**Jefferson County Fire and EMS**

**Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

**January 14th, 2025**

**Meeting called to Order:** 5:30 PM

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

**Roll Call:**

**Fire:** Board President Kim Stout, Vice President Rob Galyen, Secretary Dusty Miller, Director Chris DuPont

**Fire Members Absent:** Director Ryan Boyle

**Fire staff:** Fire Chief Blake, Deputy Chief Kasey Skaar, Admin. Asst. LeeAnn Bowman,

**Zoom:** Jennifier King, Kim Nicholsen, Chris Mahr, Leeper, “Guest”, Capt. Beebe, FF/Paramedic Kayla Page, Andy, Mark Cooley, Andrew Flood,

**Community Members:** Linda Larson, Michelle Spaulding, Scott Spaulding, Leeper, Phil Johnston, Chelsie Patt, Trevor Patt, Stacy Chiddix, Hunter Hansen,

**Agenda approval/adjustment:** DVP Galyen motioned to approve the agenda as typed. Director DuPont seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Presenter: Chris Mahr - 2022-2023 Audit**

Auditor Chris Mahr presented the 2022-2023 audit to the board and those in attendance. He acknowledged that the merger and personnel changes have posed some challenges, but he is pleased to report that the FY 2022 audit has been completed. Chris and LeeAnn are currently working on the 2023-2024 audit.

Chris emphasized that the 2022 audit covers Jefferson County Fire only, as the merger with EMS had not yet occurred. These financial statements reflect the period ending June 2022. He also stated that he will provide an unqualified opinion on the audit. Although this audit is delayed, as we are now in the 2025 fiscal year, he clarified that FY 2022 ended with approximately $1.8 million, which reflects about 15 months of operations during the 2022-2023 year. The budget had projected an ending balance shy of $1.5 million, meaning the district ended with a significant surplus.

However, there were some overspending issues, particularly in Capital Outlay, related to building renovations. Chris acknowledged that this is distinct from the current state of finances, but noted that the only outstanding debt at that time was the PERS liability. Some of these expenditures were categorized under materials and services, which were later moved. Additionally, the early retirement of Umpqua Bank staff led to a small over-expenditure, which Chris deemed a one-time expense. He suggested that Chief Blake consider resolutions to cover this over-expenditure. Another issue noted was that certain purchases exceeding $5,000, like dorm room equipment, should have gone out for bids. Chris attributed some of these challenges to the merger of the fire department and EMS.

Chris also mentioned that there has been significant turnover in the finance department, which has contributed to delays in the audit. The state is aware of the challenges faced by auditors and municipalities due to COVID-19 and staffing shortages. Chris stated that he hopes to provide the June 2023 report within the next month.

Regarding other concerns, Chris pointed out that, as a small organization, the district lacks ideal staffing for internal controls. He noted that this is a common challenge for many small organizations and recommended that the current staff take a more active role in managing finances to ensure proper tracking and oversight.

In conclusion, Chris assured the board that, as of June 2022, the district was in good financial standing, despite the transitions due to the merger and ongoing facility upgrades.

Questions

Chief Blake asked if hard copies of the audit would be provided. Chris confirmed that hard copies would be distributed and requested that the board review them for submission to the state.

Secretary Miller inquired whether the next audit would be completed by the February board meeting. Chris stated that he is prioritizing the audit, but completion will depend on how quickly the necessary information is received. He mentioned that February and March can be difficult months to complete items, but his goal is to finalize them as quickly as possible. Chief Blake noted that a large file was sent two weeks ago. Chris promised to follow up with LeeAnn at his office for clarification. No further questions were raised.

**Citizens' Input**

Chief Blake announced that citizens' input would be limited to two minutes and that all speakers should state their name and whether they reside in the district. No citizens’ input was provided.

**Minutes from December 2024 Board Meeting**

Director DuPont pointed out that the minutes incorrectly stated he was absent from the December 10th meeting, though he was present. Secretary Miller motioned to accept the minutes as amended. Vice President Galyen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Director DuPont also noted that he should have been listed under roll call. Secretary Miller motioned to accept the minutes as amended. Secretary Miller seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

**Building Expansion**

Chief Blake updated the board on the ongoing construction, stating that asphalt is being removed to facilitate utility work. The goal is to complete the utility work and then restore access to the station. Although permits have been paid for, the county has not yet issued them. Owner’s Representative meetings are set to begin on January 15th. Blake stated that they hope to stay ahead of the schedule. Weekly meetings will be held, and a project schedule will be shared with staff as soon as possible. Chief Blake mentioned that the most difficult part of the project will be the remodel and seismic work, as apparatus will need to be moved around.

Director DuPont asked when the project’s timing would be more definite. Chief Blake stated that the schedule will be updated once the remodel and seismic work are underway. A fresh schedule will be provided to the board at the next meeting, and bi-weekly updates will be sent via email. Completion is expected by March or April of next year, with seismic work needing to meet a strict deadline.

**Bond Advisory**

Chief Blake reported that a bond advisory meeting was held last week, and the committee unanimously recommended reimbursing the district for $979,965.97 in expenses.

Secretary Miller asked about the reimbursement for the medic unit. Chief Blake clarified that confusion surrounding COVID funding for EMS led to one medic unit being pulled out for reimbursement. The district is also working toward acquiring another medic unit and has been in talks with Braun NW. Chief Blake is preparing a third capital funding request.

Director DuPont inquired whether this reimbursement covers all eligible expenses. Chief Blake confirmed that this amount covers everything he feels comfortable reimbursing.

Secretary Miller also asked if the bond committee was comfortable with the remaining funds for both building and equipment purchases. Chief Blake assured that the committee is comfortable, though cautious, due to the fluctuating costs of construction. Blake mentioned that the district has implemented cost-saving measures, such as finding flooring that is $20,000 cheaper than initially expected.

Director DuPont made a motion to accept the bond advisory reimbursement of $979,965.97. Vice President Galyen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**New Business**

**Finance Update**

Chief Blake proposed a resolution to move bond funds to a separate account for tracking purposes. He has been exploring investment options for these funds and discussed the possibility of using the Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP). The county is willing to place the funds into the LGIP, and Blake suggested setting up both a checking account and a money market account for the bond proceeds.

Blake stated that further research on the LGIP is needed, and he proposed that a special meeting may be necessary to discuss this matter in more detail. In the meantime, the funds can be placed in the LGIP until a long-term investment strategy is determined. Director DuPont supported this suggestion, noting that placing the funds in the LGIP would allow the district to earn interest, but he will abstain from voting on this matter.

Attorney Gassner proposed a resolution to transfer the bond proceeds into the LGIP with Jefferson County and to create a separate checking account for bond expenses. Vice President Galyen moved to approve the resolution as proposed. Director Miller seconded the motion. Director DuPont abstained from voting. The motion passed.

**Finance Update:**

Chief Blake briefly reviewed the financial statements shared by Kristal. There was a discussion about the total bond amount listed as $965,965K, and Kasey questioned the figure, stating that it should be another value. Blake clarified that this was for the December 31, 2024, report, while they were now in January 2025, which explained the discrepancy. Chief Skaar inquired whether bond funds were being used to help with operations, and Blake replied that Kristal and Heather were working on clarifying that.

Operating Expenses for the month were reported at $380,594.04. Blake mentioned additional payments to PERS totaling $265,922.58 and explained the processing delay in payments to PERS, which could take up to two weeks. He expressed that they were continuing to work with the actuarial team for more details.

Director Miller confirmed that the income-to-date format seen in previous financial statements would continue to be used. Blake confirmed this and explained the absence of some information due to the absence of Billing Manager Peckham.

Director Galyen asked about the status of received funds, and Blake clarified that while they were receiving payments from Pacific Source, they were still finalizing the amounts. There was a question about the percentage of current vs. past-due billing, which Blake said would need to be clarified with Danielle. The department had been receiving batch payments, with both current and past-due bills included, and once approved, payments took about two weeks.

Chief Blake expressed frustration with Medicaid payments, thanking Kim Nicholson for helping secure payments from Pacific Source.

**IGA with Warm Springs Fire & Rescue:**

Chief Blake introduced the IGA between Jefferson County Fire & EMS and the Confederate Tribes of Warm Springs, asking the board to review it. Tim Gassner recommended against approving the IGA at this time due to vague provisions, spelling/grammar issues, and inconsistencies. He stressed that the agreement would need revisions before any approval could be considered. He also highlighted the need to understand how the agreement aligned with existing mutual aid arrangements, particularly with the PGE agreement.

Sec. Miller asked if there was already a valid agreement with the tribes, and Blake confirmed there was a mutual aid agreement through Central Oregon Fire. The discussion then turned to why a new IGA would be necessary. Blake explained that there was a need to clarify what was missing from the existing agreement.

Director DuPont asked if Chief Blake was working directly with the Warm Springs Fire Chief, and Blake responded that the IGA had been sent to the board, not to him, and it was a contentious issue. Blake explained the geographical proximity of PGE lands and how the Tribes and PGE had different fire protection risks.

VP Galyen also expressed reluctance to approve the IGA without more clarity and the board agreed not to move forward with it at this time. President Stout echoed that she was uncomfortable with how the board was brought into the matter, encouraging Blake to work directly with the Warm Springs Fire Chief.

Scott Spaulding clarified that the IGA was a working document between PGE, the Tribes, and Jefferson County Fire & EMS, not something to be directly negotiated by the board. Blake reiterated that the two fire chiefs would be the key players in these ongoing discussions.

VP Galyen motioned not to move forward with the IGA, and Director DuPont seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**Approval of Civil Service Commission:**

Chief Blake discussed the need to reinstate civil service rules post-merger with EMS, which oversee hiring, promotions, and reductions. Gassner proposed appointing Scott Surgeon, Jeff Hurd, and Jeff Jordan to the commission. Director Miller suggested that resolutions should be numbered and formatted correctly.

VP Galyen asked if it should be a motion rather than a resolution, and Sec. Miller clarified that a motion was needed to approve the members, followed by a resolution to adopt civil service rules at the next board meeting.

VP Galyen motioned to approve Jeff Hurd, Scott Surgeon, and Jeff Jordan to the Civil Service Commission, and Director DuPont seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Board Policy - Surplus Property:**

Chief Blake presented a surplus property policy that requires board approval for the sale of items over $5k. Sec. Miller suggested using Kelly Bluebook as a reference for valuation. Blake agreed to incorporate it into the policy.

Sec. Miller approved the policy as printed, and VP Galyen seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Resolution - Moving Board Meeting to 3rd Monday of the Month:**

Chief Blake proposed moving the board meetings to the third Monday to allow for more accurate financial data. He explained that the current timing led to absenteeism and inaccurate financial reporting.

VP Galyen asked for clarification on whether it required a resolution, and Gassner confirmed it did. However, the topic was tabled until the next meeting for further discussion.

**Fire Ops and EMS Updates:**

Chief Skaar provided updates about volunteer staffing and grant applications, including the AFG grant, and a BLM grant aimed at funding salaries, prevention projects, and fuels mitigation.

Chief Blake also updated on the crew’s involvement in California wildfires, noting that reimbursement for expenses could take several months but would total an estimated $160k.

There was also discussion about ongoing EMS transfer operations and concerns around workload, with Chief Blake noting that they were working to implement changes safely, balancing risk and financial concerns.

**Citizen Input:**

FF Paramedic Penny Codemo expressed concern about the potential staffing reductions and asked if there could be a contingency plan for workload management, particularly given the increased transfer calls, upcoming wildland season, and staff shortages.

Marylin Clark, a Jefferson County resident, raised concerns about fire risks in the wildland-urban interface, mentioning the importance of Firewise landscaping. She offered to help with outreach efforts and encouraged more community engagement.

VP Galyen inquired about the Firewise Grant, and Chief Skaar confirmed that the program was still in effect and offered a $500 gift card incentive for homeowners completing mitigation work.

Chief Blake highlighted the financial challenges the department was facing, particularly regarding worker’s compensation increases, health insurance, and declining ambulance billing revenues. He emphasized the need to explore additional revenue sources and plan for potential staffing reductions, but stressed the importance of ensuring public safety.

**Additional Comments/Concerns:** No additional comments.

**Adjourn Meeting:** 7:57 PM

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Board President Recording Secretary