



## MEETING MINUTES A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE FOREST LAKES FIRE DISTRICT SEPTEMBER 26, 2024



- 1 Call to Order. The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Julie Swanson at 10:08 am at the Willow Restaurant, Casino AZ, Scottsdale, AZ.
- 2 Roll Call of Committee Members. In addition to Julie, in attendance were committee members Pete Batschelet, Sue Conrad, Chief Rodriguez and Wanda Burnett. Board members Dennis Massion and Israel Torres were absent. Also in attendance was John Hennessey, immediate Past Board Chairman. For the record, there was a quorum of the board. There were no other members of the public in attendance.
- 3 Board Chair Swanson turned the meeting over to Past Chairman Hennessey for purposes of continuity of the discussion to the posted agenda, part of which covered his tenure as Board Chair. He noted that:
  - a) This is a planning session only, with no board actions allowed.
  - b) The overview of process, plan for remaining meetings, was introduced in the August 17, 2024 board meeting, and was covered in abbreviated fashion at that time.
  - c) The Finance Committee, under the leadership of Treasurer Batschelet, works the financial plan in parallel.
- 4 Brief Review of Foundational Documents. John stated the subject documents, which address Mission, Vision, Values and Guiding Operational Principles, are included in the 2023 STRAP Update document, with which most team members are familiar. They were reviewed again for the benefit of Sue and Wanda, since this is their first introduction to the STRAP process. They are included here in summary, for the record.

Guiding Operational Principles. The FLFD leadership team has determined it will conduct its operations in accordance with the following operational principles:

- If you are going to hang out your shingle, you better be prepared do the best job you can.
- We will act with integrity in everything we do.
- We will do what is morally, legally and ethically responsible.
- We will comply with all legal and statutory requirements.
- We will operate in a way that makes the safety of our personnel and equipment paramount.

Mission (what we should be focused on accomplishing each and every day.)

*“To provide comprehensive fire, emergency medical and search and rescue services to the Forest Lakes community and our surrounding Service Delivery Area.”*

Vision Statement (what we aspire to evolve into over the long term):

*“To provide comprehensive services to our communities via the use of up-to-date facilities, rolling stock, supplies and trained personnel funded, to the greatest extent possible, by new revenue sources.”*

Values (the cornerstone of who we are and how we operate.)

*Trust. We rely on the integrity, strength and ability of every member of the Board and fire department. We are confident each one will do the right thing in dispatching his or her duties. We are entrusted with the responsibility and authority to run the fire district, and all our actions will reflect positively on the department and community.*

*Respect. We value and hold in high esteem the sense of the worth or excellence of all members of the Board, the department, as well as all people we deal with. All members of the Board and department are expected to demonstrate the personal qualities or abilities that reflect this attitude of holding others in high esteem.*



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**Attitude/Conduct.** Each member of the Board and department will strive to demonstrate, by their personal behavior, manner, disposition, feeling, bearing or deportment, a positive mental attitude regarding people and equipment and will conduct themselves accordingly.

**Honesty.** All members of the Board and department will strive to be upright and fair, truthful, sincere, frank and free from deceit or fraudulent behavior.

**Loyalty.** All members of the Board and department will strive to act in ways that reflect faithfulness to the fire department and its commitments and obligations.

**Commitment.** Every member of the Board and department will strive to be engaged and involved in the discharge of fire district duties and responsibilities.

**Teamwork.** Each member of the Board and department will strive to be cooperative and participate in coordinated efforts on the part of the fire district, acting together as a team in the interests of a common cause.

**Openness to Change.** All members of the Board and department will strive to demonstrate a willingness to transform, convert or otherwise make the future course of the department different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone.

**Accountability.** Each member of the Board and department shall be answerable to the members of the fire district, and shall be subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify their actions.

- 5 Chief's "State of the District" Message. Chief Rodriguez's State of the District is the focal point of Session #1 of this STRAP Update session. It sets the tone for all follow-on discussions, and is included here in its entirety.

The presentation consists of 14 slides:

- Slide 1:** State of the Department, September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Chief Rodriguez
- Slide 2:** Greetings and welcome. The next 2 years will be challenging as we maneuver through the rising costs of goods and services. Inflation has impacted our small, rural fire district with no immediate financial relief identified. We are at the maximum tax levy, industry and community standards will not tolerate a reduction in service levels and I am not aware of discussion at the state level for a mil rate increase (election year).
- Slide 3:** Call volume and impact to budget. Call volume remains consistent with previous years. Transportation to landing zones and hospitals provides the opportunity to bill patients and is regulated by the Department of Health Services. The amount we bill is \$2,286.94 per transport. We receive a portion of that amount depending on the health care provider.
- Slide 4:** Chief's Top Priorities: Maintain On-Duty Staff, Identify Grant and Alternative funding opportunities, Recruitment of POC candidates, Maintain and enhance community relationships, Entertain Auxiliary as a funding alternative.
- Slide 5:** On-Duty staff wage adjustment: PARAMEDIC. Current - \$21.00/hr, Proposed - \$22.00/hr.
- Slide 6:** On-Duty staff wage adjustment: FIREFIGHTER/EMT. Current - \$18.50/hr, Proposed - \$19.50/hr.
- Slide 7:** Current Staffing Model: Two Paramedic/Firefighter, One EMT/Firefighter.
- Slide 8:** Current Staffing Challenges: Reduction in Resident POC Availability, Time Commitment for Certifications, 1000 hours for Paramedic, College Semester for EMT, 50+ hours for firefighter, Residents have family and job commitments, Seasonal Residents—retired or here for recreation.
- Slide 9:** 16 Years Ago. A table showing historical staffing data from 2008 to 2024.
- Slide 10:** Today. Paid on Call Resident Personnel - "POC". Active Roster 2024: St. Germain, Josh (CFR, Full-Time), Rutt, Joe (CFR, Part-Time), Waggoner, LJ (CFR, Part-Time), Carcha, Dino (EMT TRAINING, Full-Time), Ullinger, Mick (CFR, Part-Time).
- Slide 11:** Budget Impacts Plus-Deltas: Pay Adjustments, No Potential Mil Rate Increase, Apparatus replacement, Charging property owners for EMS response, Auxiliary support.
- Slide 12:** Succession Planning: Fire Board, Fire Chief, Merger/Consolidation/JPA.
- Slide 13:** Summary: POC Availability - Reduced to lower level, Maintain Current Level of Service by adding additional On-Duty staff, Equipment Maintenance, Grant opportunities, Alternative funding sources.
- Slide 14:** In closing, we are fortunate to have the professional staff who want to be here, a group of dedicated POC personnel, a cohesive fire board of directors that understand our unique challenges, and a community that is supportive of our overall mission. Thanks to each of you!

**Key points from Chief's presentation:**

- The next 2 years will be challenging as we maneuver through the rising costs of goods and services. Inflation has impacted our small, rural fire district with no immediate financial relief identified.
- We are at the maximum tax levy, industry and community standards will not tolerate a reduction in service levels and I am not aware of discussion at the state level for a mil rate increase (election year).



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- c) Call volume and impact to budget. Call volume remains consistent with previous years. Transportation to landing zones and hospitals provides the opportunity to bill patients and is regulated by the Department of Health Services. The amount we bill is \$2,286.94 per transport. We receive a portion of that amount depending on the health care provider.
- d) Chief's Top Priorities
  - i) Maintain On-Duty Staff
  - ii) Identify Grant and Alternative funding opportunities
  - iii) Recruitment of POC candidates
  - iv) Maintain and enhance community relationships
  - v) Entertain Auxiliary as a funding alternative
- e) Cost Containment Considerations
  - i) When do we consider lowering service levels.
  - ii) Property valuations will increase
  - iii) Will the new generation of property owners be as giving and supportive of the district and its needs?
- f) Health Care Providers
  - i) Blue Cross/Blue Shield
  - ii) United Healthcare
  - iii) Cigna
  - iv) AHCCCS
- g) How Do We Address Our Priorities
  - i) How do we continue providing service that meets the needs of the district understanding the constraints we are facing? [financial & personnel].
  - ii) Increase On-Duty staff when POC's are not available. (personnel safety)
  - iii) What can our tax base support with the current and future needs of the district?
- h) We Must Pay a Competitive Wage
  - i) Our Service Delivery Model Depends on Our Staffing Model
  - ii) The staffing model has been in place for sixteen years and serves the District adequately if resident POC are available for emergency response and transport.
  - iii) Important to note that First Responder Certification is for driving and equipment retrieval. This level of certification is not part of the patient care module and does not replace the EMT or Paramedic role and responsibilities.
- i) Our POC Support Staff Is at Critical Mass

Paid on Call Resident Personnel - "POC"			
Active Roster 2024			
25	St. Germain, Lou	CFR	Full-Time
88	Ruet, Joe	CFR	Part Time
33	Waggoner, LJ	CFR	Part-Time
93	Cerchie, Dino	EMT Training	Full-Time
22	Ulinger, Mick	CFR	Part-Time

- i) Lou has stated his intention of phasing out of the POC program but remains active. Dino Cerchie is a fulltime resident member. Joe Ruet, LJ Waggoner and Mick Ulinger are seasonal POC members.
- ii) Look around next time you are in the community and see if you identify any potential POC candidate.
- j) Hourly wage increase is being driven by the fire chief in order to stay competitive with mountain top wages. If wage increase is affordable, this would place FLFD in the middle of the mountain top salary range.
- k) How do we manage inflation, competitive wages, rolling stock and service delivery model?



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- l) Are there any unforeseen issues that would impact our service delivery model to the District?
  - m) Can we predict any unfunded mandates in the near future?
  - n) POC personnel numbers have reduced over the last 11 years.
  - o) Keep looking for potential POC candidates.
  - p) Our current emergency response works well for this community!
- 7 Potential Five-Year Goals. Our Five-Year goals are a rolling average, and are updated annually. The list from last year, included herein, will be updated for 2024.
- a) Continue to pursue our designated Master Facilities Plan projects including completion within this 5-year strategic timeframe.
  - b) Upgrade our rolling stock as planned in our latest STRAP (Strategic Plan).
  - c) Improve non-tax revenues each year by identifying new revenue sources, and by leveraging community resources via the Auxiliary, grants, on-going donations and corporate/other.
  - d) Rebuild cash reserves to take advantage of unexpected opportunities.
  - e) Develop governmental relationships and influence with our local politicians at the Federal, State and County levels, coordinating with the Arizona Fire District Association or other representative groups as appropriate, to ultimately be able to call on these relationships for assistance with governmental matters that would benefit our District, especially related to increasing our tax revenues.
  - f) Identify and develop the FLFD Leadership Team for the future, including qualified candidates for the Board of Directors.
- 8 Master Planning Committee. The FEL shelter has been on the back burner for some time. Due to our financial constraints this situation may continue. This issue will be addressed in the follow-on sessions.
- 9 5 Year Forecast and Budget. Treasurer and Finance Committee Chairman Batschelet provided an initial review of our revenue and cost picture for the 5-year STRAP planning window. Key takeaways are as follows:
- a) The next two years look good.
  - b) Chief has done a good job of managing costs.
  - c) Chief Rodriguez has no intention of retiring within the STRAP 5-year planning window.
  - d) Our lease purchase agreement will be re-priced in 2027. It is anticipated our annual LPA costs will be somewhat lower than they are today.
  - e) We will need to have a Mil rate increase in order to have balanced budgets in the out years or we will have to adjust our service delivery model or consider a shared service model.
  - f) Pete made some preliminary estimates for revenue and costs which he will incorporate into the Excel model. This will be the starting point for the Session 2 agenda, which will follow the October regular business meeting.
  - g) We have included reasonable inflation estimates but there some cost elements over which we have little or no control (Workman's Comp, insurance, utilities (propane), unfunded mandates, e.g.).
- 10 Adjournment. There being no further business before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 12:18 pm.