

QUARTZSITE FIRE DISTRICT

P. O. Box 1889, 70 East Tyson Street 85346
(928) 927-6556

khess@quartzsitefiredistrict.org

waaron@quartzsitefiredistrict.org



McMULLEN VALLEY FIRE DISTRICT

P. O. Box 25, Salome AZ, 85348
928-859-3261; (Fax) 928-859-4287

chiefhess@tds.net

mmvfd1@tds.net

Joint Board Meeting/Public Hearing Agenda

September 29, 2025

Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order: **Called to order at 6:03pm by Susan Sewell.**
2. Pledge of Allegiance: **All in attendance participated.**
3. Roll Call: **Susan Sewell, Phil Cushman, Sam Rees, Pam Wolfe, TC Collier, Travis Freedman, Dave Collier, Teena Conrad and Judie New (Cell phone)**
4. Discussion and Possible Action re: Approval of Minutes:
 - a. QFD: 8-28-2025 Minutes: **Travis Freedman made a motion to approve the minutes, Dave Collier seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**
 - b. MVFD: 8-28-2025 Minutes: **Sam Rees made a motion to approve the minutes, Teena Conrad seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**
5. Discussion and Possible Action re: Approval of Treasurer's Report for August, 2025:
 - a. QFD: Treasurer's Report: **Travis Freedman made a motion to approve the minutes, TC Collier seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**
 - b. MVFD: Treasurer's Report: **Sam Rees made a motion to approve the minutes, Judy New seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**
6. Discussion/Possible action: Merger presentation for QFD and MVFD: Members of QFD, MVFD and AFMA may present. **The Presentation was made by Chief Hess. There was no discussion.**
7. Discussion and Possible Action re: possible merger between the Quartzsite Fire District and the McMullen Valley Fire District. **The discussion occurred during the public hearing.**
 - a. Open Public Hearing for the Quartzsite Fire District re: possible merger between the Quartzsite Fire District and the McMullen Valley Fire District. **Philip Cushman opened the public hearing.**
 - b. Open Public Hearing for the McMullen Valley Fire District re: possible merger: **Susan Sewell opened the public hearing.**

between the McMullen Valley Fire District and the Quartzsite Fire District.

c. Public Hearings/Comments re: The Quartzsite Fire District Governing Board will hear those persons who appear for or against the proposed merger and to determine if the merger will promote the public safety, health, comfort, convenience, necessity or welfare of the Quartzsite Fire District.

d. Public Hearings/Comments re: The McMullen Valley Fire District Governing Board will hear those persons who appear for or against the proposed merger and to determine if the merger will promote the public safety, health, comfort,

convenience, necessity or welfare of the McMullen Valley Fire District.

Summary

Kevin Hess presented an overview of the proposed 2025 merger between the Quartzsite Fire District and McMullen Valley Fire District, detailing financial comparisons, shared resources, pros and cons of the merger, and personnel benefits, while addressing financial constraints and growth limitations. In a public Q&A session, John Lehman, Lynette Maynes, Denise Slawson, Patty Reinhart, Charles Knight, James Reinhardt, and Eileen Wood raised questions and concerns regarding assessed value, the long-term vision with AFMA, equipment and ambulance placement, duplicate services, employee classification, previous merger discussions, staffing continuity, and attorney fees. Susan, John, Debbie, and Carolyn voiced concerns about audits, financial transparency, resolution discrepancies, AFMA suggestions, commercial development, firefighter wages, and the need for more documentation and a public vote, while Nancy Nichols, Linda Goldberg, and other community members expressed support for the merger and clarified existing practices. Lynette expressed deep concern over the McMullen Valley hearing being held outside its district boundaries and raised additional concerns including the loss of local representation for McMullen Valley, incomplete information and hidden costs of merger, irreversible decision and lack of democratic process.

Details

- **Meeting Opening and Approvals** Susan Sewell called the meeting to order, and attendees stood for the pledge of allegiance. They confirmed that all members of the Quartzsite Fire District and McMullen Valley Fire District were present or accounted for, with Judy New present on the phone for McMullen Valley. The minutes from August 28, 2025, for both the Quartzsite Fire District and McMullen Valley Fire District were approved following motions and seconds with no discussion ([00:07:36](#)). The treasurer's report for August 2025 was also approved for both districts after motions, seconds, and no discussion ([00:10:01](#)).
- **Merger Presentation Overview** Kevin Hess presented an overview of the proposed 2025 merger between the Quartzsite Fire District (gold) and McMullen Valley Fire District ([00:12:17](#)). The merger aims to improve services for both districts, which currently cover 1,000 and 190 square miles, respectively ([00:16:21](#)). A combined district would cover over 1,000 square miles and complete nearly 2,800 runs annually, with an initial budget of approximately \$2.62 million and a tax rate of roughly 3.72% for 2025, which is below the state limit ([00:17:48](#)).
- **Financial Comparisons and Growth** Kevin Hess presented financial comparisons between the two districts, noting that McMullen Valley runs about 400 calls per year with a cost of \$1,752 per call, while Quartzsite runs approximately 2,400 calls per year at \$793 per call ([00:16:21](#)). If merged, the cost per call for taxpayers would be \$930 ([00:17:48](#)). Both districts have shown growth in assessed value: McMullen Valley increased 16% from 2020 to 2025, and Quartzsite

increased 23% in the same period, with Quartzsite nearly matching the state's 5% growth allotment. Kevin Hess also highlighted significant commercial growth in Quartzsite since 2022, including new businesses and construction, which is expected to boost their budget next year ([00:19:25](#)).

- **Shared Resources and Current Operations** Kevin Hess detailed existing partnerships between the districts, including shared dispatch, firefighters, and a shared fire chief. They also jointly purchase tools and share continuing education, fire cadet training, and EMT student training. McMullen Valley has two stations, two engines, a rescue, two brush trucks, and two water tenders, while Quartzsite has two stations, one engine, two tenders, and three brush vehicles ([00:21:37](#)). Will Aaron noted that while some equipment is aging or undergoing maintenance, efforts are underway to ensure all vehicles are operational soon ([00:23:01](#)).
- **Pros and Cons of Merger** Kevin Hess outlined the perceived pros and cons of the merger. Cons include the loss of individual district identity, reduced local autonomy, potential resistance to change, and the complexity of merging legal and administrative processes ([00:26:22](#)). A significant con is that merged districts cannot unmerge. Pros include reduced costs through the elimination of duplicate services, streamlined governance with one board and budget, improved service quality, and increased bargaining power for insurance and procurement contracts ([00:27:35](#)).
- **Personnel and Training Benefits** Kevin Hess explained that a merger would ensure full-time personnel coverage 24/7, with two people at the Salome station at all times. Employees would rotate between stations to learn the entire district, and the combined district would have access to 37 certified members for shift coverage ([00:29:01](#)). Will Aaron also discussed the potential for a joint powers agreement or complete merger with the Arizona Fire Medical Authority (AFMA), which could lead to substantial savings on large capital purchases and shared benefit plans, as AFMA has 325 employees ([00:30:14](#)). Chief K Nixon, a Deputy Fire Chief with AFMA, elaborated on how AFMA's size could significantly reduce costs like worker's compensation and provide access to benefits such as annual cancer screenings for firefighters.
- **Financial Constraints and Growth Limitations** Kevin Hess highlighted the financial challenges faced by fire departments, noting that state legislation in 2012 limited their ability to tax on full cash value and imposed a 5% annual growth cap on the budget, with a maximum tax rate of 3.75% ([00:31:24](#)) ([00:47:27](#)). Assistant Chief Aaron reinforced this point, explaining that small districts like McMullen Valley, with a \$700,000 budget, struggle to retain full-time, experienced firefighters due to limited growth opportunities compared to larger city departments ([00:59:20](#)).
- **Public Concerns and Q&A Session** The meeting transitioned to a public Q&A session regarding the merger presentation, with a three-minute limit per speaker ([00:33:44](#)). John Lehman raised a question about the assessed value, clarifying it comes from property value ([00:35:19](#)). Lynette Maynes sought clarification on the long-term vision of merging with AFMA, to which Kevin Hess confirmed it is a long-term goal ([00:36:40](#)). Denise Slawson inquired if equipment in Salome would remain there and if an ambulance could be stationed in Salome, with Kevin Hess affirming both goals ([00:37:59](#)). Patty Reinhart questioned the specific duplicate services that

would be reduced and the nature of improved services, which Kevin Hess clarified would include administrative services, audits, and assistant fire chiefs ([00:39:27](#)).

- **Staffing, Compensation, and Union Benefits** Charles Knight asked about the classification of employees (volunteer vs. paid staff), and Kevin Hess clarified that Quartzsite is 100% full-time, while Salome primarily uses paid reserves ([00:43:37](#)). Will Aaron expressed a desire to provide benefits to all employees due to the dangerous nature of their work and the challenges of retaining firefighters when larger cities offer better salaries and benefits ([00:44:53](#)). Chief K Nixon explained that specific hourly rates for union members are negotiated but emphasized AFMA's commitment to member wellness, including downtime and cancer screenings ([00:47:27](#)).
- **Previous Merger Discussions and Future Outlook** James Reinhart inquired about previous discussions regarding administrative and bookkeeping services for McMullen Valley and why a past merger attempt was unsuccessful ([00:50:15](#)). Kevin Hess explained that the idea of an administrative assistant was postponed, and a previous merger decision did not move forward, but contacts with AFMA prompted revisiting the merger to secure a sustainable future for the fire districts ([00:51:52](#)). Kevin Hess also noted that if the merger does not pass by unanimous vote, it will go to a public vote ([00:53:11](#)). John Lehman followed up on the financial details of potential savings from the merger, to which Kevin Hess estimated around \$30,000 annually but stated that concrete numbers would be determined during the feasibility study with AFMA ([00:55:58](#)). Eileen Wood raised concerns about staffing continuity at the Salome station and suggested redirecting attorney fees to firefighters, with Kevin Hess emphasizing the necessity of legal fees for proper procedures ([00:58:24](#)). The public hearing portion of the meeting was then opened, with the aim to determine if the merger would promote public safety, health, comfort, convenience, and welfare for both districts ([01:01:21](#)).
- **Meeting Noteworthiness and Conflict of Interest** Susan Sewell opened the meeting by emphasizing the importance of highlighting key points from a well-written document. She clarified that no board members have a conflict of interest as they do not provide services to the district beyond their board duties, though Chief Hess has a signed conflict of interest statement regarding the training center ([01:06:30](#)).
- **Auditing and Financial Practices** Kevin Hess addressed a misconception about district audits, stating that Quartzsite is audited annually and their district's finances are reviewed by the same auditor. He also explained that the apparent \$300,000 debt for Quartzsite is a normal line of credit usage by fire districts in Arizona due to the fiscal year starting July 1 and tax collection not beginning until October, with the line of credit paid off annually ([01:06:30](#)).
- **Merger Process and Election Costs** Kevin Hess discussed the proposed merger, noting that a unanimous vote on resolutions would achieve it without an election, which would cost at least \$5,000. He explained that if either board does not vote unanimously, the merger would proceed to an election ([01:07:45](#)).
- **Board Representation Post-Merger** Kevin Hess addressed concerns about McMullen Valley losing its voice if the merger proceeds, clarifying that the new board would consist of three

members from Quartzsite and two from McMullen Valley ([01:07:45](#)). He stated that current board members would serve until the end of their terms, after which anyone is eligible to run for election, and it is possible for the new board to be composed entirely of members from McMullen Valley ([01:09:09](#)).

- **Property Taxes and Financial Impact of Merger** Kevin Hess explained that the merger is not expected to significantly raise property taxes, with an annual review of tax assessments and a state-imposed limit on increases of 3.75% ([01:10:30](#)). He estimated that at worst, taxes would increase by four cents per thousand dollars if the levy limit were reached ([01:11:28](#)).
- **Attorney Fees and Compliance with Statutes** Kevin Hess addressed concerns about attorney fees, explaining that the money has been spent to ensure the district's compliance with statutes, which had not been consistently followed for years. He emphasized that catching up on these compliances helps prevent lawsuits and saves funds for essential services provided by EMTs and paramedics ([01:14:13](#)).
- **Lack of Audits and Financial Transparency** A community member, Patti Reinhart, raised concerns that McMullen Valley had not undergone required audits in previous years, questioning the consideration of a merger under these circumstances. Susan Sewell acknowledged the issue, stating that they are in the process of arranging audits for those years and are comfortable with the financial reviews that have been conducted by the same independent auditor ([01:17:03](#)).
- **Resolution Number Discrepancies** Patti highlighted discrepancies in resolution numbers listed in approved minutes, mailed notices, and website postings, suggesting a potential clerical error or material defect ([01:18:40](#)). She expressed concern about missing information or meetings due to these inconsistencies ([01:20:12](#)).
- **Quartzsite Fire District Line of Credit and Ambulance Service Revenue** Patti questioned the Quartzsite Fire District's line of credit usage and the lack of ambulance service contract income in their budget information, implying a connection between the two ([01:22:12](#)). Kevin Hess clarified that ambulance service payments are deposited directly into the payroll account, reducing the tax burden ([01:23:46](#)).
- **AFMA Suggestions for Revenue Generation** Patti reported on her conversation with Eric Kriwer from AFMA, who suggested fee schedules to generate revenue for fire departments, particularly for out-of-district calls and services to large installations like solar plants ([01:24:59](#)). Chief Nixon affirmed these suggestions and mentioned additional revenue ideas, including charging visitors in long-term visitor areas ([01:26:27](#)).
- **Commercial Development and Inspections** Patti raised concerns about AFMA's recommendation for annual inspections of commercial developments, questioning if taxpayers were aware of the potential implications of joining AFMA ([01:28:53](#)). Will Aaron clarified that AFMA does not decide on development but plans for and responds to it, with actual decisions made by county or municipal boards ([01:30:16](#)). Linda Goldberg, a council member in Quartzsite, stated that fire inspections of new and existing projects, often in conjunction with code compliance, have been a long-standing practice in Quartzsite ([01:31:37](#)).

- Fire Suppression Requirements for New Developments** Kevin Hess mentioned that for new housing developments, the county requires information about fire suppression, and the fire chief and Captain Collier, a certified inspector, are involved in addressing these requirements ([01:33:02](#)). He noted that Quartzsite Fire District has an arrangement with the state fire inspector for inspections, and they hope to extend this to McMullen Valley Fire District ([01:34:58](#)).
- Billing for Services to Non-Property Owners** Kevin Hess reiterated the practice of billing non-property owners, such as winter snowbirds and commercial entities, for fire services to offset costs, stating that this is not an uncommon practice and no one has complained about it in Quartzsite. He also emphasized the importance of charging for inspections of public rentals, stating that taxpayers should not bear these costs ([01:27:49](#)) ([01:34:58](#)).
- Clarification on Residential Inspections and Sprinklers** Kevin Hess clarified that residential property owners do not have to pay for inspections unless requested, and there is no state legislation requiring fire sprinklers in residential homes ([01:36:09](#)). He agreed that sprinklers are a good idea, citing statistics that no one has died in a house fire with sprinklers ([01:37:35](#)).
- Support for Merger** A community member expressed strong support for the merger, stating it would be beneficial for both communities and commending the well-presented information ([01:37:35](#)). They emphasized that Quartzsite, an incorporated town, has its own business but the fire district operates under statutory authority for fire prevention and inspections ([01:39:13](#)).
- Firefighter Wages and Career Positions** Debbie raised concerns about low firefighter wages, noting that \$16 per hour is "appalling and absolutely pathetic," and Carolyn added that these are "outlaw positions" without benefits. Carolyn stated that a significant benefit of the merger is the potential to bring in more stable, career firefighter positions to the community, addressing the high turnover rates ([01:39:13](#)).
- Value of Emergency Services** A community member emphasized the invaluable nature of paramedic services, stating they would willingly pay extra taxes if it meant saving a family member's life ([01:41:11](#)).
- Rural Communities Training Emergency Personnel** Lynda Goldberg highlighted the appreciation from mayors of larger cities like Phoenix and Tucson for rural communities like theirs, which train fire, police, and medical personnel who often move to metropolitan areas for jobs due to staffing shortages ([01:41:11](#)). He underscored the importance of providing firefighters with the best protection, rest, and wellness due to the stressful nature of their job ([01:43:04](#)).
- Call for More Documentation and Public Vote** John Lehman expressed opposition to a unanimous decision on the merger, stating that they would like to see more documentation, including financial benefits and details on firefighter compensation, before proceeding. They suggested delaying the vote until winter when more people are present and allowing the public to vote on the merger ([01:45:36](#)).
- Concerns about AFMA and Associated Costs** A community member raised concerns about the potential costs associated with AFMA's regulations, particularly for code enforcement and

inspections, encouraging everyone to review AFMA's fee schedules on their website ([01:46:48](#)). Will Aaron clarified that they do not charge for inspections and fire prevention, as current on-duty personnel perform these proactive tasks ([01:47:43](#)).

- **AFMA Implementation Timeline** Phil Cushman clarified that joining AFNA is a future step, estimated to be at least two to three years away, and should not overshadow the immediate merger discussion ([01:48:47](#)).
- **Lack of Public Awareness and Notification** A community member from Salome expressed not having heard about the meeting or the merger, despite notices being sent out and posted on websites. Kevin Hess explained that returned notices were due to incorrect addresses in tax assessor and treasurer records ([01:49:50](#)).
- **Positive Outlook on Merger** Nancy Nichols, a council member in Quartzsite, expressed a positive outlook on the merger, stating that it appears to be a "win-win" for emergency personnel, citizens, and residents, with potential benefits outweighing any minor cost adjustments. She believes it will positively impact firefighters, EMTs, and residents, with questions moving forward, but overall a positive outcome for both communities ([01:51:07](#)).
- **Concerns Regarding Merger Location and Transparency** Lynette expressed deep concern over the McMullen Valley hearing being held outside its district boundaries, stating it hindered accessibility and transparency for affected residents ([01:52:29](#)). She raised additional concerns including the loss of local representation for McMullen Valley, as three board members would be lost immediately ([01:53:30](#)).
- **Incomplete Information and Hidden Costs of Merger** Lynette voiced concerns about incomplete information, stating that the full cost of the merger had not been presented to the public, and a feasibility study was still pending ([01:53:30](#)). She also highlighted unforeseen costs such as rebranding, equipment updates, and potential unionization, which she felt had not been fully disclosed ([01:54:51](#)).
- **Irreversible Decision and Lack of Democratic Process** Lynette emphasized that the merger is a permanent and irreversible decision, demanding caution rather than haste ([01:56:09](#)). She criticized the lack of a democratic process, arguing that five board members making such a significant decision without a public vote, unlike previous mergers, is not representative democracy and asked for the
- **Community Focus and Board Structure** Pam Brady stated their long-standing commitment to the community as a business owner and board member, emphasizing support for firefighters and children. They also suggested a board structure for the merged district, proposing the board chairman come from the McMullen Valley District Board and the board clerk from the Quartzsite Board to ensure continued representation ([02:06:22](#)).

e. Close Public Hearing for the Quartzsite Fire District. **The meeting was closed by Philip Cushman.**

f. Close Public Hearing for the McMullen Valley Fire District: **The meeting was closed by Susan Sewell.**

g. Quartzsite Fire District: Discussion and possible action re: possible approval of Resolution # 2025-9-29-QFD, approving the merger of the Quartzsite Fire District and the McMullen Valley Fire District; and calling for a joint meeting of the Districts to appoint 5 members to the newly merged District. **Travis Freedman made a motion to approve the Merger, TC Collier seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

h. McMullen Valley Fire District: Discussion and possible action re: possible approval of Resolution # 2025-9-29-MVFD, approving the merger of the Quartzsite Fire District and McMullen Valley Fire District. **Judie New made a motion to approve the merger, Teena Conrad seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

8. Joint Discussion and Possible Joint Action re: possible selection of a time and location for the next Joint Meeting of both Governing Boards to appoint 5 members to the newly merged fire district Governing Board: **After a brief discussion it was decided that the board would meet Wednesday, 10-01-2025 at Desert Gold RV Resort, at 6:00pm in the Rec Hall.**

9. Adjourn Meeting: **The meeting was adjourned at 8:03pm by Susan Sewell and Philip Cushman.**