

MEETING MINUTES OF THE VERNON FIRE DISTRICT BOARD

11/19/2024 AT 5:30 PM at the Vernon Library

REGULAR BOARD MEETING

1. **CALL TO ORDER REGULAR BOARD MEETING:** Called to order by John Vehar at 5:32pm.
2. **ROLL CALL OF BOARD MEMBERS:** Present were Grey Murphy, Randy Mifflin, Gregg McClendon, Paul Kovacic, John Vehar.
3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND PRAYER:** Prayer set aside for this evening.
4. **RECOGNITION OF GUESTS:** Wendy Sharp, Kathy Schlichting, Ben Archer-Clowes, Chief Collin DeWitt, Pam Giles, Tony Anderson, Steve Brosz, Paula Johnson, Peter Nishimoto.
5. **REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE**
 - A. Financial Report and Discussion – Report given by Ben Archer-Clowes: Tax revenue for October was over budget by \$79,000 compared to last year that was trending behind. Year to date it is \$87,000 over budget. Non-tax revenue is \$102,000 over budget due to wildland revenue. Expenses for the month of October were \$125,000 over budget. Most of that is due to personnel costs that were not budgeted for. Managerial expenses were also over by \$13,000, tied to professional services for HR. Backing those two numbers out we are trending close to budget for October. Year to date is \$399,000 over budget for non-tax revenue due to wildland being \$42,000 over and grant revenue making up the difference. Grant revenue does have expenses but is still a positive. In total, revenue is \$487,000 over budget, expenses are \$247,000, of which personnel is \$110,000 of that figure, and vehicles and equipment repair and maintenance is \$30,000 over budget. Managerial expense is also over, due to HR fees as mentioned earlier.
 - B. Chair Summary – John Vehar presented Paul Kovacic with a plaque of appreciation for his time in service as a board member.
 - C. Chief's Report and discussion – Chief DeWitt reported on a recent fire incident, then discussed an internship program with local community college fire programs giving students credited volunteer experience with which they can grow into reserves and full-time recruits. He reported on the status of the tender being built and discussed a FEMA grant application for an SCBA compressor. Wildland was briefly mentioned and acknowledged that it would be discussed later on the agenda.
6. **CONSENT AGENDA**
 - A. The Board has reviewed the Financial Report for the month of October 2024
 - B. The Board has reviewed and approved the meeting minutes for 10/07/2024, 10/10/2024, 10/22/2024
7. **BUSINESS**
 - A. Motion by Randy Mifflin that the Board has approved the consent agenda, seconded by Paul Kovacic. John Vehar called for a vote, and it was approved unanimously.
 - B. **Discussion and possible action: Board candidates**, John Vehar stated that this discussion would happen in an executive session.
 - C. **Discussion and possible action: Grants and Wildland**, Chief DeWitt mentioned the grant for the compressor from the Chief's report. John Vehar asked for a motion to approve the application for the grant, Paul Kovacic made the motion, Grey Murphy seconded. John Vehar called for a vote, and the item was approved unanimously. Chief DeWitt mentioned a mitigation grant that is also being applied for and is awaiting funding. John Vehar then asked if there was any other information on wildland, and Chief DeWitt informed the board about who was still out on assignment. After the ballot was announced there was further discussion regarding ADASHI qualification. Hardware is needed for communication to properly take place in our area at a cost of \$22,917. The grant will pay for this. Grey Murphy motioned to authorize payment of this amount for the stated purpose. Paul Kovacic seconded. John Vehar called for a vote, and the proposal passed unanimously.
 - D. **Discussion and possible action: Station 26**, Chief DeWitt discussed the auction that will take place, the proposed date, the notification of the estate, and the process that will be used for the auction. He then talked about a proposed appraisal of the property.
 - E. **Discussion and possible action: Sale of extra vehicles and property**, Chief DeWitt talked about vehicles being stored at Station 26, some functioning, some not. He suggested evaluating keeping some and selling others. John Vehar mentioned that there was previous discussion about this and tasked Kathy Schlichting with locating the information, and Chief DeWitt volunteered to update that list. The appraisal and possible sale of Station 26 was discussed along with the need to retain it if a fuel mitigation grant were to be received. The sale of land on Hwy 61 was also discussed.
 - F. **Discussion and possible action: ISO ratings**, Chief DeWitt stated that the ISO rating did not change from the previous rating. The information will be posted publicly but not mass-mailed, and questions will be fielded by the administration office. The rules of the ratings were discussed, as well as the state of the district's hydrants, locations, and access to them. One water tank in particular was identified as a possible water source for tenders and John Vehar directed Kathy Schlichting to investigate it further.
 - G. **Discussion and possible action: Possibility of merging with another District**, Randy Mifflin discussed other districts as well as areas that are not incorporated within any district. Greer, Concho, locations south of I-40, were all mentioned as potential entities to have discussions with. The question was posed: Would it make sense to merge in order to assist each district with its unique needs, whether financial or personnel related? Also, would it give the newly formed district a better position for annexation? Other logistics were discussed including a systemic approach mentioned by Chief DeWitt, the personnel dedication and experience that VFD has to offer, and communications.

The following item was discussed after item 5A to accommodate Ben Archer-Clowes' need to attend another board meeting:

 - H. **Discussion and possible action: Finances and Staffing**, Chief DeWitt discussed personnel expenses in relation to monies received from the state of Arizona, and a concern for recurring income being used for recurring expenses vs. one-time income being used for recurring

expenses. He stated that steps have been taken to reduce staffing and that he has been in contact with the head of the county appraisers as well, and she has said that revenues should increase beginning in February, however, Chief DeWitt was reluctant to mention a possible dollar amount of increase because the math didn't quite make sense yet. Chief DeWitt informed the board that the Assistant Chief has been given notice, and the position alongside that one has been eliminated, and information on two-person vs three-person crews was presented. The board expressed concern over possibly losing operations personnel and the impact that might have on the service capability of the district. John Vehar recommended revisiting this issue in February in order to see how the county's assessments turn out since only 50 homes have been reassessed so far, and there are many more to be done. The federal mandate for service, the possibility of another allocation from the state, the growth rate of the Vernon area, subscriptions, billing non-subscribers for service, property liens for non-payment, and annexation were all discussed. Ben Archer-Clowes shared financial projections which included aforementioned increased wildland revenue, population growth, personnel costs, vehicle repairs, maintenance, and replacement costs. He illustrated different scenarios based on different growth factors.

8. **ADJOURNMENT OF REGULAR SESSION—Agenda item 7.B Discussion and Possible Action: Board Candidates**, Grey Murphy motioned to go into executive session and Randy Mifflin seconded. John Vehar called for a vote, and the motion was approved unanimously. The regular session was adjourned at 6:55pm by John Vehar.
9. **RECONVENED**: John Vehar reconvened the regular board meeting at 8:08pm.
10. **BALLOTS**: John Vehar asked for the report of ballots cast for the new board member. Tony Anderson received 3 of 5 votes and was announced as the new board member.
11. **CALL TO THE PUBLIC**: No public comments.
12. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**: Staffing issues.
13. **ADJOURNMENT**: John Vehar called for a motion to adjourn. Gregg McClendon made the motion and Grey Murphy seconded. John Vehar adjourned the meeting at 8:16pm.