

Pine-Strawberry Fire District

PINE-STRAWBERRY FIRE BOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES November 11, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm

1) **Pledge of Allegiance**

- 2) **Presentations** – Sheriff Adam Shepherd was in attendance to administer the Oath of Office to newly appointed Board member Bob Bennett as well as Board Members Chuck Ackerman and Dave Burkhart whose terms are renewing. All three took the Oath of Office.

Welcome New Board Member Bob Bennett!

Former Chief Gary Morris gave a synopsis on the 310 ballot measure that did not pass.

- 3) **Roll Call** – Present were Board Clerk - Bob Papke, Board Chairman - Chuck Ackerman, Member - Dave Burkhart, Member - Melvin Palmer, and new member, Bob Bennett.

- 4) **Correspondence** – Three “Thank you” letters were read by Chairman Chuck Ackerman.

- 5) **Call to the Public** – Mr. Roger Miotto – Pine resident, addressed the board stating that over the past few months he has noticed that he has not seen the Fire Engines in his subdivision doing training on the fire hydrants. He stated that this used to be a very common thing for him to see and wondered who would be taking up the role of leadership and training. Chairman Ackerman thanked Mr. Miotto for his observations/comments.

Interim Chief, Joel Brandt stated that there have been multiple new hydrants installed in the Pine Strawberry communities and that the crews are doing their training on these new hydrants.

Chief Brandt introduced Carron Jones, our new Chaplain. She has 26 years experience with the US Army as a Chaplain and brings with her many credentials. She is currently working with the Gila County Sheriff’s Dept. as their Chaplain as well. Her husband, Mark, is also a Chaplain and they will be available for us as needed.

6) **Approval of Previous Minutes**

- a) **October 20, 2022** – Special Meeting Minutes – Dave Burkhart made a motion to accept the minutes as written and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Melvin Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
- b) **October 20, 2022** – Regular Meeting Minutes – Mel Palmer made a motion to accept the minutes as written and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Chuck Ackerman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

- c) **October 21 2022** – Special Meeting Minutes –Dave Burkhart made a motion to accept the minutes as written and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Melvin Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
- 7) **Financial Report of October, 2022, Finances** – Ben Archer-Clowes of the James Vincent Group was in attendance and he presented the financial report to the board. Melvin Palmer made a motion to accept the Financial Reports as presented and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Dave Burkhart seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
- 8) **Fire Chief's Report**– (Given by Interim/Acting Chief, Joel Brandt) Including but not limited to:
- a) **Significant emergency incidents** –
 - b) **Other non-emergency Fire District Activity**
 - c) **The Fire Marshal's** office has reviewed 8 plans, adding 12,333 square feet of construction and totaling \$2,696.44 of revenue.
 - d) **Report on emergency call volume from previous month** – responded to 62 calls for service.
 - e) **Report on vehicle maintenance from previous month** – Total Vehicle expenses for the month of October were \$6,358.24.
 - f) **Report on training activities from previous month** –243 hours of training reported.
 - g) **Specific program updates or demonstrations** –
- We have cancelled the District purchasing cards through Chase Bank. We are in the application process with National Bank for a consortium card just for Fire Districts. This should be completed this Month.
 - SCBA donation from Three Points Fire District was picked up on October 25th.
 - Trunk or treat was a great success.
 - Of the three new reserves 2 have completed the application process. 1 has started shifts and the other is waiting to complete the PPA.
 - The PSFD has started to review the Camp Lomia Burn plan and will be working with DFFM to start prescribed fire treatment with in the camp this fall.
 - The contract with Sunstate Technology group was canceled without issue.
 - We have gotten all 7 of the new computers. Garret Turley has started the process to rebuild the system.
 - Bill Potter also took first place in the cook like a firefighter competition. ABF came to the station to present him with an award. He donated his prize gift cards to the food bank and the Chester's.
 - The benefit for the Chester family went great and we had a huge turnout.
 - We will be meeting with The James Vincent Group on December 5th to start long range financial planning.
- 9) **Other Fire District Related Reports**
- a) District Board Chairman's Report – None
 - b) PSPRS Board Report – Members are completing the training videos that were sent by PSPRS.
 - c) Firefighter's Association Report – None
 - d) Labor Organization Report – The 310 Proposition did not pass.
- 10) **Old Business** –
- 11) **New Business** –

- a) **Discussion/Possible Action on Policy 2.1 Employment Status** –This item was tabled until a future meeting.
- b) **Discussion/Possible Action regarding Digital recordings of Board Meetings.** – Interim Chief Joel Brandt included a couple of options for recording systems. The “Owl” system comes highly recommended. It turns towards the speaker for clearer recordings. This item is well within the Chief’s spending limits, the Board will leave it up to Joel to order a recording system for our meetings. No action taken.
- c) **Discussion/Possible Action on Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with staff.** – Dave Burkhart suggested that the Members write up an MOU – not to necessarily include specific wages, but possibly include some of the items that they are presently involved in. He brought up the fact that if this current Board changes over the years many of the things that they have worked hard to accomplish could be changed. He suggested items such as the right to be involved in the budget process, the right to have representation at Board Meetings, to have a Union representative, etc. Mr. Burkhart suggested that the Members write something up and bring it to the Board. Interim Chief Brandt stated that he has one that they can look at and he would be willing to send that out. No action taken.
- d) **Discussion and possible action on Office Manager duties/title** – Dave Burkhart asked for this to be on the agenda as there has previously not been a job description for the Office Manager, Carmen Wailes. When asked for a list of duties, Mr. Burkhart compiled this into a job description, but doesn’t feel that the title of “Office Manager” does justice to the amount of work/duties that are performed. He feels that the title “Administrative Services Manager” better fits the amount of duties this position encompasses. Mr. Palmer stated that personally, he doesn’t see what changing the name of the title has that much to do with it. That she is doing this stuff now, she will be doing all this stuff next month, and he feels that changing the title is immaterial. Mr. Papke agreed that changing the title doesn’t really **do** anything, except maybe recognizing that those duties that are listed, should be listed under whatever title Carmen – or the person in that position – is called. We should have an accurate description of the responsibilities of the office. We need to have an accurate job description, because as everybody has said, if those things don’t get done, the district doesn’t run. The title is immaterial. Mr. Burkhart pointed out that if they should have to recruit for that position they need to have a title that accurately describes the things that we are looking for. Additionally, when we do salary surveys, it needs to be a title that we can compare. Mr. Papke pointed out that aside from trying to do an accurate comparison, it is vital that Carmen understands what those duties are, and anyone else we hire understands what those duties are. After much discussion, Interim Chief Joel Brandt suggested that we table the item and that he and Carmen Wailes discuss this and come back to the board with a suggestion for the most accurate title that fits the job duties- that can be compared on most wage studies. No action taken.
- e) **Discussion and possible action on Recruitment of Fire Chief** – Mr. Burkhart stated that we had put Joel Brandt in as Interim Chief, and that we need to decide if we want to continue with that or if we want to go out for recruitment. Mr. Burkhart feels it could be handled several different ways. We could have one or two Board members handle recruitment. We could establish a committee. If we have a committee, every time we meet it would have to be posted and minutes kept etc. How the Board handles the applications and the interviews can be discussed down the road. We need to discuss how we want to do the recruitment – whether we want to handle it ourselves through the resources we have, or if we want to spend the money to hire an outside firm to do this. Mr. Burkhart also stated that Timber Mesa Fire Department just hired a firm to do state-wide recruitment. They had eight applicants, three of which were internal candidates, and they ended up selecting an internal candidate. Mr. Burkhart suggest that we go ahead and advertise at the Arizona Fire District Association (AFDA), the Fire Chief’s Association, and the different Firefighter Magazines that we subscribe to, Retired Chief Gary Morris has a bunch of contacts, Joel has contacts, this will cost us a lot less. Mr. Burkhart sent out to the other Board Members a rough draft of a recruitment poster for them to look at. We need to decide how long we are going to leave the recruitment period open, and also what rate we are going

to be paying the new chief as well. These are all decisions that need to be made before we can actually go out and recruit. Mr. Burkhart pointed out that once you get applications and resumes in, you need to establish who will be doing the interviews, an interview process, it will take several months. We are looking at at least June, before we could have a new Chief in here.

Mr. Palmer stated that there is also the option of NOT recruiting. We can hire from within. Mr. Palmer further stated that he feels that Joel has been a very good interim chief and that his personal opinion is that we hire Joel as the permanent Chief and that we don't go out and spend all that time on recruitment. He stated that this is the fourth time he has been through the hiring process of a Chief. We have, in the past, gone nationwide and got 50some applicants. It took a LOT of time to go through and narrow that down to about eight. He feels that we should only look within this state as it should be someone who is familiar with Districts and the hierarchy of the Fire Association. Joel is very familiar with all of that as well as the internal issues that have happened here. It is widely known throughout the state that we recently fired our last chief. Mr. Palmer feels that if we hire someone that is unfamiliar with the area and with our Fire District, that we could be looking at potential problems all over again. He feels it would be best to hire from within.

Mr. Papke agreed with those statements.

Chairman Ackerman agrees as well. Being involved with the last recruitment, he stated that we spent a lot of time and effort on it and ultimately we didn't get it right. Joel has been doing a fine job, he understands the Department, He has a good working relationship with the crew – of course, in every job there will always be some who like you, some who don't, but overall has a good relationship with the firefighters, understands the community, and feels that recruitment would not be worth the effort. He agrees with Mr. Palmer.

Mr. Burkhart stated that he sort of agrees with everybody. We are a unique Fire District in that we put a lot of stock into our members. We like their input. They are involved with our budget process, they come up with ways that we can save money. They did that with the building of our Brush truck and the building of Station 42. We need someone who can lead them and be involved in our community. Joel does all that. Mr. Burkhart said that he has talked with most of the crews and with Joel, and they have said that they would like to see outside recruitment. But if the Board feels like they would like to go ahead with hiring Joel, Mr. Burkhart suggests that we have a Special Meeting and go into Executive session for a personnel matter and discuss these things with him and see what we would expect of him and what terms we want to have.

Joel Brandt stated that as he has told the Board before, he will put his application in, however he is open to seeing what else is out there and that he feels the testing process is good idea.

Chairman Ackerman stated, "I think the Board is telling you, we want you."

Joel Brandt stated, "I know what you're telling me, and I just want you to know that I'm perfectly fine with you seeing what else is out there."

Chairman Ackerman stated that we also need to have someone outside (Legal) go through the contract. All the Board members agree that the contract should be re-written.

Mr. Papke stated that he has also spoken with Joel, and is very impressed with the things that he has done – even as an interim Chief and yet he agrees with him that he does not have a problem with seeing what else is out there. He is NOT in favor of a nation-wide search, he would prefer it was more local. And also that we are sure that if we are hiring someone that is still in the PSPRS that they have the ability to go back to a "for cause" position in the department if something didn't work out. Mr. Papke further stated that he feels we need to be very clear this time what the expectations are for the Chief position.

Chairman Ackerman said that he will get with our attorney, Bill Whittington, and have him look over and make changes to our chief contract. The Board then decided to schedule a Special Meeting prior to the next Regular Board Meeting to have a discussion with Interim Chief Joel Brandt regarding the recruitment for the permanent Chief position.

12) **Future Special Meeting Date** – December 15, 2022 at 4:00 pm

Regular Board Meeting Date – December 15, 2022 at 6:00 pm

Items for discussion –recruitment for Fire Chief, Legal review of all Policies, MOU review. Avenues for gaining revenue.

13) Adjournment:

Dave Burkhart made a motion to adjourn. Mel Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously at 7:25 pm.

cw