

Minutes to the Special Meeting of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District Board of Directors

Date: January 12th 2014

6 p.m.

Call to order

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call – Izzo, Rinaldi, Bianchi, Neal and Berry

Terry Plympton

Good evening my name is Terry Plympton I live in Elgin, Arizona and I am just going to take a minute of your time this evening. I would just like to thank the entire board for your due diligence in these contract negotiations. I have been here from the gecko when we first started this. I was totally impressed that you all have done your research and your homework. You have looked at comparative contracts. I would say you have handled yourselves in a very business and professional manner and I think all parties are well served by your efforts. So I just want to thank all of you very much.

Don Webster

My name is Don Webster I am from Sonoita and I have been here 7 years. I would just like to comment that about a year ago Jerry asked me to do some strategic planning seminar here and I had a lot of fun doing it. Jerry was there and Chief was there I hope you got something out of it but if you didn't, maybe it was fun I don't know. Here I am again. I would like to discuss changing the chief's salary from 84,000 to 75,000. Now off the clock I will give you just a little bit about my background so you know where I am coming from. I was an electronic engineer I headed up an engineering organization project development for about 8 years in the 80s. It was a start of our company who was born in 1981. Um... we were in bad shape we were asked to turn it around and to help us they gave us a president and gave him 2 years to do it. He didn't do it they got another president and he didn't do it. And another four times and didn't do it. Now the reason I am saying that is every president that came in disrupted the organization in surveys and its estimated that over a 4 million dollar company the corporation spent close to 6 million dollars. Now what happened is the new people came in and added a new board of directors with a different approach. What they said Don you are the president and what we want to hear from you is what it takes to turn this company around and we will support you. So we came up with a plan and said 75,000 dollars and no profits for the first two years. Notice I am using the adjective we not I. We grew that company for 4 million to 38 million in 8 years, so working with an organization improving it good things happen. Disrupting organization potentially bad things. Got it? Ok. I have never in my career or do I know of anybody in my career who has lowered somebody's salary. I have heard raising salaries in bad times but not lowering. I called a lot, not a lot, I am sorry sometimes I have an exaggeration, I called a few of my friends high level people so they lowered the chief's salary. What are they trying to do get rid of him? I don't think so. Was there anything wrong with the organization? No it was great. Why because it's not common practice in the business for a reason you don't want to interrupt an organization. It's more expensive to put an organization together if you disrupt it back again. Can I ask a question?

Izzo- You can ask a question but we can't get in a discussion.

Alright think um....the reason I have heard the reason is you got some kind of salary survey and decided chief has made too much money based on that survey which there are other districts around in the area. Is that right? Yes or No.

Berry- I think so.

Alright I really didn't want to get into salaries to surveys but because I would have wanted a budget from a risk benefit analysis but you have this little elephant in the room the salary survey let's talk about that. All these districts seem to have a lot of variability, a lot of differences and it feels to that that's why the state shows to give local control to local district because of all that variability. Um....actually because of variability we have a lot of data to select from um...so if you do a survey I say if you ask me give you a

survey that shows that the chief's salary is just fine. Now you get into an argument who likes this district or this district. So you just generate from the argument. I can find districts 100k well-staffed the chief only works 40 hours a week, Picture Rocks 80k I can go on and on. I can justify the chief's salary based on the survey. But then again I don't think it is worth it. No one has told me to shut up yet so I will keep going. Let's look at a risk benefit analysis and I will put on my HR hat for just a minute. If the salary is fair and you give raises and so on the employees are happy doesn't necessarily increase productivity. A raise informa last for about 30 days. That is what the studies have shown. What people really work for you get satisfaction out of doing a good job that adds value. Being recognized for the value added. I know teachers get paid, but they know what other teachers are getting, it's an issue but it isn't an issue and they do their job. My wife is a school teacher still talks about it today, and still has students calling her. The district she worked in is very supportive teachers. The parents were; 99% graduation, 80% went to college and 10%.....ok because of the support and motivation of the teachers, however if the salary is considered unfair or no action is taken that is a tremendous demotivater tremendous. And it something everybody blows off. Why? Because you don't value it. Now as an individual you deal with the individual but this is public so it is a whole organization. I say that pushes unnecessary risk in the organization. I'm not saying that anything is going to happen I'm just saying the risk is there. And the primary risk is losing people. Now just to describe to you what happens when you turn over an organization and the cost involved it always cost more to reconstitute an organization and get it back to what you had then if you kept the organization you had and approved it. If you lose people you all know what happens after you have to retrain, you sign out maybe unexperienced people, you may be subject to loses and of course you have heard this 100 times if someone dies of heart attack because of a poorly trained EMT it's on your conscious and you don't know what you get in employees. I have been through it have hired people with excellent resumes and references and with the worst personalities in the world someone got rid of him and gave him a good reference. I heard a story about a district I had known hired a new chief 2 years later they found they were in a whole of 300,000 dollars. Ok its high risk and to lower a salary demotivates an organization and puts high risk in the organization. That is a risk factor not 0 and it's not 100% it's there. My point is that it doesn't need to be there. This may be unfair but I am going to say it. Lowering the chief's salary 9,000 dollars cause I think that is what we are talking about lowers the average tax payer in this district \$6 per year. If you cut the chief's salary half what is that? 40,000 dollars 4 times 25 hours a year. If we take action on cutting back that's one exercise you should do before cutting back is what is the real economic benefit of doing it. We are better off staying with what we have. If you really feel that you have to take some action then the appropriate action would be freeze his salary keep it from him till cost of living increases catches up to it. That probably minimizes your risk to the organization.

Izzo- Don I am going to have to ask you to wrap it up, its been... do you think you can wrap that up? Ya I'm finished it it aint broke don't fix it. Thank you.

Call to the public- Ok we will move on to item 4 and it is still not too late to sign up for the audience comments at the end of the meeting. I have noticed there are some people here that are new tonight and I am glad to see you. Just to refresh and bring everybody up to date what we are doing the board is holding a special meeting for the purpose of developing a draft proposed contract. So this is not a final contract this is a draft proposed contract. Once the board has completed with its proposed contract it will be given the proposed contract to chief DeWolf and then chief DeWolf will then will have an opportunity to address the board negotiate the contract. So we are in the draft proposal stage this is not final tonight. So we will move on with that. The board has been provided the draft contract. Maybe what we can do is just go page by page if anybody has any comments

Old Business-

Berry- Do you have an extra contract?

Neal- We can share.

Izzo- We can get you another one.

Berry- I can get one at the end.

Izzo- Ok. So page 1 we have one blank in there and that's the one I couldn't.... Page 1 anybody.

Rinaldi- No.

Izzo- Page 2

Bianchi- There's a little tight bowl under duties and responsibilities C

Izzo- That could not be possible

Bianchi- It says and to. It should be and obligations and make recommendations I don't think we need the to in there.

Izzo- And to communicate with the board and just make recommendations ok. Page 3 as you noted on page 3 I did not include section K and Jennifer rightfully found that and inserted it so if you have the one if you printed it from home it was in blue and I'm not questioning the need for on one hand and on the other hand I just wanted to point out that act in accordance with board policy is good but the will not do something normally you will have a will not in a contract. Um...and so we could maybe try to rephrase that and then do just want to call your attention that this is at will. At this point the contract is served at pleasure so the board can terminate the contract for any reason we don't even need a reason we can just terminate the contract. I have a question why would we want to say you shall not do something. This came from another contract. I didn't even think about it. This was in with other contracts that's why it's there. Maybe we do have to address it. You shouldn't commit an illegal act or conduct.

Rinaldi- I think this speaks to other fire departments that have had trouble in the past. I think it merits being mentioned perhaps we can rephrase it.

Izzo- Any thoughts on that?

Bianchi- I see where you are going with it Ron and I don't know if we absolutely need that in here so I would object removing item K.

Berry- I think it might be necessary to emphasize the fact that lets say that chief DeWolf leaves or he is in there I mean we don't want our chief getting a DUI and not knowingly criminal littering, theft I think it just emphasizes the fact that we set higher standards and if something happens like there involved in a crime we can terminate them because they have obviously been involved in something that we don't think is publically right. So it is nice to have that in there.

Izzo- Ok. Any other thoughts?

Neal- If you want to leave it in there instead of will not it will be shall not that is the language that is usually used.

Rinaldi- Or we could just say act in a manner make it a positive. You will act in a manner that is becoming to take it from there and phrase it that way.

Izzo- Do you want to do that? Seems like there is enough to keep it in. Judy are you ok with keeping it in with that revision of shall?

Neal- I'm ok.

Izzo- Jerry are you ok

Bianchi- Ya, I am.

Izzo- Lets change that and leave it as it is. Ok anything else on page 3? Page 4? We have our option A and B. Might as well deal with it now. And for those of you who don't have it...if you do want a copy they will probably make another copy we did offer earlier. Option A the district recognizes that there may be necessary for the chief to travel in the course of employment and chief shall be authorized unrestricted traveling within Santa Cruz, Pima and Cochise County. Should the need to arise to travel outside this area chief shall obtain expressed permission I guess that would be from of the board of directors. Option B the district recognizes that it may be necessary for the chief so the only difference here is should it be need a rise to travel outside the state chief shall obtain expressed permission of the board of directors. So B gives them authority to travel anywhere in the state without our permission of the board and option A says you can only travel in a three county area. So that is the difference. If I understood it right from our previous meeting.

Bianchi- Under option A I would like the board before they reach a decision on A or B to consider the fact that most of the business that takes place with the chief and the fire district does run in the three counties there. Also we have from prior discussion recognize the fact that the chief serves on the board for the Arizona Fire District Association for monthly meetings and we have allowed for that. For other things I believe that the board should consider whether or not we want chief who is one of 12 people salary in the department to be traveling without us knowing why or approving it. I don't think we have placed him in an unreasonable restriction by keeping it to the three counties.

Rinaldi- I am in agreement with A as well.

Berry- Are we expressing our opinions here.

Izzo- Well I just want your thoughts here.

Berry- As I emphasized last time it would be B is a more positive option.

Neal- I am ok with A but I am would be interested in hearing your point of view because you know where you travel and do you see an issue?

Chief- Well EMS wise yes I can travel up to Greenlee County for an EMS meeting. Working with other districts I could go up in the Yavapai County whether it is working with other districts like we just used this past weekend Palomino District's burn tower. 2 structure trucks and 5 personnel in that district and they didn't charge us anything for it for the use of the tower because of the times I have gone over there and helped them. I have gone to Yavapai and have helped them with their wildland program in return we were able to send some of our people over there for trainings. So I do but don't travel a lot around the whole state Phoenix is Maricopa and I do go to Phoenix for the Arizona Fire District Association. We have had several meetings in Greenlee. Im trying to think of the other counties over there by Parker. We have met over there just to cut other peoples drive time down. Again 99% of the time I do notify the board when I am going to go somewhere. So state wide I don't see the differences of three counties state wide. I would say the state wide is more.....it's what we have been doing for the past 13 years.

Izzo- I think the way I had envisioned this is the chief and again we have I n the contract the chief and we do have his name in there this would be the standard contract that any chief would have. This isn't particularly unique to Joseph DeWolf that was our intent.

Berry- Sorry to interrupt if I have to make a phone call or something do I request a reassess how do we do that?

Izzo- I think you just need to excuse yourself.

Berry- Ok. Thank you.

Izzo- You going to do that now?

Berry- Yes

Izzo- Ok.

Berry- Just for 2 minutes.

Izzo- Ok we will hold any decision making till you come back. The way I envisioned this working is that the chief would come to the board at any time and say I am a member of the Fire Chiefs Association and we have a meeting once a month and they usually have that meeting in Phoenix or Prescott somewhere like that get our approval and we would say ok. We would just know about it and we would say ok. Personally Im not really solidly understanding the relationship between districts in this state. So I don't really understand the benefit to Sonoita ok for our staff to go help another district. I would like to know what that is. So if our chief is going to Prescott to help the district do something I would want to know that that is happening and what is the benefit. I just don't understand it. I just don't understand how we as a district benefit from our fire chief even let's take selection panels so that is a real common one if we were looking for a fire chief probably at the selection panel and ask some other fire chief to sit on it I would understand that. How many times has that happened? How much time does it take? What is the cost benefit? You know we haven't looked for a fire chief in all these years so I don't know if I want our fire chief spending 2 or 3 weeks a year serving on other panels. Maybe once you know if it is a day or something but if it is 3 or 4 days and 4 to 5 times a year then I am concerned. So I wouldn't just want to know about it and that's the way I see this it's not saying you can't. A matter of

fact the first sentence says we understand it and there is a need and we do recognize it. We just want to know what is going on. We just want to know what that need is. We then make an evaluation and assessment of that. It could be on a case to case basis. That's where I am with this.

Neal- Well that makes since. There are things scheduled that the chiefs knows about monthly, every other month or a year commitment. Then at a beginning of the New Year he just lets us know and that's it. Then the other things that come up like that we would be informed.

Rinaldi- That's the key phrase is being informed and knowing because we are responsible financially. So I think we need to know.

Izzo- So we have 2 over here for A Judy....

Neal- An A

Izzo- An A ok so it really doesn't matter did you want to say anything else? Looks like we have 3 for A.

Berry- No just as long as we can work A out for an acute situation where he is invited to something and needs to know within a few days. I'm not sure how we can all be contacted and approve that, a funeral I'm not sure. It's just the word

Izzo- Should we had an emergency clause? Shall an emergency rise the chief does travel so report to the board at the next regular meeting. Sound good? And for emergency purposes Sounds like....you know a firefighter a big fire happens, you know like what happened in Prescott is that what you are talking about?

Berry- Yes.

Izzo- I can see that as an exception. Ok so we will add some kind of emergency where it isn't practical. Anything else on page 4? Page 5.

Bianchi- Under disability something was added also

Rinaldi- I didn't add I just changed the verbiage. It's exactly the same

Bianchi- I think that basically says what we discussed last time.

Neal- Ya the only thing we might want to add that it would be at the cost of the district.

Izzo- Ya that was a thought I don't know where we got that from. Anything else on page 5? Page 6. Is that it folks? So what are the mechanics of this? What is your pleasure we can make those changes I think we are going to have to have another meeting actually vote on the draft don't you think? Do you want to have a special meeting or do you just want to have it at a regular meeting which is coming up in 2 weeks. 2 weeks right?

Rinaldi- 26th. We could do it at our regular meeting right it seems as though we got just a few things.

Izzo- Sounds good.

Bianchi- Sounds good to me.

Rinaldi- Just as an agenda item.

Izzo- Ok let's just talk briefly on since it still has to do with that so we can finalize this at our regular meeting and then present it to chief and how long should we give him to respond? We can talk about that next time too.

Rinaldi- Judy what is your experience?

Neal- The standard in the school ground is 10 days for a response. It use to be 30 days and then timelines were changed and the legislator actually changed it to 10 days.

Rinaldi- Ron what is your experience?

Izzo- Ya 10 days, 2 weeks. Chief would you like to weigh in? Is that a good time for you?

Chief- Sure.

Izzo- You have had everything we have been working on so....ok move on to item 6.

New Business- None

Audience Comments – Sandy Ruppel

I wasn't here to hear all of Don's comments but I think they are valid. I have a question for you Ron and for you Judy. If this contract was handed to you would you accept it with the understanding that #3 you could be terminated at will by the board's decision at any time there aren't always warm and fuzzy feelings from the board to the fire department. There is no time limit on if there is a disability so all you have said is he needs to be evaluated and should it come back as ya he is disabled you can terminate him at will giving him 30 days, even though you require him to be on call 24/7 unless he has left for vacation or something like that. In terms of traveling around the state for various reasons it's called networking. Networking is very important to any organization and because of chief going out networking with other agencies in other areas of the state that's how we draw in quality people to our station as how we get people from out of our little town who want to be a part of this station is because of the networking that they know this is a quality station. In some ways to me it feels like you are micromanaging and I know it is your responsibility to work with this station and be the board for this station but it feels like you are micromanaging this station. You want to be the chief and you can't be the chief. So if you were handed this and was told you are going to get a \$9,000 dollar cut, you are expected to be on call 24/7, you can be terminated at will at any time would you accept this contract?

Neal- You are asking me? I will tell you as a school superintendent I have taken contracts that were at will and I could be given 30 day notice.

Sandy Ruppel- Have you ever been asked to cut your pay at least in Elgin?

Neal- At Elgin no. A little over 5 years I was there I was at a pay and stayed there. I never got a raise.

Sandy Ruppel- That is understandable I like that point of instead of cutting the pay maybe freeze it for a while. Freeze it and then the cost of living later on. But I agree with Don your actions have a much bigger reaction that ripples through the station then you understand I think. The moralization of this station is something we have been fighting for a long time. These kids my kids included come and put their lives on the line I hear the thing go off in the middle of the night my kids are up and gone. There are not many careers where you are required to do that to keep moral up high at a station like this because of what happens on these calls. You are dealing with your neighbors dying. You are dealing with kids you have been working with dying with their parents showing up on scene. You are having to deal with that while you are dealing with a kid you have been working with in 4-H dying. These are not small things. I think compensating that is very minor. Like Don said I will get my \$4 or \$6 bucks if you look at what the fire station gets as opposed to some other public entities in the area this is minor and affects all of us very very strongly. To have qualified people we are over an hour from the nearest hospital to have qualified people here who can help us when we need it is extremely important and we have to have those people with good moral and to know they are being backed by their board. Thank You

Terry Plympton

Terry Plympton Elgin part 2. I want to say I appreciate the comments from the public here tonight but I would like to mention that for all these meetings I have been the only member of the public to be present for all these meetings. So I have seen this process from the beginning and to see all the discussions they have had including the chief. Everyone here has had a chance Kevin has had a chance to speak about certain issues so this has been a real joint effort on every ones part to try to hammer this contract out. So I would just like to say that some of the comments tonight although I appreciate them they are out of context and they seem to be coming from your information second hand because these people were not here at this meeting. Regarding the chief's salary I know this is a touchy issue but one thing I would like to say just in general is this is not for chief DeWolf it is just in general over chief's salary if that salary is already set to high then I say that needs to be adjusted. It was also mentioned at one of these meetings by one of the board members I'm not sure which one of you that any money that would be deducted from the chief's salary could indeed go toward increasing the salaries of the firefighters which is another issue that keeps coming up time and time again how to retain firefighters and this would be one way of possibly doing it is taking that money and putting it

towards another cause. So again I would just like to thank all of you guys for your efforts and this has been a tough one I know but again having me sit through the whole thing over the past month

Board member comments (name and brief comments)

Motion for adjournment by (name), seconded by (name) , motion carried. Meeting adjourned.

Approved (date) _____ Clerk of the Board