International Association of Firefighters has had a significant Diversity Program and Study since the early 2002s. Based on the 2000 Census, approximately 12.5% of the U.S. population was Hispanic while the fire profession had only 8.5% Hispanic employees as well as for African American firefighters. Approximately 5.1% of all firefighters in 2000 were women even though half of the U.S. population is female. Recent industry studies reflect that approximately 96% of all firefighters in the country are male compared to law enforcement's 88% and the U.S. military's 85%. The fire service reflects more white and male employees than any other industry.

Nationally, there is recognition of the need to address the issue. As the Project Manager for the IDEA Team, Captain Hurley reported he worked with Ms. Dillard to serve as the point of contact for the Fire Department. The team has met seven times since July 2018. The first meeting included representatives from other agencies to include Tacoma Fire Department, Lacey Fire District 6, Olympia Fire Department, and West Pierce Fire. Representatives from those organizations shared experiences of their respective hiring process and

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some barriers they have encountered. The Tacoma Deputy Fire Chief shared information on a court order requiring the department to hire more African American firefighters. Today, the Tacoma Fire Department has a very diverse workforce.

Members of the team developed the IDEA definitions and identified goals. Ms. Dillard facilitated discussions on the need for change, cycles of change, and assisting members to understand why certain beliefs and feelings often arise when those topics are discussed. Members discussed the SCARF model – Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness in terms of why feelings of pushback occur when diversity and inclusiveness initiatives are discussed. Several engaging discussions focused on gender, race, and ethnicity in the workplace.

The team established a recruitment and hiring committee, a training committee, a communications committee, and an on-boarding committee. The team agreed to focus on the recruitment and hiring process because it was tangible and results could be demonstrated.

Ongoing goals also include training for all members of the department on issues surrounding gender identity, culture, language, and beliefs. Those efforts will be ongoing.

The team met with each fire shift to discuss the program and to answer initial questions from employees, as well as address some pushback from some employees. Goals of the program were shared with personnel. Future efforts will include a recruitment open house and ongoing training for employees.

Chair Oliva asked whether there is sufficient support from the rank and file for the program. Captain Hurley said the team has shared information on the project and he believes employees are supportive. Following the meetings with each shift, some of the comments reflected that the project was not such a big deal and that the goals were serving a good purpose. The meetings with each shift were important to solicit support from employees.

Councilmember Althaus complimented the team for including definitions for accessibility and equity in relationship to the volunteer firefighter and professional opportunities. The inclusion of equity as opposed to equality is very important, as the definitions are very different concepts when attempting to achieve the stated goals.

Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey briefed the committee on proposed changes to the hiring process for the fire service.

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Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey shared some Tumwater School District demographics. Approximately 70% of the student population is Caucasian with 20%+ reporting as other or mixed race. Half of the City's demographics are female. It is important to ensure the workforce reflects demographics of the community.

The first step involved deconstructing the hiring process for firefighters to identify some of the challenges. One of the first steps was identifying where females and people of color were within the pool. The second step reviewed the steps necessary to be hired in the position. The first step is a written test. Within the written test pool, approximately 15% (2016-2018) of the applicants were nonwhite. However, for each subsequent hiring step, the percentage of minority and female applicants began to drop significantly. The commitment is the belief that diverse teams offer a broad perspective and the goal is to remove the barriers and help people visualize themselves within the profession.

The hiring process includes approximately 12 steps beginning with the job description. One of the first actions was updating the job description to make it reflective of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics needed for the position. For each step of the hiring process, the committee, as well as the Civil Service Commission, identified barriers. It was important to understand the need for the steps in the process and identify potential barriers for different groups. One of the barrier's of the written exam was higher scores enabling an applicant to advance to the interview. Within the hiring process, the written test represented 60% of the final score. People who tend to test well often score higher. Some applicants re-tested many times leading to better scores. The written test was identified as one of the barriers in the hiring process. It was important to open the interview process to people who might not be the best testers in the pool but who passed the test and had the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are reflective of the job.

Another component of the hiring process is the candidate physical ability test, which can be costly for the applicant. The committee examined ways to change that element of the process to help people who might not have the financial ability to take the test repeatedly.

One of major changes to the hiring process is including a screening interview. Instead of referring the highest scoring candidates to an interview, all candidates with a passing score of 80% or higher would be invited to a speed interview enabling the candidate to demonstrate their skills and abilities that are reflective of the job requirements. The process now includes a speed interview for all applicants with a score 80% or above.

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Another change was the assignment of test score weighting. Critical attributes and abilities for an entry level firefighter are good communications, ability to work well with people, and critical thinking. Those elements were weighed more heavily. The 60% weighting for the written test was changed to 30% for the final score with the oral board now weighted at 70% for the final score.

The Tacoma Fire Department implemented a similar process and based on experience, the department experienced many candidates who did not test in the high 80s but remained in the pool through the speed interview and oral board by demonstrating their ability to compete for the position. The model has produced many success stories.

The revised process will require more resources than in previous hiring processes. It likely will involve several hundred speed interviews over a course of a week following by approximately 60 oral boards. The proposed process is specific to entry level firefighters only.

The Fire Department opened recruitment in March with the recruitment closing on June 7, 2019. All candidates testing at 80% or higher on the written test will be invited to participate in the speed interview creating a predictable structured schedule.

Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey explained that during the recruitment period, the Fire Department is hosting two Career Discovery Recruitment Information Events with firefighters sharing information on what a "typical" day is like and why they chose the fire service. The one-hour event includes an optional tour of the fire station. Dates are April 27, 2019 at 10 a.m. for the Women's Edition, and April 30, 2019 at 7 p.m. at the Tumwater Headquarters Fire Station, 311 Israel Road SW, Tumwater.

Chair Oliva conveyed how impressed he was with the program in terms of its breadth and thoughtfulness intent.

City Administrator Doan acknowledged many employees who have been involved in the program to include Communications Manager Ann Cook and Digital Media & Communications Specialist Katherine Braseth who have worked diligently to convey the message to the community. He thanked Fire Captain Hurley for assuming a leadership role and providing daily leadership at the fire station. Assistant City Administrator Behrends Cerniwey and Senior Human Resources Analyst Juliann McGarva have worked many hours to revise the structure of the hiring process.

Chair Oliva inquired about the number of current Fire Department

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employees. Fire Chief LaVielle advised that currently, the Fire Department has 44 employees with five positions open.

City Administrator Doan added that the hiring process would transition to an annual process to recruit and develop a list to afford a predictable schedule for hiring.

**TUMWATER SAFE PROGRAM:**

The committee deferred the topic to the next meeting.

**SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER PROGRAM INTERLOCAL AGREEMENT:**

Police Chief Weiks presented the proposed interlocal agreement with the Tumwater School District for the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program. The original agreement was executed in 2013 with an amendment in 2017. The agreement is scheduled to expire on August 31, 2019. The new contract is the same as the current contract with four sections modified after review by both parties. At the request of the City's Finance Department, the contract period was changed to reflect a calendar year rather than a school year. In the 2017 agreement, a second officer was added with the school district paying for the second officer and reimbursing the City for the officer's salary and benefits. The City pays overtime when needed. The contract also includes a minor insurance adjustment. Another provision was included for training, subject to budgeting. The school district and the City will partner to provide annual national training to the SRO's specific to their roles and responsibilities within the schools, as budgeting allows.

The contract has been reviewed by both organizations. Staff is seeking authorization to move the contract to the City Council for consideration.

**CONSENSUS:**

**The Public Health and Safety Committee forwarded the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program Interlocal Agreement to the Council for consideration.**

**POST SNOW UPDATE:**

The committee deferred discussion on the topic until the next meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**With there being no further business, Chair Oliva adjourned the meeting at 9:01 a.m.**