**Jefferson County Fire and EMS**

**Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

**November 19th, 2024**

**Meeting called to Order:** 5:32 PM

**Pledge of Allegiance lead by:** Led by Director Miller

**Roll Call:**

Board President Kim Stout, Secretary Dusty Miller, Director Ryan Boyle, Director Chris DuPont

**Fire Members Absent:** Vice President Rob Galyen

**Department staff:** Fire Chief Blake, Deputy Chief Skaar, Deputy Chief Earnest, Billing Manager Danielle Peckham, Finance Manager Kristal Huges, Fire Attorney Tim Gassner, Volunteer FF Rick Allen, Captain Tom Jaca

**Zoom:** Kayla Page, Jess Haury, Josh Mcclatchey, Michelle Spaulding, Kate Fry, Andrew Glen, Conner Bowman, Melody Ronan, Sam Collier, Josiah Bailey, Skyler Horton

**Community Members:** Stacy Chiddix, Linda Larson, Griffin Construction,

Online Brad Pahl CRR

**Agenda approval/adjustment:** There were no adjustments to the agenda. Director Chris Dupont motioned to approve the agenda as typed. Director Dustin Miller seconded Director Boyle the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Presenter:** No presentation.

**Citizens Input:** No citizens input. Public items on or off agenda

**Minutes from previous meeting:** President Stout stated that under Agenda approval/adjustments and under previous minutes Director DuPont needs to be removed as he was absent. Secretary Miller seconded his motion. Motion passed unanimously. Secretary Miller motioned to approve the minutes with the two amendments. Director Boyle seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

**EMS/Fire Consolidation:** The fire audit for 2022 should be in draft form and as complete as of this week; we are expecting drafts by next week. Sensible, an auditing company, may be conducting the EMS audit. The cost comparison for pricing on the EMS audit is ongoing. Sensible might be the auditor in 2024. Director Miller asked if both audits are concurrent. Chief Blake said yes, and by the December meeting, we hope there will be a presentation and at least a draft will be done.

The department is still waiting for a significant amount of back billing. We are getting some funds back from billing. At the beginning of November, we received a check for $45,000. Some of this is from current billing. A few of the $45K was backdated. On the Medicaid side, we have yet to be approved. Danielle reviewed and gave further updates regarding this matter. Blake stated that progress has been made and he is hopeful we get our back billing payments paid in a large portion. In the meantime, as a precaution, we have balanced. Blake discussed another option for adjusting the part-time program. He stated we have reimbursement from the Bond as well. Blake mentioned that there have been overtime changes; Deputy Chief Skaar and Deputy Chief Earnest have been working on the operating line item. Worst case scenario, Blake said we could furlough employees over a period. One of the things that comes with different questions is that for those furloughed employees, they could be placed on the part-time list and get first priority to cover shifts. If we are able to implement other programs that would generate funds, we could do those. We have employees in the paramedic program, and we would cover their expenses for their Paramedic program. We want them to come back and be paramedics. Again, Blake wanted to stress that this is just preliminary planning. We currently have to be realistic. One of the options even includes laying off himself, Chief Blake stated. He asked that nobody overreact. If it is going to happen, he'd like to be able to give 60 days' notice to the employees. If we are successful, that will change things. Blake said the lack of back billing for EMS is the reason; he was told it would take 9-12 months before we start seeing the funds, but due to the security breach, we are further behind. Blake said we are in the best model that we can be in, and these employees are needed. The bottom line is we have a revenue problem, and we need to bring more funds into the department. This model was proven on Saturday at the structure fire, and it was also demonstrated at the Elk Lane fire. If we did not have this model, we would have lost houses. Blake stated his stance is that we need to do what we can to sustain this workforce. He said we could get a loan from the county, but the county would like to see changes. Blake stated we did or could secure a loan from SDAO for funds. These are things we have to talk about because it is real life, and we need to be realistic. If we don't get the funds soon, we must balance our budget. He stated we have cut costs and will continue to. That is where we are currently—it is not great, but he feels hopeful.

Dustin Miller stated that he agrees we do have a revenue problem, but when looking at the budget, our current collection rate is 10%, which is 2.8% of the collection rate that has never been collected. We have a revenue issue. We merged two departments, and today, as we sit, we have more FTEs than both agencies ever had, but we have never increased taxes or billing. He agrees that the community deserves a Duty Officer, an ambulance, but that is not the reality of our tax base and what we collect in revenue. So, we either need to look at a levy or we have to look at some sort of reduction because it is real.

Blake understands it's real, but we are under a grant with the Oregon State Fire Marshal’s office that we have utilized. When you say that we have more staffing, the grant employees are not factored into that. Blake stated it is not apples to apples because we have lost our revenue. It is like the SAFER grant; it buys us time. If we have to lay individuals off, there is a strong possibility we would give the grant money back. So why would we do that if we can maintain this for a period of time? If you look at the budget, we knew we would lose money yearly until we could sustain it to give us time. It was taken away by the loss of EMS billing. Blake feels that we have a good chance of getting close, or really close, to the reserves we had. It will be a change when we start getting revenue. Blake said that, long-term, we do need to make a change to bring in more revenue, as we all know.

Dusty stated, when we merged, how many FTEs did each agency have? Kasey stated about 21 total, and the fire district had 6. We are 28, carrying one vacancy. Dustin stated we are picking up payments but look at the bills this month—it is not sustainable. He stated he would like 16 people to show up when his house is on fire, but that is not realistic. We either have to hope and pray to get checks in from EMS billing, but we have been hoping and praying for a long time. Chris agrees with Dustin. He ran the numbers, and the deficit is there and will continue to grow. Even if we get the funds in, it will eventually run out if we don’t do something to change it. He thinks we have a lot of different issues hitting us at the wrong time. He agrees he would like all our staff to be here, but given the circumstances, what do we do? We want Pacific Source to write us a 2 million-dollar check tomorrow, but what will we do next year? Chris stated we want layoffs to be the last resort, but if that is our reality, then that is our reality. Blake stated we do have a certain amount of time, and he is uncomfortable writing a check back to the state for their positions. He stated he is fighting as hard as he can. He said our employees are not dumb, and they have fears. Every one of them could get jobs anywhere, and he knows we have good ones. He wants to do everything we can to exhaust every reality. He stated the other side of this is that we have been made promises that have not been kept, from when the consolidation first started to ARFA funding. He would like the record to show that’s the case, whether it costs his job or not.

Linda stated everyone needs to think of every penny that has been spent because these people have given so much to support the community and the department. She stated the board needs to figure out a way to not look them in the face and say, “I know you have given us everything, but we’re laying you off.” Something has to be done to save those employees—they have given too much to the department. There has been money spent that could be saving the employees. The public is talking about it. It is not a happy situation. They have given their all, and it is time for staff and the board to give it their all.

Blake stated there is not a choice to be made tonight, but we are acknowledging there is a plan, and we are planning for the worst- and best-case scenarios. We need to publicly state this. We need to see where we end up.

Chris asked if we had any specific dates for when we will hear back from Pacific Source—it is still in the approval process. Blake stated he hopes it will be sometime in December. Kasey asked for clarification on the number we are anticipating from Pacific Source. Numbers were then calculated during the meeting based on the billing reports Danielle provided for a more accurate representation of the numbers.

Deputy Chief Earnest stated, reading the handbook, he is one of the ones to be laid off first, as one of the last hired. In your preliminary planning, do they at least have an idea of the number if close to black? Chief Blake stated we are not settled on a number yet. He stated Krystal is running numbers. Blake said the dollar amount he is comfortable with is $500,000.

Kim stated the last thing we want to do is cut staff and lose service to the community. She does see how much transfers may help, and that is something we can look at. Blake stated that if we bring back 24/7 transfers, that is another option we are looking at and how much it brings. He stated the bottom line is that if we got an extra $150 per call, that changes our entire outcome, being that it is half a million. We have a lot of roadblocks we are working on. We are not the only organization facing this. The reimbursements are going down, and costs are going up.

**Old Business**

**Building Expansion:** Stacy reviewed all the bids and highlighted that the seismic upgrades need to be completed before the 2025 fiscal year. Blake mentioned that if the project starts soon, it may offer potential capital funding benefits. He also noted that the fire truck expected for delivery in October 2025 could be leased, allowing the use of reimbursement funds to help manage current financials.

Blake mentioned ongoing discussions with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regarding the EMS building. However, if the building is sold, there would need to be an alternative space for BLM, although this is still under discussion.

Kim called for a motion to approve the project timeline. Ryan asked for clarification on the start and end dates, which were tentatively set for December 23, 2024, to April 14, 2025.

Deputy Chief Skaar suggested making the engine project a comprehensive one, including the necessary equipment and considering a logistics building. He also raised the idea of possibly moving some items to this building, and renting space to BLM. The building project is a priority, but several factors need further consideration, with a budget of $6.8 million allocated.

Director Miller motioned to approve the start date for the building expansion project as December 23, 2024, and Director DuPont seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

**Bond Advisory**: Previously reviewed.

**Old Business**

**EMS Audit:** Previously reviewed.

**New Business**

**Finance Update:**

**Financial Dashboard:** Chief Blake deferred as Krystal was not present.

**New Business**

**Finance Update investment policy agreement:** The Investment policy service agreement paperwork was then gone over. There was no real change, we just need an updated agreement with a new signature card with all of the board signatures.

Tim Gassner then read the Resolution by title 2024-2025 #04. He then asked for questions or comments for the resolution. There were none. Director Chris Dupont made a motion to approve the resolution as read. Boyle then seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

LGIP: Blake would like to move bond funds to its own LGIP accounts.

Blake read into the record the public hearing for the supplemental budget regarding the bond funds- It was then opened for public comment. There were no public comments or discussion from the board. Dustin made a motion to approve the supplemental budget. Ryan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Blake states that Kristal worked on the financial dashboard and presented it on her behalf. He asked if the board had questions. Chris stated it was nice to see financials in an easy-to-read format.

Blake went over the legislative update. There are three items they are working on- Funding of EMS services, affordable housing, balance billing for EMS services. He passed a copy of the legislative concept that they will go over, Legislative concept 928- our EMS fees for service. Lastly, they will cover the Oregon GEMT program.

PGE Contract: Blake stated we are in the final stages of the PGE contract. One of the largest adjustments we will have to make is the value and what property we will be covering. There is a 3% escalation clause annually for the contract. We will not get full value at the start of it.

Thursday, Blake has a meeting with Central Oregon Gov. Counsil and Culver to discuss the annexation process and the Culver lease. He is also stating that we have been overpaying the lease with utilities currently anyways.

**Fire Ops.:** Deputy Skaar went over stats for the calls we ran 280 calls this last month. He then broke down the stats. He stated we had a great stop on the fire on 7th st- Library house, on Saturday. That is what he had for the monthly report and when Capt. Glen gets here he will send out Glens Draft. Blake commented that the Chair of the library board were very complimentary on the job our crews did putting the fire out and protecting the property around the house. Blake stated we took three other calls during that period, Linda took pictures and we owe that to our staffing model.

Chief Skaar stated we are balancing staffing issue right now – A shift has the most staff at 7 and then we have B and C at 6 staff. With that during cold and flu season Capt. Jaca is covering the shift currently.

Volunteer John Brown and Skaar will go to Braun NW and get tires for the new ambulances that were found- 12 take off wheels for winter tires on the ambulances.

He is looking at a few grant opportunities currently in regard to the opioid crisis. They are looking at any grant opportunities. Capt. Glen and Skaar are looking at a grant for cancer prevention relating to PPE. Also, regarding the building project we do not have an exhaust system and Skaar stated it would be nice to see what it would take to get one. He is exploring the AFG Grant to see what he can make happen.

Skaar stated Capt. Glen and Capt. Johnson did a great job at the burn to learn we had about 30 people attending, Linda was out taking pictures. It was a great opportunity for training.

Thursday, there is an after-action review for task force leaders that responded to fires around Central Oregon and they will cover what went well and what we can do better for next year.

**New Business**

**Fire Prevention:** Deputy Chief Earnest stated that it was a busy month and went over his report. He shouted out C Shift as they were busy with prevention with him! Address signs are being installed and he has also issued two special burn permits this month. He also has a lot of new building construction to go over. He has had multiple business inspections as well this month- The spot and the brewery being two of them.

The fall Fire Free was a success with 70.2 tons of debris collected. He is also working on a grant through FEMA. Jeff. Co. was identified as a high probability location for grant funding after the Elk Lane fire. He is writing the justification for air burners currently. He is asking for $480k for 4 units that sit at box canyon, and three mobile units- three rivers, camp Sherman and one at Crooked River Ranch.

Central Oregon Daily News will be at the station will be here tomorrow and we will be doing a news clip on Fire Safety in your home! Lastly, he is working with COCC to get waivers for all of our students.

Chief Blake added that the air burners are important because Fire Free is a loss for box canyon and the air burner is important to keep fuels down.

**New Business**

**EMS Report:** Deputy Chief Lepin went over his EMS report. His first item was balance billing, Danielle and he are both working on that currently and is hopeful we see good things out of it.

He then spoke about the shortage of iv fluids and items we would typically get from Baxter. The shortage was due to the hurricane. We got a big shipment right before the shortage which we are grateful for. They are hoping to be operational by the end of the year. We have enough IV fluid and flushes to get us through to Jan. or even Feb.

He stated we were successful in getting a $15,000.00 grant from St. Charles to go towards buying transport ventilators. We settled on a Hamilton Ventilator. With this we are able to do transports on Bipap. We are currently unable to transfer Bipap so we are missing out on those transfers currently. He stated with specialty care we are able to gain more funds from. We will get the funds in December. LifeFlight will come out and help us train.

Deputy Chief Lepin stated that Adventure Medics is doing transfers that we should be doing. That company also does specialty care transfers. He is working on getting some of those transfers back. He stated doing 24/7 transfers may be beneficial. Before the merger we had a BLS ambulance that was staffed during peak hours and it helped out a lot. It is Lepins goal to put a 3rd out crew to do that- it will help with funding. We would be giving our community a service as well as bettering our relationship with the hospital. With that he stated with those types of ventilators in the future we will do critical care transfers. We will have to send paramedics to get critical care certs at that point.

Lepin stated he is a board member of the Oregon Rural Health Association. He wrote a grant to help rural agencies with their billing and resources. We bill for two of those agencies- Mitchell and Fossil. They are targeting seven agencies right now that need help. With this he is putting together a team to teach them to bill- if it is successful he’d like to take it statewide. Because Lepin is involved in the grant the dept. gets benefits such as scholarships for EMT and paramedic programs which could in turn help our staff going to medic school pay for their paramedic or pay for future medics.

ASA states that if another ambulance agency wants to come in and take transfers, they need a contract with him. He would like to clean up the grammar on the contract.

Last Monday was the EMS Rodeo – Danielle and Chief Lepin put on a presentation on diversity. He said it was great, and we learned a lot about everyone there. He stated we have an amazing crew that works here.

**New Business**

**Chief Update:** Continuing to work on Urban Renewal task force. Continued work with county commissioners on payment for one of the ambulances with some of the arpa money. He is working on some grants for equipment. Linda took great pictures on the burn to learn and the paper wants to do a press release on why we do burn to learns.

**Monthly Bank Accounts:**

Reviewed by Blake and blake signed the checks he can sign.

**Pay Bills:**

Kim Stout asked what the Hartford was- Blake stated it is our Paid Leave. He stated he went through Hartford for cost savings and employee benefit. Blake stated our costs are high. We will get some back for seismic grant. One of the bills was to the Sheriff’s office to pay for dispatching – about $40,000.00.

Ryan motioned to pay the bills as presented. Dustin seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**Citizens Input:** Linda reminded the board that keeping our personnel is most important because when the ambulance or fire truck pulls up it is the people saving the lives not the equipment. The equipment is only as good as the personnel.

Penny Codemo stated that she is a paramedic with the dept. and she started volunteering in 2003 and she has seen the ups and downs of the dept. If we go to lay off employees, they are assets to the dept. beyond what people understand, and it would be hard to replace that. She stated she lived through covid, and if we go to skeleton staffing, we will lose staff, we will be labeled as a toxic work environment and that’s is the last thing we want and hard to come back from. We will not be known for keeping people and we will be a revolving door. We need to retain what we have. You have an entire dept., that is doing what it takes to keep employees. They are willing to go back to full-time transfers which means so much. We just need more communication and to be told what we can do, and the staff will do it.

No zoom comment.

**Additional Comments/Concerns:** Chris stated that the conversation that was had tonight is difficult and to just know that it is not a decision that we are going to take lightly at all. The last resort would be layoffs, and we are focused on how much staff we can save.

Blake said his concerns with 24/7 transfers, but he is worried we will be taken advantage of.

**Adjourn Meeting:** 7:43 PM

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Board President Recording Secretary