



City of Bellingham-Whatcom County Fire District 8 Regional Fire Authority Planning Committee Meeting Minutes for July 6, 2026



Committee Members Present:

Roger Buswell, Whatcom County Fire District 8 Commissioner

Dan Hammill, City of Bellingham Council Member

Michael Lilliquist, City of Bellingham Council Member

Kim Lund, City of Bellingham Mayor

Robert Neher, Whatcom County Fire District 8 Commissioner

Committee Members Absent:

Sheena Williams, Whatcom County Fire District 8 Commissioner

City of Bellingham Staff, Officials, and Others Present:

Andy Asbjornsen, Finance Department Head

Bill Hewett, Fire Chief

Christopher Hughes, Fire Systems Analyst

Forrest Longman, Deputy City Administrator

Dave Pethick, Assistant Fire Chief

Matt Stamps, Senior Assistant City Attorney

Rod Topel, RFA Project Manager

1. Welcome and introductions

Mayor Lund called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. All present introduced themselves.

2. Minutes review

Action:

Council Member Michael Lilliquist moved to approve the 6.22.26 minutes. Commissioner Robert Neher seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0 with Commissioner Sheena Williams absent.

3. Chapter 7, Organization and Administration Follow-up

Rod Topel gave an overview of the chapter, including the changes and additions that had been made since the previous meeting.



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Commissioner Neher asked about notice to the committee in the case of arbitration from the example interlocal agreement. Rod Topel explained that that is specific to the City of Renton and that Bellingham's City Attorney could use different language.

Action:

Council Member Dan Hammill moved to adopt the chapter. Commissioner Robert Neher seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0 with Commissioner Sheena Williams absent.

4. Chapter 6, Finance, Introduction to RFA Plan content

Rod Topel explained that the language in the chapter as provided to members is not final. Staff are still working through this chapter, and they hope to bring a complete draft to the next meeting. The main components of the chapter will be:

- Consideration of the fire benefit charge
- Interim / transitional financing for the time between the initial creation of the RFA and when the tax collection begins.
- Transfer of assets
- Debt transfer

Members and staff discussed topics including:

- LOEFF funds and whether they are subject to inter-city loans. Finance Director Andy Asbjornsen answered that they are not.
- Anticipated debt from the bond that the Commission is paying off. Chief Hewitt explained that they anticipate \$3.5 million in debt with debt service at \$250,000 per year.
- Funding for the ten month period between the creation of the RFA and the first tax collection. In the anticipated timeline, funding for the remainder of 2027 would be covered through normal budgeting, however there is a gap between the 1st of the following year (2028) to the time of tax collection that needs to be accounted for.
- District 8's funding, all of which would be transferred to the RFA. Council Member Lilliquist requested that the chapter specifically point out that this is a case in which the City of Bellingham funds can be transferred, which is prohibited by a clause in the chapter "unless otherwise specified".



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- Water systems and fire hydrants. In response to questions from Council Members Hammill and Lilliquist, Chief Hewett explained that water used for fire protection is given to the RFA at the time they use it. By state code, there is no meter or charge for water at fire hydrants. Water purveyors have right to maintain system, but there are requirements in state law that puts the onus on water purveyors to make water available for fire protection.
 - Water used at the stations is considered a utility service, which stations pay for and would continue to pay for under the RFA.
 - There is no contribution from the RFA back to the city for lift stations.
- How labor contracts will transfer. Collective bargaining agreements would stay in effect until a successor contract is agreed upon.

5. Chapter 2, Organization and Administration – Introduction

Rod Topel explained that this chapter was essentially copied from the last RFA work. Legal will review and make any needed changes to the definitions. There were no questions or suggestions for changes.

6. Plan Document Draft – Introduction

Rod Topel stated that this document is not ready yet. He anticipates that they will have every chapter except for Finance ready at the next meeting. He also suggested that members start conversations with their respective bodies (City Council and Fire District 8 Commission) in the meantime.

7. Public comment

No public comment was given.

8. Next meeting

Mayor Lund reminded members that the next meeting is scheduled for the July 20, 2026 and will be dedicated to review of the Finance chapter.

9. Adjournment

Mayor Lund adjourned the meeting at 2:41 p.m.