

Minutes to the Regular Meeting of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District Board
23 May 2011
6pm

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call – Tomlinson, Ruppel, Bianchi and Izzo were present.

Approval of the minutes to the 18 April 2011 meeting – motion by Ruppel, seconded by Tomlinson, motion carried.

Fire Chief's Report – Chief DeWolf addressed the Board on the following issues; Arlene Fire (a new fire burning south our the District in the San Rafael Valley), Out & About, Fundraising Calendar, Wildland Fire Refresher training, Website visits for April, Budget Schedule, Wildland Fire Season, and the Run Report for April.

Treasurer's Report – Bianchi – I reviewed the financial statements the Chief prepared, we made a few corrections, we talked about some budget items, and basically here are the numbers the chief prepared, and according to the policy manual if there are any comments to be made to the Board on this it will be the Chief's responsibility.

DeWolf – Chief DeWolf made a quick review of the Balance Sheet and the Financial Statement.

Correspondence – none

Action Items – none

Audience Comments -

Sandy Ruppel – Much has been said in the past few weeks concerning the Fire department, individuals within the fire department and board members. Anger and insults have been directed at these people. Character has been questioned. Statements bordering on libel have been made. If nothing else, division has been encouraged within this small community. My main goal is to provide some perspective on what's been going on here. I want you all to consider whether the level of self-righteously indignant accusations that have been directed at these good people matches what is actually warranted by the perceived offenses. This all stemmed from the posting of the proposed budget. There was a perceived increase in the rate, but what wasn't taken into account is that property valuations overall have been decreasing. The total assessed valuation for the district has decreased even though some individual assessed valuations have increased. The actual revenue required for this proposed budget is approximately \$16,000 higher than this year's budget. I understand these are hard times for everyone, but let's keep this in perspective. My calculations show that the approximate change in my parent's property taxes will be less \$50 for the whole year. That's less than dinner at the Steakout. Less than a tank of gas at the Mercantile. Less than getting a cut and color at Sonoita Strands. My mother is more than happy to pay this for the security of knowing that this fire department and these well qualified people are here to care and protect her and my ailing father. I challenge you to find out exactly what the change in your taxes will be before jumping to conclusions. I have another point about all this that greatly concerns me. Who, in this audience, is a member of this community - you ALL receive the

benefit of protection from the Sonoita Elgin fire department. Who here has children under the age of 14 - you are receiving the benefits of our tax dollars to the school. The proposed budget for the SEFD is \$1,094,006. To provide service for everyone in this community. This year's budget for the school is \$1,818,000. To service the families of 120 kids. The proposed salaries and benefits for the employees of the department are \$599,006. This year's salaries and benefits for the employees of the school were \$1,425,921. The department is staffed 24 hours a day 365 days a year. I hear the tone go off in the middle of the night. I hear the voices of those who have left their beds to go care for the people of our community or even those that are just passing through. The school is open 5 days a week with evenings, weekends, and holidays off. I have nothing against the school. I served on the board that hired the current Superintendent. It's a good school. I just wonder why there is so much said about the fire department budget that services us all and nothing about a school of less than 125 local children. Something to think about. All I am asking is that everyone really think, do your research, and decide how much of a reaction is warranted. Don't demoralize this department and divide this community for an issue that amounts to less than 2 bales of hay from the feed store.

Ed Schaeffer – I own a local business. I haven't raised my rates in four years. I have nothing against the Fire District; I think everyone's doing a wonderful job. I'd like to ask the board the right time to forget about the \$1.50 per \$100 of assessed value that we've heard so much about for three, four, five years now. Is this the right time with the economy the way it is, to go to your friends and neighbors and say, that \$1.50 just doesn't pertain anymore there's absolutely no way we can cut our budget.. There are a lot of people out there that are cutting their budgets, there are a lot of people who are hurting. I'd just like to know why, it is impossible for your budget to be cut at all.

Terry Plimpton – I am a member of the community and have a small business in the Sonoita-Elgin area. Gentlemen, as elected officials of the Fire District Board you are charged with the responsibility of representing to the Fire Department the interests and concerns of the taxpayers of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District. Here are a few of our concerns; we are currently in an economic recession in this county and in this nation with no signs of improvement. Members of our community receiving social security benefits may see no cost of living increase for several years even as prices for goods and services soar. Many county, state and federal employees are dealing with wage or hiring freezes, reduced pay, reduced work-week or facing the prospect of going on furlough. The private sector is not in any better shape, as employees are forced to reduce their work force, their inventory, services or in worst case scenarios, shut their doors. So the question we have for you gentlemen is this; the Board is in the process of considering an increase in the 2011-2012 Fire District Budget. We ask that before you make a decision that you consider the plight of your friends, neighbors and members of the community who are experiencing firsthand the stresses associated with this recession. Would it not be more reasonable to maintain the current tax rate, find ways to trim your current expenditures, be creative with your fundraising efforts and wait for the community to improve before putting an increased tax burden on your community? Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michelle Cardillo – I live in Sonoita and have lived here a little over 6 years. I would like to start off by saying that no one has my respect more than firefighters and EMT technicians that take care of us. I respect you the Board, hopefully for looking out for us as residents. You are supposed to be looking out for our interests and serving us first – the citizens first. People have done quite a bit of research; several people as a matter of fact have called around to different departments in our immediate neighboring area to find out what they were doing about their budgets and how they were going to deal with the problem of our economy. Most of the answers that I got were we're freezing salaries, we are not hiring, we're keeping our budget the

same, we're cutting back. I'd like to know just one thing. Why are we jumping forward at such a time when all of our neighboring Fire Departments are cutting back.

Annette Kelley – Good evening Board. Annette Kelley, resident Sonoita, last five years permanently. I'd like to address the Board in addressing the audience. I want to thank all of you for being here today it's wonderful to see the wonderful faces of Sonoita here today. I mean, it's great that we all have a voice that we can speak up and that we have the option to do that and the ability to do that in our community. The ability to show our gratitude – thank you very much for doing that I really appreciate it, I really do. A lot of times we find that this could be a very thankless job – most of the time we find that it is a very, very thankful job, from those that we serve and those that we don't serve who have other family members that are able to have the services of the department. I have a challenge for the board. I would challenge the board to encourage the commitment of those 26 people who are here - to continue to show their commitment to the community by stopping by the station and see what goes on at the fire station on a daily basis, see what is done, see the trainings that are done, see the hard work, see the effort, see the ability see all the commitment that is there not just from the firefighters, not just the EMT's, but every one of our volunteers, every one of our Board members who get involved, everyone who stops by on a day when it's windy and a fire is going to say hey, how's it going? I encourage the Board to encourage our community to continue to get involved. We have what , 26 here, that's every two weeks, two weeks can we have someone at our station going through to see what we do, see how we are committed, seeing what actually is done. Understanding at the very top the laws, the commitment that's intended from this department by everyone from the very top down, from our citizens, by those how aren't here, the chairs that aren't represented here. Please, encourage those, respond to those who are not here, those empty chairs. Please encourage those who are here, bring someone with them when they come to the station to see exactly what goes on, to know exactly the laws and why they're there, and to see the commitment it's going to take to continue to move this department forward and not just stand still. Everything that isn't moving forward is moving backwards – we know that – from growing plants, everything, they stop moving they stop – we may not see it, but it stops. Thank you.

Gary Soliere – Sonoita Resident – I come to the meetings every month and this is a huge crowd, there's usually about three of us. All week I've been hearing he said, she said, they said. If you'd all come you'd know what's going on. Nobody comes; it's usually just the three of us. This Board is your elected official, they don't get paid – it's nothing – what's in it for them. I think they do a terrific job, they aren't yes-sir people, they ask tough questions. Guys, just go with your hearts and your minds. Thank you.

Board Member Comments –

Bianchi – Unfortunately due to a family commitment that cannot be changed, I will not be at June's meeting. But I would like to encourage anybody who would like to email me, I've gotten a number of emails, I read them all, I give some serious thought to whatever I see. Or, if you want to stop by my office and visit with me – a number of people have done that – I am willing to do that. I am sorry I won't be here to address specific questions about the budget next month, but again if you would like to do a one on one – I'm there – just check first, I'm in real estate and not always inbound to the office.

Tomlinson – The posted budget is just a starting point, it not something the Board's endorsed, it's nothing necessarily that anyone has endorsed – it's the budget that was put forth that was posted it doesn't mean this Board is going to ask the community to pay – it's just a starting point. Next meeting is going to be a little more involved in the budget, we're going to start to work things out – it wasn't on the agenda today so there's

not much we can do about it. Just so everybody knows that's the starting point. I'd encourage you to look, not just at the levy rate, but also at the actual budget – it does increase, but again that's just a starting point.

Izzo – I'd like to personally thank all of you for coming, generally there are just two or three people who express an interest – so we have to rely on our friends and neighbors and other people who talk to us or call us or email us to have an idea of what people are thinking. The next meeting is June 20th it is a public hearing of the budget. So the purpose of this is to hear comments from people – positive, negative, otherwise – just a chance to address the Board. We will present the budget in a little bit more detail. It has been posted publicly; all of you have had an opportunity to see that, make some comparisons with last year and see exactly what's going on. The budget process is established by state law it's not something that we can come up with – we have certain requirements by state law. The Chief proposes a budget, we cannot adopt it, we can't do anything to it until after we've had a public hearing, then we have a chance to work on the budget and make any changes that we feel are appropriate. We have a deadline that our budget has to be adopted and presented to the Board of Supervisors of both counties. At that point they determine the tax levy. Any numbers that we hear now are actually kinda backed into – we don't determine the levy rate, we determine the budget. The county assessor determines the evaluation and that determines the levy rate. We can't say we're going to have a levy rate of this or that, we've just got to get this information together and find out what it is. We want everyone to know we've tried not to be secretive about any of that information and have that out in the public. Chief is always available – everything we do here is a matter of public record. I would like to see you all again on June 20th, your friends and anyone else who would like to address us so we can hear what people are thinking of. I want to thank very much for coming. Is there a motion for adjournment?

Ruppel – So moved.

(Question from the audience – what time is the meeting?)

Izzo - It will be posted, generally our meetings are at 6 pm. I am sure the local Tea Party will know. It may not be in this room, we may need a larger room.

Ruppel – Chief, could you address that?

DeWolf – It is posted here at the station and at the post office. We post it the Friday before the meeting, so if we change locations it will be posted at that time.

Izzo – we had a motion do we have a second? Tomlinson seconded, motion carried, meeting adjourned.