

MINUTES 6/21/22
Whitefish Fire Service Area Trustees Meeting
Fire Station #22

Call to Order: 6:00 pm

Attendance

- Trustees: Dennis Oliver, Molly Miller, Rebecca Breiber. Ed McGrew (George Losleben absent)
- Guests: Chief Joe Page, Thomas Moran

Public Comment (2-minute limit per speaker)

Approval of [5/17/22 Minutes](#)

Treasurer's Report

- Bills paid
 - Invoice for check #2949?
 - Dennis has the final fire tower invoice and will upload to Google Drive
 - 2950, NWE, \$75.92
 - 2951, FEC, \$95.00
 - 2952, Big Drift (April and May), \$1000.00
 - 2953, Apex Pest, \$185.00
 - 2954, JD Thinning (hauling trash), \$141.96
 - 2955, Dennis Oliver (reimbursement for supply cabinets), \$1196.78
 - 2956, City of Whitefish, \$163,378.00 (half of contract payment for FY 23)
- Current fund balances:
 - Working Fund: \$355,184.42
 - April deposit identified? Payment estimate, not deposit.
 - Capital Improvement Fund: \$857,214.47
- WFSA/City contract payment for July (see above, check 2956)
- July Budget submission
 - Tentative budget due 7/22
 - Dennis reviewed the line items; board will approve the full budget in August
 - Still possible to make some changes before final budget due
- GIS audit
 - Dennis has reviewed taxpayers requesting review
 - Will send in comments by 6/30

DEFERRED UNTIL JULY MEETING:

Trustee Introductions and Expectations

- Trustee introductions and backgrounds
 - What are the backgrounds, relevant strengths of each trustee?

- Trustee roles and responsibilities (see [2021_Bylaws.pdf](#))
- Trustee culture and expectations discussion
 - How do you want Trustees to operate?
 - Any changes from past procedures?
 - Recommend development of a standard Treasurer's report that can be reviewed in advance and attached to the agenda and meeting minutes.
 - See Steering Committee recommendation (ii) below
 - Refer to list from trustee email chain on this topic for discussion.

DEFERRED UNTIL JULY MEETING:

Officer Elections

Committee/Working Group Updates

- Set priorities for [Steering Committee recommendations](#) (all Trustees)
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UO-qUOUp0SHhE3BvrGqWPBp15wA6QJS9/view?usp=sharing>
 - The top 5 priorities:
 - i) Recommend that WFSA approach the Flathead County Commissioners with a proposal for a WFSA rate increase that would make up for the lack of rate increases over such a long period (none since 2015) and help us start saving for anticipated future investments. [County Commissioner Approval not required.] **[NOTE:** The Trustees to develop a 3-year plan, as described in (iv) below, to explain the increase and describe future projects, including the remaining priorities. A 3-year plan takes the Trustees to the end of their respective terms and dovetails with WFD contract negotiations.]
 - ii) Recommend immediate increased financial transparency and planning. The entire WFSA board should review financials each month and financial statements should be attached to the minutes so the public has access to this information. The WFSA should conduct a budgeting process with full board oversight (via vote) ahead of each calendar year. It would be very simple to manually input inflows and outflows of cash into a cloud-based accounting platform, which would allow us to generate the financial statements we need (profit and loss, balance sheet, budget vs. actuals, and year-over-year comparisons).
 - iii) Recommend that WFSA Board hire a professional who has conducted successful communications campaigns to start communicating with the public on a more regular basis via such means as regularly scheduled email newsletters, social media posts and newspaper articles. The goal of this communications campaign should be (1) to educate the WFSA about how their fire services work, (2) keep the public in the loop regarding WFSA needs and planning, and (3) set the scene for buy-in for future investment in new stations and staffing. Lisa Jones is recommended by

Ed McGrew as someone who has led successful communications campaigns.

- iv) Recommend that WFSA work toward the Fire Authority model and start educating the public and talking to lawmakers regarding the need for this regional, cooperative fire services format. WFSA will also need to formulate a back-up/interim plan (likely a Fire District) in case that this effort is unsuccessful in the 2023 MT legislative session and/or takes longer than we want to implement. Create a WFSA 1-, 5-, and 10-year (or other suitable increments) plan. [See (i) above.]
 - v) Recommend that WFSA pursue establishment of a resident volunteer program with Chief Page's guidance and assistance. These resident volunteers would be trained and managed by the WFD. Chief Page reports that he has a couple of firefighters willing to conduct training and oversight of the resident volunteers and that this would be sufficient staffing to oversee the program. A Scholarship Program is another option to consider to recruit volunteers. Contact the firefighter union early in the process to get their feedback on these options. Missoula is apparently already utilizing this model, and Bigfork has just started - so we should reach out to them to see how this is going periodically.
 - vi) (Implied by [v]) Build suitable housing at Hodgson Rd. Station #22 and staff with resident volunteers. WFSA is contracting with the WFD to provide fire protection in the WFSA. If the WFD has insufficient staffing and equipment, so too does the WFSA. This is especially true during simultaneous incidents. Because the most critical and immediate need at the WFD is more firefighters, creating housing and establishing a resident volunteer program is the fastest and most cost-effective way the WFSA can provide these resources to enhance fire protection in the WFSA. Regardless of whether a Fire Authority is formed, or WFSA forms a Fire District, or continues as a Fire Service Area, this investment will not lose its utility and will continue to fill a critical need.
- Update on CMU project (Tom Moran and Becky) - here is a [visualization](#) of the project as it stands now.
 - Project still in planning; beta testing in October timeframe
 - Are there existing tools used by other states and fire service areas? Board can research this to help them create policy inputs. Becky and Tom are doing other prep work now.
 - Trustees to define allocation scenarios and policy inputs for the tool by August, to explore different methods and outcomes for how property owners are charged.

Project Updates

- Final BBQ planning (all Trustees)
 - 28 RSVPs plus duty crew
- Bid review for painting Station 22 (Ed)

- Will put an RFP in the newspapers to industrial painters and roofers to paint/redo roof
- Google Shared Drive (Becky)
 - Becky gave out user tips.
- Fire Tower costs and City invoice (Dennis)
 - In the \$90K range for expenses
 - We will bill the City for remainder owed
- Station 22 cistern maintenance
 - WFD will fill cistern to capacity of 10,000 gals
 - Current pump/well insufficient to fill automatically

July Meeting Agenda

- Deferred from June:
 - Trustee introductions and backgrounds
 - Trustee roles and responsibilities
 - Trustee culture and expectations
 - Officer Elections
- Clarify bid solicitation & invoice policy.
 - Set a threshold/requirement (usually a dollar amount) for when we must solicit bids, and how many bids do we need to solicit (three is commonplace).
 - Make it mandatory that we have an invoice in hand before paying any bills.
- 2023 Budget review
 - Tentative budget due 7/23
- Next steps on 3-year plan and priority action items identified from Steering Committee recommendations
- Montarise Village development and annexation process
 - What is the WFSA position on large developments going forward?
- Montana Fire Trustee's Association Conference, Sept 30th, Copper King Hotel, Butte
- Discuss hiring a property manager to oversee contractors and conduct Station 22 upkeep and maintenance.
 - That Guys Lawn Service charging \$150 x 2/month

Adjournment: 9:10 pm