

THURSTON COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT THREE

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

September 4th, 2025

The meeting was conducted remotely via Zoom and with in-person attendance at Station 31.
1231 Franz St SE, Lacey, WA 98516

Present:	Present (Virtual):	Excused:
Commissioner Kirkbride Commissioner Kelling Commissioner Hetzler Commissioner Gamble	Commissioner Roberts	

I. CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Hetzler called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM, followed with a salute to our Nation's Flag.

II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

There is an addition to the agenda under Old Business – a letter written to L&I.

MOTION: To approve the agenda as amended.

Motion: Commissioner Gamble

Second: Commissioner Kelling

Carried: Unanimous

III. HEARING OF THE PUBLIC / MEMBERS PRESENT

None.

IV. APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

A. Draft minutes of the August 21, 2025, meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners.

B. Warrants (AP 9A 2025):

- General Fund 001 (Acct #6630) EFTs numbered 5636 through 5639; checks numbered 24550 through 24558 for a total amount of \$38,893.78.

- Equipment Repair & Replacement Fund 103: EFTs numbered 5640 through 5641; checks numbered 24559 through 24560 for a total amount of \$34,321.74.
- Capital Projects Fund 301: check number 24561 for a total amount of \$69,846.00.

There was one question before approving the consent agenda. Chief Schmidt shared that there was interest in a charge for a repair on Engine 342 for about \$8,000. Chief Cerovski has information about that:

Chief Cerovski shared that the repair bill or invoice is something that has been worked on for a little over two years. The repairs have not been completed because of the unavailability of the Mack Truck facility to provide them; additionally, the rig is used for several months at a time during academy for training purposes. The invoice is for a culmination of minor issues with body, paint, scrapes, and scuffs that happen over time. A vendor in Tumwater was located to provide that service. They will also be involved in assisting with the repair of Engine 31 and some door damage that happened several months ago.

MOTION: To approve the consent agenda as published.

Motion: Commissioner Kirkbride

Second: Commissioner Gamble

Carried: Unanimous

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Thurston County Medic One

Commissioner Kirkbride reported from the meeting of last week:

- A number of years ago, eight new medic vans were ordered. They are now arriving. One has been received, and two more should be arriving within the next month or so. The rest are trickling in after that. The first one will be Medic 8, which will go to Tumwater and should be online in October.
- The budget committee is looking at how staff is organized and what their work focuses are. Staff is now divided into two main focuses: administrative or fire department field support. That has now started to happen. Efforts are being made to fill vacant positions, with one being filled so far.
- There is a plan in 2027 to go to the voters to restore the levy. At that point, a few more positions will be added in order to continue making the operations more efficient.
- An update on the suboxone pilot: since May, there have been 14 patients who have accepted the opportunity to get into the program and come under the guidance of the Catholic ministries that do this. Thus far there is no report of how those folks are doing. There is also no data available yet on the change in Narcan distribution. Historically, there were controlled

applications by police or fire but now with many people having access to it, there is no tracking of its distribution.

- There are eight approved surplus units. Identification has been made of the agencies who will be receiving a surplus unit, LFD3 being among them.
- Regarding the budget: currently on budget or slightly better. Projections for 2026 through 2028 were reviewed. There were minor changes on what is paid for rent. Medic One pays for rent space within the apparatus bay. There has been an increase in expenses and in paramedic training. On the BLS side, there has been a formula for a per-call basis after a core amount.
- Yesterday there was a West Region EMS Council meeting. West Region Council is made up of five counties, and it is a Department of Health organization and has an executive director and a budget from funds given to it by the Department of Health. The entire operation is \$160,000 a year. The Department of Health has asked West Region to look at taking over the directorship of Northwest Regional, as they have lost their director. The Department of Health has cut the budget for the West Region EMS Council, and it is anticipated that next spring it will be cut again.

B. Thurston 9-1-1 Communications (TCOMM)

Commissioner Roberts reported from the September 3rd meeting:

- The financial report: the sales tax is up 2.5% from budget. Currently up 2.3% over last year's sales tax. All expenditures are currently under budget.
- The executive director's summary: Dupont site work is scheduled and has begun. This is the last of the TCERN updates. The biggest part of that site work is getting power.
- Radio system staff are finalizing user agency radio reprogramming requests. Non-member agency agreements are still being processed, which is taking a bit of time. There are some new requests in the queue. The radio system staff are working through the inbuilding radio coverage testing.
- There is something new called the Diagnostic X Subscriber Radio Monitoring System. There had been an agreement in place that if repairs were needed to the new radios, that TCOMM would cover it. Radios are supposed to be brought in for annual maintenance. It has been found that agencies are not the best at keeping up with that. There are now boxes that will be installed on towers, and if the radios are brought near them, the box will ping the radio, saying that it is time for an upgrade or fix. Commissioner Roberts inquired if this has happened with any of the LFD3 radios.
 - Chief Cerovski confirmed this. An ILA was signed for the box to be installed at the TEC. The radios will thus be prompted for updates when they come to the TEC.
- The new phone system is scheduled to go live on November 3rd. There are two other cutovers to take place: River Comm 911 is going first, and then Cressa is following in December. TCOMM operators and personnel will undergo training at the end of October.

- In the staffing room, for the first time in a very long time, all positions are fully staffed. This does not include the six in budget that have never been filled. There is an academy going on right now with another one scheduled for November. The hope is to be fully staffed by the end of the year.
- The executive and deputy directors are participated in the FIFA 226 World Cup planning meetings at the state 911 level.
- Monthly call volume has steadily increased. The peak was July, which was up 4.5%.
- The next meeting will take place on October 1st.

C. City/District Liaison

Commission Hetzler reported that the next meeting will take place on September 18th.

D. Thurston County Fire Commissioners Association

No report; the next meeting is on September 16th.

E. Thurston Regional Planning Council

The next meeting will take place tomorrow. Per the agenda, there will be discussion about the Comprehensive Plan review checklist update. They will also talk about the high-capacity transportation policy statement. There will be work on appointment of work program subcommittee people. There will be a discussion and presentation for action of staff salary adjustments. An executive session is scheduled related to the executive director selection process. There will also be action take on the executive director salary. Also scheduled are updates on the transportation program and legislative priorities.

F. Community Outreach

Chief Schmidt shared:

- In the last weeks there have been a couple of preschool tours at Station 31.
- There was an invitation to Panorama City. Chief Schmidt and Chief Harn went out and it was an incredible event. The event was an outreach to all of their sponsors and partners in the community.

G. Capital Facilities and Equipment Activities

Chief Cerovski shared:

- An apparatus update: the two aid units have made it to Tacoma. They are expected on Monday. Aid Unit 33 should be ready for service in short order. Aid 31 is not staffed, but it will be a fantastic reserve unit until it can be staffed.
- An update on Engine 31: progress is underway with its assembly. Chief Cerovski shared photos of its progress thus far.
- October 3rd is the closing date for the purchase of the new property. A traffic study is still in progress but it is expected to come in within the next few days. There will soon be a pre-application with the City of Lacey to review the plans for the site, at which all due diligence will be completed

and the purchase of the property can move forward. The tentative date is October 3rd.

- Dark Horse Analytics is a data tool that LFD3 is going to start using. Chief Cerovski was able to see a preview of what the dashboard will look like. It looks extremely promising. It will be the foundation for eventually having accreditation and a complete buildout of community risk reduction and understanding the risks and threats in the community. It will complement strategic planning and community risk assessments.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. L&I Changes to PTSD Treatment – Draft of Letter

MOTION: To send the letter to Labor & Industries, as drafted, outlining significant concerns about their proposed actions with regard to PTSD treatment.

Motion: Commissioner Kirkbride

Second: Commissioner Gamble

Carried: Unanimous

B. Adobe Sign

Chief Cerovski reported that the District is moving forward with the change to Adobe Sign. A brief walk-through was provided for how to navigate through and use Adobe Sign.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Healthcare Costs for 2026

Chief Schmidt reported:

- Expectations were for a 15% increase for the calendar year of 2026. This is an anomaly and an unprecedented number. Efforts were made to determine the reasons behind the significant increase.
- In the beginning of 2nd quarter, the insurance provider saw that their costs were at 92% of what was budgeted for 2025. By the end of 2nd quarter, that number had gone up to 112%.
- The trends that the insurance providers have seen is not that the firefighter or members themselves were having major injuries or workplace events. There has been a trend with dependents having major lifechanging events (cardiac events, major hospitalizations, traumas, etc.). The second trend was a baby boom. Finally, there has been rollover of issues with mental health illness, PTSD, etc.
- The projected premium increase is 15%. The total additional district cost is \$290k based on 2025 premiums and projected 2026 staffing.
- There is the contractual framework of the 10% Rule: if premiums increase annually by greater than 10%, the dependent coverage is the burden of the member. This translates to a 5% increase passed on to the members. Furthermore: “should dependent premiums increase less

than 10%, increases from the previous year that exceeded 10% shall be absorbed until the 10% threshold is reached.”

- Based on this rule, the calculation has been made the members will need to bear the burden of 1.9% of the increase.
- The bottom line impact per member is calculated to be \$31.00 in average monthly contribution increase.
- The remaining district shortfall after member contributions are applied would be \$59,000.
- Staff recommendations for addressing the shortfalls:
 1. Direct contribution plan: work directly with Local 2903 to determine the best method for members to incur the small monthly additional cost.
 2. HRA/VEBA Utilization: consider allowing members to use their HRA or VEBA accounts to offset the increased premium cost.
 3. Budgetary Absorption: the District could treat this as a one-time event, absorbing the \$290k premium increase in the overall budget review.
- The path forward: address 2026 shortfall; form joint work group; review all insurance options for 2027.
- Commissioner Kirkbride shared his concern that if the district covers the entire cost, then an amendment may be needed to the labor agreement. If this happens again in the future, the increased costs will cause significant problems with the members. The preference would be to change the contract so that the language is for 12 to 15% so that in future there is more leeway to deal with the changes and not burden the membership with the increased costs. This, of course, depends on the District being able to cover the costs. The goal is to lower the fiscal burden on the membership.
- Chief Schmidt mentioned the goal of continuing to work with the current insurance provider, due to the fact that switching to a different insurance provider would potentially result in loss of coverage for retirees.

B. WFCB Conference

- The commissioners have received the fliers and have the dates. The question for discussion is how many want to attend and if any help can be offered for making reservations, arranging transportation, etc.
- Commissioner Kelling would like to attend through Saturday, including the Snure Seminar.

C. Fall Workshop Date Planning

- After comparison of calendars, the date of October 30th at 5:30 was settled upon for the workshop.

VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

A. Chief Patti reported:

- Since the last meeting, there has been only one significant incident. Last Friday, there was a fire at the paper plant off of Union Mills. The fire was on one of the machines caused by one of the belt feeders. Crews were able to get in there quickly and there was no significant loss. The plant was back up and running within a couple of hours.
- Call volumes continue to be up, but no other calls of particular note.
- While mobilization activity has been fairly mellow this summer, it has blown up in the last week. There are 12 major fires burning in the state, with 5 new just this week, probably due to lightning storm. Roughly 40,000 acres are currently burning. One member firefighter is out with the REMS team right now. He is assigned to the Lightning Complex and the Blackhawk Mountain fire, which started on the 29th.
- There has also been mobilization for the Lower Sugarloaf Fire. This fire started on the 1st and has ballooned up to 3700 acres with structures threatened.

B. Chief Schmidt reported:

- Tomorrow is Foofaraw in downtown Olympia on the waterfront. This is a military appreciation day sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and Olympia Yacht Club. LFD3 will have an apparatus and some executive staff present at the event.
- At the next meeting, there will be a ceremony for the new medics' pinning.
- LIFESCAN details have been finalized. The provider has offered to take up the cost of LIFESCAN and bill individual insurances (after this year). The cost to the district is usually about \$140,000. This cost will not be incurred next year. LIFESCAN will be available from October 12th through November 7th.
- The training division has put their team together and started their planning for January. They are getting ready to launch a county meeting for all of the partners to start planning for January. Saint Martins will not be available for graduation next year, so they are scouting out other appropriate locations.
- With regard to hiring: for the AC SCO process, there were two internal candidates. This was opened to outside applicants and there are now a total of five candidates coming forward. The goal is to be done with the process by mid-October.
- Still working through the entry level hiring process. There still remains 12 to 16 hours of staff time reviewing applications. There were almost 200 applicants, and there are 5 unfilled positions to be hired for, as well as some potential slated positions.
- There was an opportunity to connect with the Tribe's legal counsel today via phone. Chief Schmidt shared with him about where LFD3 is at with property procurement and asked if they had any updates to share. He shared that they have completed their environmental study.

They had originally envisioned a big truck stop at the diverging diamond right off of the freeway, but feedback from the study shared that there is insufficient infrastructure to support that. Instead of a big truck stop, they will have a minimart version. This was the only big change that came from the environmental study. The traffic study was also completed, and these were the last two checkboxes for the fee-to-trust. As far as the Tribe and the developers are concerned, the project is in the hands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This could happen any day. Chief Schmidt asked if there was a possibility for him to come speak directly to the commissioners at a future meeting, and he was open to that and will discuss it with the council next week.

- Chief Schmidt clarified in response to a question from Commissioner Kirkbride that the Tribe has only been working on the retail and recreation portion, not the gaming portion.
- There was an event a couple of weeks ago when a crew that doesn't normally work together had lowered the bay door a bit on a very muggy day to help with air flow. When the engine left for a response, the door was still partially down and it took the light bar off of Engine 31. There was fairly limited damage to the door. There will be warrants coming through with regard to these repairs.
- On Monday night (Labor Day), a medic van had transported up to Pierce County for a patient who went to Tacoma General. Between 8:00 and 9:00 p.m., they were on their return drive just north of the Bridgeport exit. The officer side window blew out into the apparatus onto the crew. There were very minor injuries consisting of abrasions to the arm. They contacted dispatch, asked for state patrol, and traveled about a mile further to the Bridgeport exit to assess the damage. There was an incredible response from WSP with four officers there within just a few minutes. They did a fairly thorough investigation. The crew ended up contacting the chain of command, returning to their station, and switching to a different rig. Looking in the rig, there was no evidence of pellets, rounds, etc., but state patrol believes that, similar to other events in the area, there may have been a projectile or rock that hit the window from the exterior. Administrative staff reached out to WSP. They pulled data and shared that they could not confirm that similar activity had happened in that direct region, but they are looking more into it.

IX. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Roberts – thanks for the opportunity to Zoom in. Thank you to the Chief for the presentation about healthcare. Regarding the Snure workshop coming up – if the commissioners receive the state auditor's office newsletter, they shared an Open Meetings Act Guide pdf, which is very easy to follow and a good resource. Regarding the Bear Gulch fire and the two firefighters who were immigrants and were arrested – one of the Thurston County commissioners,

Wayne Fournier, has introduced an ordinance, Emergency Responder Protection and Enforcement Coordination Act, to designed active emergency operations as noninterference zones and require federal law enforcement to coordinate with the designated incident commander before taking any action and guaranteed due process and ID protection for all responders regardless of background or employment status. Thurston County Board approved this being sent to the legal team and are looking forward to final adoption. It looks like fire commissioner boards may have some input into this ordinance as time goes on.

Commissioner Kelling – Lacey Emergency Preparedness is Saturday, September 20th, in Olympia from 10:00 to 1:00. The commissioners are encouraged to go and take a look at it. Good discussion on the healthcare situation. Everything that we do is by, with, and through our members. The extra dollars spent pay off in intangibles.

Commissioner Gamble – thanks to the writers of the letter to L&I. It is an important topic, and it is important to make a strong stance. Thank you for the fiscal responsibility of changes such as the move to Adobe Sign.

Commissioner Kirkbride – this district has a long history of taking care of the members in all aspects. The approach of the chief and the staff to try to tackle the health insurance situation is terrific and is the direction that is appropriate for the agency to go in. A question about whether there are any retirements coming up? Chief Schmidt responded that there are two members who have capitalized on the new contract. Lt. Neil Towers plans on retiring next spring. Lt. Kirk Beatty has also turned in his retirement paperwork. Their retirements are part of the calculations for new hires in January. Commissioner Kirkbride also shared some thoughts about the wildfire season and how it has gotten worse in the past years, with the need for Forest Service work to clean up these areas, and that fires are part of mother nature’s process of cleaning things out. Thanks to everyone involved in the firefighting process, both paid and volunteered, for their hard and dangerous work.

Commissioner Hetzler – is the Tec Equipment (the Mack dealership) still not able to do any service? Chief Cerovski responded that the service department had not been responsive to our requests for service. A vendor has been found who delivers this.

X. CORRESPONDENCE

None, but as a reminder, a great newsletter went out.

XI. HEARING OF THE PUBLIC / MEMBERS PRESENT

With regard to the health care insurance increase notification, a comment was made by member Jim Greene to thank executive staff and Director Kirkwood for all of their hard work.

There was a comment from Jonathan Clemens, district resident. Insurance costs will continue to rise. Under the Affordable Care Act as amended, insurance companies can only collect a percentage of profits. Things will keep going up because insurance corporations are incentivized to do so. The commissioners are encouraged to manage member expectations and keep in mind that the district could be on the hook for bigger and bigger increases in coming years. There is nothing on the horizon to slow the increase in healthcare costs.

As a caution, if the district makes itself very attractive to new hires based on coverage for catastrophic events, they may end up increasing the risk pool by attracting laterals and new hires to who have family members and dependents with exceptional medical needs.

Thank you very much for the L&I response. It looks very comprehensive. This is an example of the RCW gives and the WAC takes away. L&I is, unlike this organization, not flexible in what it can spend. Presumptive care has gotten through the legislature, but that does not change L&I's funding model, which is all payroll deduction. There is therefore no pool of money to pay for PTSD treatment. Expect that if this is successful, the fire department will be essentially taxed more through higher payroll deductions based on projected mental health costs for firefighters.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned as of 6:59 PM.

***Next Regular Meeting: September 18th, 2025– 5:30 p.m.
Available via remote meeting.***



Liberty Hetzler (09/30/2025 16:12:19 PDT)

Chair



Vice Chair



Melissa Gamble (09/23/2025 22:50:07 PDT)

Commissioner



Sylvia Roberts (09/23/2025 19:26:17 PDT)

Commissioner



Richard Kelling (09/26/2025 05:56:35 PDT)

Commissioner



ATTEST: District Secretary

09 04 2025 BoFC Meeting Minutes Final

Final Audit Report

2025-10-01

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2025-09-30 - 4:12:17 PM PDT



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