Sonoita-Elgin Fire District

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

September 25, 2023

Board member Chair Chris Johnson call the meeting to order at 9:02a.m.

1. **Roll call and confirmation of quorum**.

Chris Johnson, Ruth Ann LeFebvre, Robert Garber and Russ Kolsrud are present and the Board has a quorum. Eddie McArthur is absent.

1. **Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.**
2. **Call to the Public.**

* Brian Jackson addresses the Board: Brian Jackson thanks the Board, he explains that he has served the district for over 16 years and is deeply concerned about the safety of the community. He continues to explain his thoughts of being demoted from Captain to Fire Fighter, he wants to make it clear that this he feels that this decision was based on disciplinary action against him, and it is his understanding that Chief Meredith claims that this decision was not based on any disciplinary action taken against him. He explains that he feels that the Board has made a decision and chosen this path without giving him the opportunity to address his grievances regarding the matter. He continues to explain that he is deeply disturbed by the decision to demote him from Captain to Fire Fighter, and proceed with looking for a Captain with a requirement of Paramedic license and a minimum two years’ experience. He continues to explain to the Board that he feels the community deserves an individual with experience, qualified leadership and the proper certifications or we risk compromising the safety of our community. He continues to explain that we jeopardize the training and development of our districts Fire Fighters without considering the value of an experienced Captain. He concludes by asking the Board to reconsider their position for the safety of the community and to consider the communities comments on Instagram and Facebook as he feels that it is not ethical to block content from those platforms as well.
* Chris Johnson responds to Brian and thanks him for his thoughts and that the Board will discuss it later as a potential item on agenda item #11, and if the Board chooses to address his concerns it would be listed as a topic of discussion for a future meeting, but further discussion on the matter would not be discussed today.

1. **Approval of the Minutes from past meetings.**

*Russ Kolsrud makes a motion to approve the minutes from Board Meeting September 25, 2023, and Ruth Ann LeFebvre seconds the motion and it passes unanimously.*

1. **Reports from the Fire Chief.**

* Administration and Budget: For this year’s audit we will be using Walker & Armstrong, we are currently pulling items and getting ready for this year’s audit next month. Our goal is to have our FY22/23 audit wrapped up quicker than our FY21/22 audit. Once this year’s audit is wrapped up someone from Walker & Armstrong will come and do a presentation for the Board.
* Our grant from the Legacy Foundation was for $5,000, we have already received a check and we are excited to be part of their foundation and it will be used for the districts strategic planning process.
* Transition from In The Black Accounting to James Vincent Group is under way and they will be taking over as of October 1, 2023. More comprehensive accounting financial services firm for the future. Want to extend a strong thanks to Ronda for her services over the last couple years.
* PSPRS does not have a meeting set up at this time, anticipate a meeting before the end of the year.
* Operations: Incidences count for August was 55: 30 EMS, 11 FIRE & 24 SERVICE with 26 in Zone 1, 7 in Zone 2, 9 in Zone 3, 3 in Zone 4, and 20 in Zone 5. 20 occurred during A shift, 22 occurred during B shift and 24 occurred during C shift.
* Dispatch process may include hardware updates and will be an ongoing discussion.

We need more timely updates, expectations for ambulances and recording of times and GPS monitoring. The expect the units to have permanent GPS monitoring.

* Chris Johnson discusses the importance of dispatch and the timely notification and the level of service that we deserve for our communities.
* Russ Kolsrud asks how does it happen to provide better dispatch services, and Chief explains the program and the need for dispatch services and that the emergency medical dispatch, Santa Cruz County Sherrif’s Office is a PSAP (Public-safety answering/access point) facility and they have the authority to receive 911 calls.
* First Due will be used by most cities and it will be easier to share resources. First Due App is for District use, community connect is part of First Due that can be utilized by the community.
* Recruitment process for a Captain/PM is scheduled to close at the end of September and have 2 applicants so far.
* Have a new full-time member on A shift, starting next week.
* Apparatus: Engine #822 is still being worked on and may be the end of October, all other apparatus is operational and in service.
* Legislative Update: Nothing that warrants bringing up at this time, Legislative session is still in session.

1. **Presentation and Approval of the Monthly Financial Reconciliation and Reports pursuant to ARS Sec. 48-807 including: reconciled balance sheets, month-end statements, month-end balances at all institutions and county accounts, revenues and expenditures and the cash flow projection report.**

* We received an infusion of ARPA (The American Rescue Plan Act) funds that totaled $67,000, which are meant to back bill our salaries and we have the flexibility to use it for other funds.
* We will be using the Chase account to write all checks and pay accounts payables.
* Overtime pay is used when someone is sick, on vacation, during education and classes, and when we set up for special events such as contracted medical services.
* Russ Kolsrud asks if we can use the ARPA funds for overtime costs, there are specific parameters for the use of the money but yes, that will help. Chief explains that the James Vincent Group has modeling capabilities that will help project needs for the district now, and in five years from now. Russ Kolsrud expresses how expensive it is to provide services and the possible need to increase tax rate. Chief responds that we are having more incidences, and we are seeing an increase in this district from last year to this year.
* District is struggling with simultaneous events and when all resources are committed, right now it is 25-30% of the time.
* We worked on getting the fuel allowance program current with the members for the year and that was accomplished on this last paycheck.
* Ruth Ann Lefebvre asks about staffing and how often staff is changing, how long members are staying. Chief explains that we have not taken a scrutinized look at staffing like that, we are a young district, will only by 20 years old in 2026, and the strategic plan we help us identify these needs.
* Cash on hand is positive and net income is positive at this time, there is not an adverse effect on the district at this time.

*Russ Kolsrud makes a motion to approve the financials and Robert Garber seconds the motion, and Board members vote unanimously to approve the August financials.*

1. **Information item-update on the new website since launch.**

* The new website is live and it is easy to upload content, Tricia is able to upload information and pictures as needed.
* Streamline has helped us created an ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant website, which has to do with font size, audio and ease of use.
* Ruth Ann Lefebvre would like to see a consistent use of language and nouns on the website as it seems very confusing and fragmented. Chief responds that we now have quicker access to editing and can make these changes moving forward.

1. **Update on referral to AZ Attorney General’s office of investigation regarding department claim with former chief.**

* Chris Johnson explains that the AZ Attorney General’s office is the bureau to handle the legal portion of the claim and we are waiting for their investigation.
* No update at this time.

1. **Informational Item-Strategic Planning Process 2023-2026.**

* A Mailing will go out to the community inviting them to one of two strategic planning meetings open to the community, where they can have input and we will plan to hold them here in our community room.
* The external stakeholder meetings will be held in October.
* Chief explains that this is the first time we have engaged in a more formal process for external and internal stakeholder meetings.
* Ironwood Strategic Solutions will be present to help facilitate the meetings.

1. **Review, discussion, and possible action: UTV purchase.**

* Chief explains to Board that the district is looking to purchase an ATV and Trailer for use for EMT and Wildland purposes, and this is a tool we have been missing and it is unfortunate we do not do more trail rescues and can increase our potential revenue with Wildland with added equipment on response and billing.
* Captain Laird brought forward an opportunity to purchase a unit at a reduced price of $26,000 compared to full price amount of $56,000 fully equipped. Captain Laird has done a lot of research on the ATV unit and the needed accessories and feels this is an excellent opportunity to purchase one.
* Ruth Ann Lefebvre asks how we would pay for this purchase as we did not anticipate this when we constructed the budget. Chief explains there are a couple possibilities: one is we have money that is currently allocated for paying people, which is now backed up by ARPA, we also have the option of financing the utility vehicle.
* Russ Kolsrud asks about the maintenance cost, repair and inquiries about what equipment we would have to add to the ATV. Chief explains that we would have to add emergency life package and an EMS skid. The brand is a Polaris Ranger, 6-seater plus the skid on the back.
* Captain Laird speaks about the reimbursement rate and the need for an ATV when out on a wildland fire. Every person driving needs to be trained to drive it. With every wildland fire we can write a ticket for it and get we can get reimbursed through Arizona Department of Forestry. Within one fourteen-day assignment we could potentially get paid $50-60,000 just for the ATV equipment on a Wildland fire from Arizona Department of Forestry. An ATV would also aid with trail rescues and other local incidences. Captain Laird emphasizes the urgency of the deal as this is a current model and will not last. A trailer would be an additional cost.
* Robert Garber asks about the associated costs for maintenance. Captain Laird feels the district is set up for maintenance and do not foresee huge cost to maintain in the future. Robert states that he feels that this is a good deal and it falls under the category of Chief Meredith doing his job. Robert asks if the Board can get an update on the financial arrangements after considering financing vs. paying for it.

*Robert Garber makes a motion to approve the purchase of an ATV under the direction of the Chief, arranging for the most advantageous financing and stipulation of a budget of no more than $50,000. Russ Kolsrud seconds the motion and Board members votes aye and the motion is approved unanimously.*

1. **Consideration of agenda items for future meetings.**

* Strategic Planning Process
* Attorney Generals Follow-up
* New Website
* Chief’s Annual Review
* James Vincent Group Accounting
* Chris Johnson opens up for discussion Captain Jackson’s comments and if his grievances should be an addenda item for future meetings.
* Russ comments that he could see where it did not seem fair but asks to clarify the last decision we made as a Board and expresses that the Board did make a decision that you can not make a grievance over a policy. Russ expresses that he does not feel that this should be an agenda item.
* Chris Johnson expresses that as long as we can come up with a clear agenda item, we could potentially put it on the agenda for future meetings.
* Ruth Ann LeFebvre expresses that she feels the Captain Jackson does not seem to know the way forward on how he will resolve this and it needs to be clarified. Chief Meredith clarifies that until Captain Jackson’s status is changed, he is still a captain and nothing has changed in his compensation. When there is a new captain hired there is a process that Captain Jackson will be subject to as outlined in our Human Resources manual.
* Roger Garber discusses that his opinion is that this should not be an agenda item and that he feels that this matter is for the Chief to decide and not an external entity.

*Roger Garber makes a motion that Captain Jackson is not going to be an agenda item for review at the next meeting and Russ Kolsrud seconds that motion. Roger Garber, Russ Kolsrud and Chris Johnson votes aye and Ruth Ann Lefebvre votes nae, the motion passes.*

*Russ makes a motion to Adjourn and Roger Garber seconds the motion and all Board members vote aye to adjourn. Board Meeting Adjourns at 10:40 a.m.*

A digital copy of this meeting is available to the public at the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District, located at 3137 AZ Highway 83 Sonoita, AZ 85637 or view the minutes on the website: https://sefd911.org.

**NOTICE: The Sonoita-Elgin Fire District Board of Directors may go into executive session for the purpose of obtaining legal advice from the fire district’s attorney(s) on any of the above agenda items pursuant to A.R.S. 38-431.03(A)(3)**

Minutes approved by\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Board Clerk, on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ruth Ann LeFebvre Date