

Pine-Strawberry Fire District

PINE-STRAWBERRY FIRE BOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

July 20, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 6:06 pm

- 1) **Pledge of Allegiance**
- 2) **Roll Call** – Present were Board Clerk - Bob Papke, Board Chairman - Chuck Ackerman, Member - Dave Burkhart, and Member - Melvin Palmer.
- 3) **Presentations** –Interim Chief Joel Brandt read a statement about the importance and honor of wearing the “Firefighter Badge”. He then formally pinned new Full-time Firefighter John Lewin. Dominic Masse’ was also pinned as a Full-time Firefighter - his wife, Anita, doing the honor. Several members of the community were in attendance for the ceremony. Congratulations John Lewin and Dominic Masse’!
- 4) **Correspondence** – Board Chairman Chuck Ackerman read a letter from Board Member Bruce Dow. Board Member Bruce Dow is resigning his position from the Pine Strawberry Fire District Board and the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System Local Board effective immediately. They have moved out of District – to the Valley (Phoenix). He considered it an honor and a privilege to serve on the Fire Board.
- 5) **Call to the Public** –None
- 6) **Approval of Previous Minutes**
 - a) **June 22, 2022** - Regular 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) **July 6, 2022** - Special Meeting Minutes – Dave Burkhart made a motion to accept the public portion of the minutes as written and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Melvin Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
When the public were excused from the general meeting at 7:23pm, Melvin Palmer made a motion to accept the minutes of the Executive Session portion of the July 6, 2022 minutes and archive them.
Dave Burkhart seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
 - c) **July 13, 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 June, 2022, Finances** - Steven Rodriguez of the James Vincent Group was in attendance via telephone and he presented the financial report to the board. Dave Burkhart made a

motion to accept the Financial Reports as presented and authorize the Board Clerk to sign them. Melvin Palmer 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** – 3 Fires – 1 structure fire, 1 grass fire, & 1 trailer fire.
 - b) **Other non-emergency Fire District Activity** - The Tonto National Forest has dropped from Stage 2 to Stage 1 Fire restrictions. The Coconino and the Apache Sitgraves National Forests currently have no restrictions in place.
We will continue with six member staffing until the third weekend in September, which is normal for the summer months.
 - c) **The Fire Marshal's** office has reviewed 6 plans, adding 7,719 square feet of construction and totaling \$1,443.12 of revenue.
 - d) **Report on emergency call volume from previous month** – responded to 69 calls for service.
 - e) **Report on vehicle maintenance from previous month** – All vehicles in Service.
 - f) **Report on training activities from previous month** –366 hours of training reported.
 - g) **Specific program updates or demonstrations** –

9) **Other Fire District Related Reports**

- a) District Board Chairman's Report – None
- b) PSPRS Board Report – Resignation of Local Board appointee Bruce Dow.
- c) Firefighter's Association Report – None
- d) Labor Organization Report – None
- e) Fossil Creek Access Report – Fossil Creek remains closed.

10) **Old Business** –

11) **New Business** –

- a) **Discussion/Possible Action on a grievance/Complaint filed by PSFD Members against the PSFD Fire Chief John Wisner.** (**Note: The Board may elect to go into an executive session for reason of a Personnel Matter*)

Board Chairman Chuck Ackerman reported that the Board had tasked him with finding an investigator. The decision was made in the Special Board Meeting of July 13, 2022 to go with Katherine Baker to investigate the complaints against Chief John Wisner. Mr. Ackerman spoke with her this last week. She is very busy and has been in court all week. She asked for him to forward the information to her so that she can begin reviewing it, which he has done. They have a conference call scheduled for 1:00pm on 7/25/22. Mr. Ackerman believes that as she begins the investigation she will be reaching out to the members. Captain Tommy Cordova inquired as to whether these would be done through telephone interviews or live interviews. Mr. Ackerman was not sure yet, but stated that she did bring that up as an option for the investigations. Mr. Ackerman stated that he would discuss that with her specifically during the conference call on the 25th. Mr. Ackerman stated that we want to get it done as quickly and as conveniently as possible for everybody involved.

- b) **Discussion and Possible action on Interim Chief position.** Dave Burkhart stated that we had put Captain Joel Brandt in place until this Board Meeting and then we wanted to decide what to do until the end of the investigation. The Board had agreed that we would not have another Board meeting on this until at least the 28th of August when Member Burkhart and Member Palmer would be back from their respective vacations and we could meet as a full Board. We need to decide if we want to continue with Joel Brandt as the interim chief until that time – we also have retired Chief Gary Morris here who is a

possibility for tentative Chief. So we are looking for feedback on that from the members and the Board Members to see what they think.

Member Melvin Palmer stated that we were wondering if retired Chief - Gary Morris was interested and available for that. Gary Morris responded from the audience that he was glad to be back and that "Yes," He is available and willing to help out.

Board Charmaine Chuck Ackerman stated that he would like to give his opinion. He thanked Gary Morris for his availability and stated that we appreciate the offer, but that he would like to see us keep Joel Brandt in that position, in that, it is a great experience for him to be able to do this as he may have aspirations of becoming Chief in the future. His only concern is whether or not we would have staffing if we move Joel into that position.

Mr. Burkhart agreed with Mr. Ackerman, and stated he would like to hear from the members and see how they feel because they are the ones that would have to be under this individual for the next 30 days.

Captain Billy Chester stated that "he wished to thank the Board for their careful consideration and approach of fixing the numerous issues we have: primarily morale, efficiency and effective operations. I have expressed to the Board before, and to each other, and to the Chief, that Operations is a pretty "well-oiled machine" we have a good handle on it, as Chief Morris can attest, it handles itself.

Obviously, it's helpful to have a Chief for operations. I just think it's worth mentioning that Chief Morris is so very valuable with the election coming up and the 310 proposition – we all love Joel and he's doing a great job and he **will** do a great job we know – it's just the invaluable amount of experience and expertise and qualification in our "backyard" willing to help us. We both agreed that any one of us Captains could fulfill a majority of those roles and probably get through just about anything – it's just worth mentioning that Chief Morris has proven himself in the political arena time and time again, particularly with our tax override, and with the 310 coming up that's going to require some campaigning and some real work at the legislative level, I just think one way or another we need to utilize that talent. I just can't say enough good things about Chief Gary Morris."

Tommy Cordova stated that the original conversation with staff was to bring someone in until such a time as we could find a high-level individual, someone with decades of experience – such as chief Morris – and that we would fulfill from within until that person was available – I believe that should be noted. That someone such as Chief Morris was the first option discussed – if it came to this situation. If this temporary position goes longer than we like, into that election cycle, it would be nice to have Chief Morris on board with his political realm on the 310 November ballot.

Mr. Burkhart asked if the members had any problem with Joel taking it for the next 30 days – until the investigation is finished.

Tommy Cordova replied that he believes Joel has the knowledge to execute the next 30 days as Chief. Mr. Burkhart asked Joel Brandt if he had thought about how the scheduling would work if he remained in the interim position.

Joel responded that he has talked about it but not executed any schedule changes up to this point.

Mr. Burkhart stated that financially it's about the same. If Gary Morris comes on we would have to compensate him, if Joel moves into the Chief position, our policy dictates a rate adjustment for him as well for filling in as the chief.

Board Member Melvin Palmer stated that he believes it will be less than 30 days but he goes along with the idea and supports Joel continuing in the Chief's position for 30 days.

Board Member Papke also stated that given the short time of 3 weeks or 30 days, he feels that there is some valuable experience that Joel can gain from this and he has no reservations about him being able to handle the operational aspects of the District. Long term, he would like to see us use the resources that Gary Morris has in some kind of a capacity with this upcoming election and political aspects of the 310.

Chairman Ackerman asked Gary Morris if he would be interested in coming on board in a different role – IF the investigation goes longer than expected to help us secure passage of the 310 tax initiative, and education of the public.

Mr. Morris replied, "Sure."

There was some discussion about the PSPRS implications and the prospect of hiring Gary Morris as a "consultant". The Board feels that we would not have to pay the pension fees for using him in that capacity.

Melvin Palmer made a motion to hire Joel Brandt as the temporary Chief until our investigation is over, and that we make the wage adjustment for him. Dave Burkhart seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Joel Brandt wished to clarify that this would be a 40 hr. work week. The Board affirmed that it would be a 40 hour work week but that he would be on-call also.

Board Chairman Ackerman then stated that he would like to have it on next month's agenda – the possibility of bringing Gary Morris on board as a consultant to help us drive that initiative through, and further stated that we would know much more by next month.

- c) **HSA/Health Insurance Report** – Captain Billy Chester – our Health & Safety Officer reported. He reminded the Board that we are on a High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) supported by a Health Savings Account (HSA) to cover the premiums, deductibles, and out of pocket expenses for the members. Our Policy covers 100% of Employee and 70% of the family portion. This year we have transitioned to a new health plan, EMI. The good news is that in this budget year we are going to be saving approximately \$40,000. There have been a few bumps in the road, one being the HSA plan had to be shut down and re-opened with the new company and also a small monthly administration fee to Health Equity for management of the plan. Historically, the Board had voted to fund the HSA accounts with a once a year contribution as our deductibles reset, rather than making smaller contributions throughout the year. We used to pay in \$3,500/single and \$5,635/family plan. The new plan out-of-pocket maximums are \$3,000/single and \$5,100/family plan deductible – resulting in just shy of \$9,000 savings. The two gentlemen that were "Pinned" earlier this evening have both received their HSA contributions for this year as new employees and we were waiting on making the deposits for the rest of the members. The new plan could not accommodate us on our fiscal year plan, so we are now on a January to January plan which is worth mentioning to the Board. There is actually no Board action needed here. We just thought it was important to keep the Board informed on what we are doing and the savings that we have worked to achieve for the coming year.
- d) **Pine Strawberry Fire District Support for SCR1049 Bill for Fire District Funding.** Mr. Burkhart explained that he asked for this to be put on the agenda and at the time it was still called "SCR1049" and since that time it has come to be known as Proposition 310. Mr. Burkhart mentioned that he has talked with our Fire Fighters Association president, Tommy Cordova about getting some information on our Facebook and getting some brochures and flyers out in the community. He said he would like to see a community group get together regarding this. That way they don't have to keep minutes and post agendas and such. Mr. Burkhart also has contacted some retired firefighters here in the community to see if they would be willing to help get the word out regarding this bill. Mr. Burkhart made a motion that the Pine Strawberry Fire District fully support Prop 310 and assist in any ways we can to help its passage. Melvin Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

- 12) **Future Meeting Agenda Items and Meeting Date** - Items for discussion – Progress report on Grievance/Investigation, Interim Chief Status, Prop 310, New Board Member, Contract with Gary Morris.

Next Regular Board Meeting - **Wednesday**, August 31, 2022 at 6:00pm Board Meeting Room.

- 13) **Adjournment: (See item 6b)**

Bob Papke made a motion to adjourn. Melvin Palmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously at 7:34 pm.