

BIG MOUNTAIN FIRE DISTRICT (BMFD) BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING AUGUST 30, 2021 AND SPECIAL MEETING OCTOBER 18, 2021

AUGUST 30, 2021 MEETING

CALL TO ORDER: 3:01pm

ROLL CALL: Board Trustees Phil Waddell, Paul Silverman, Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, Steve Cosby; Chief Ben DeVall; Firefighter Kevin Wise.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: A motion to approve Minutes of the BMFD Board of Trustees Regular Meeting June 28, 2021 and the Special Meeting July 28, 2021 was made by Sue Oemichen and seconded by Tony Patterson. The motion was passed unanimously.

FIREFIGHTER REPORT:

- The BMFD engine is not back yet from repair. It is apart and the replacement parts have arrived and are being installed. While at the manufacturer, the issue with the nozzle at the end of the ladder will also be fixed.
- There is still no word on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG). The award staff is far behind because of the fire activity which happened this summer. A turn-down letter has not been received.
- The District is no longer under fire restrictions as of today.
- The BMFD ambulance is in service. Firefighter Colin Christopoulos and Chief DeVall built a mounting system for the cardiac monitor. Firefighters Robert Sharp and Kevin Wise altered the exhaust system to fit the tailpipe on the new ambulance. Wayne Perry organized all the equipment and got the remote start wired so the exhaust system starts when the ambulance is started. The staff also installed a small refrigerator to house medications which need refrigeration. Previously, the District was replacing them frequently per drug manufacturer specifications.
- Chief DeVall spoke with the County Health Department safety officer. COVID cases are on the rise by around 100 daily within the valley. Both hospitals are out of beds, and Logan Health/Kalispell is starting the process to create overflow beds. Approximately 42% of Flathead County residents have been vaccinated, and around 100 a week continue to get

the shot. The County will start the fairground clinic again when all who have been vaccinated can get a booster.

- The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant has been approved. The District expects to receive around \$1,200.00.
- BMFD continues to be called for inter-facility transports. Chief advised the nurse coordinator this morning that the District's availability will stop when the winter ski season begins.
- All BMFD employee performance reviews have been completed.
- The District attempted to test the emergency communication system the County has access to. There were some problems originally with the Verizon towers, but that has been fixed. There are still some issues to get resolved, but full operation is getting closer. BMFD will be the first district in the County to have access and use the system.
- Chief has been asked to join the local 911 advisory board as the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) representative, but he has not yet committed to serve.
- The District is in the process of getting a script from our medical director for nitrous oxide to use for traumatic patients. BMFD has been transporting patients who are ex-opiate addicts and who will not accept pain medication. Nitrous oxide is a good alternative to make them more comfortable for the ride.
- Chief attended a Fire Safe Flathead meeting. It appears there will be more Federal Government funding for fuel mitigation work within the urban interface area under the Good Neighbor Authority. Currently there is a waiting list for persons interested in the cost share grant.
- Chief has been in contact with Chris Grant from the Elk Highlands HOA regarding the proposed conservation easement thinning project and access to the Stratham property while the work is being completed.
- Recent Firewise activity has included a community brush cleanup initiative and distribution of homeowner packets covering emergency communications and procedures.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

TREASURER'S REPORT:

1. Financials –

- a. June 30, 2021 - We have not received the Finals from the County. We will send them out as soon as they are received.
- b. July 31, 2021 YTD – The copies of the financial statements are not included in this Report due to not receiving the Finals from the County prior to the meeting – Preliminary Report reviewed and discussed, including Financial Statement Notes, Statement of Net Assets, and P&L.

2. FY-2022 Budget was discussed. Changes were made to the preliminary to reflect the increased tax/assessment revenue as shown on the updated budget and FY-2022 Budget review presented.

A motion was made by Tony Patterson and seconded by Phil Waddell to approve the final budget as presented and send it to the County signed by Board Chairman Phil Waddell. **Motion passed unanimously.**

3. Department Savings Incentive was discussed. Payout date will be finalized shortly and communicated to firefighters and Board members. It was felt that including post-employment vacation and sick paid out to two past firefighters in the Labor dollars used to calculate the incentive would penalize current firefighters.

A motion was made by Sue Oemichen and seconded by Steve Cosby not to include post-employment vacation and sick payout in the Labor dollars used to calculate the Department Savings Incentive. **Motion passed unanimously.**

A motion was made by Sue Oemichen and seconded by Tony Patterson to direct the Board negotiating team to ask the Union to consider changing the Department Savings Incentive eligibility to include current full-time firefighters who have passed probation at the time of payout, retroactive to December 2020. **Motion passed unanimously.**

4. Database Officer Position was discussed. Work continues to identify time commitment and responsibilities for this position.

5. Mill Levy Assessment Task Force - The proposal presented for the development of a task force was discussed.

A motion was made by Sue Oemichen and seconded by Phil Waddell to approve the establishment of a Mill Levy Assessment Task Force as described in the proposal. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Recommended members of the task force include: Fire Chief - Ben DeVall; Accountant - Tracy Armstrong; BMFD Board members – Tony Patterson, Sue Oemichen; Community Reps – Bob Howard and Phil Waddell; Firefighters – Ken Wensel and one other appointed by the firefighters.

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was made by Paul Silverman and seconded by Tony Patterson. The motion was passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS:

- Chairman Phil Waddell plans to resign from the Board effective September 21, 2021. He will serve as a Public Member in the future and participate in the Mill Levy Task Force.

Several candidates to replace him as a Trustee were discussed. A final decision was deferred until the next Board meeting.

- Sue Oemichen gave an update on Firewise developments. The 2020-2021 Firewise Annual Report and the 2022 Action Plan will be issued shortly. Application for renewed BMFD Firewise accreditation is in process. The Firewise Board will next meet on October 5th.
- The BMFD negotiating committee will meet with the Firefighters Union on September 15th to discuss the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Tony Patterson will edit the CBA text. Issues such as a savings incentive for new employees and firefighter physicals cost sharing are pending.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Tony Patterson attended a Whitefish Fire Service Area meeting which included discussion of possible new fire stations in the area. One location being proposed is near the bottom of Big Mountain Road. The Mountain Gateway developer has agreed to donate land for the station, but availability of potential funding for the actual structure is unclear.

EMPLOYEE COMMENT: None

NEXT MEETING: November 8, 2021, 2pm

ADJOURNMENT: A motion to adjourn was made by Paul Silverman and seconded by Phil Waddell. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 5:23pm.

SPECIAL MEETING OCTOBER 18, 2021

CALL TO ORDER: 8:15am

ROLL CALL: Board Trustees Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, Paul Silverman, Steve Cosby; Fire Chief Ben DeVall; Firefighters Ken Wensel, Kevin Wise.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Deferred to next Regular Board meeting

FIREFIGHTER REPORT:

- BMFD firefighter Wayne Perry's last day was October 2nd. The remaining employees have been covering resultant extra shifts.
- The District has had staff come down with COVID. Chief DeVall contacted the County Health Department for clarification as to when they can return. No fever for 48 hours and a 50% reduction in severity of symptoms are the criteria.
- Positive COVID cases are increasing in the Flathead Valley. Currently, Montana has the highest per capita infection rate in the nation. Both area hospitals are at capacity.
- BMFD continues to do inter-facility transports when other resources are unavailable, and has transported multiple COVID-positive patients.
- Chief has been in contact with the County Office of Emergency Services (OES) director regarding the emergency reporting system. She has been working with the vendor to try to get it sorted out. The County may have to increase its subscription to make it work, but the fix has not been identified.
- The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) started its fuel mitigation work just east of Big Mountain and has done three prescribed burns. BMFD participated in the process by providing water and support at the helicopter landing pad.
- Chief has ordered two fire danger signs that have levels from low to extreme. They are being funded almost entirely by a Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) grant, though the District went \$140.00 over what was allotted. The signs have been shipped. Chief met with Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR) officials Elyse Knudsen and Nick Polumbus and resolved that one sign will be installed on Big Mountain Road before the turn to the Base Lodge.
- Chief attended an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) advisory board meeting and was again asked to edit protocol changes.

- Chief talked with Bill Cabbage of WMR who noted that the Resort saw 460,000 skier visits last year. He believes the number will break 500,000 this coming season.
- Chief has been in contact with the Landmark developer. An exterior building plan was provided, and Chief was asked to sign acknowledgment of the structure. Chief advised the developer that the District staffs two firefighters 24/7 but does not have the resources to adequately deal with another large building. Chief noted that a mutual aid agreement is in place. Though the Whitefish Fire Department (WFD) is closest, there is no guarantee it could respond, and support may have to come from Kalispell FD or Columbia Falls FD. The developer asked if there was something Landmark could do to improve the situation. Chief said ultimately no, although property taxes from the building would help, but that revenue would not be seen by BMFD for years. Tony Patterson will review the developer's document and may decide that the County must become involved.
- The Firewise group is in the process of renewing District certification. A wildfire risk assessment must be performed, and Chief is working on getting it scheduled. The homeowner packets are complete, and a few remain available. They had to be printed commercially, as BMFD's printer did a poor job.
- District firefighter Colin Christopoulos and Chief DeVall figured out how to build a turnout drying system, and Colin constructed it. The cost of around \$400.00 compares to a purchased unit at \$6,000.00.
- Colin installed a new downstairs firehouse door, as the old one was beginning to delaminate.
- The Big Mountain Firefighters Association (BMFA) continues to collect donations and homeowner information for emergency contact.
- BMFD has a meeting scheduled on October 21st with the Flathead County Finance Director. Sue Oemichen has provided a list of questions for the Director's review before the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

OLD BUSINESS:

- Sue Oemichen made a motion that the Board ratify the 2021-2022 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) negotiated with the Firefighters Union. Paul Silverman seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously. Ken Wensel and Sue are the signatories. Key provisions include a 6% salary increase chosen by firefighters over an option for a 4% raise combined with a \$19,200.00 savings incentive. The latter will be eliminated after November 2021. In addition, there will be a 3% firefighter salary increase every July, subject to budget limits which could result in a higher or lower figure.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Sue Oemichen made a motion to nominate Tom Sato as a new Board Trustee, replacing Phil Waddell. Tony Patterson seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.
- Tony Patterson made a motion to appoint Sue Oemichen as new Board Chairperson, replacing Phil Waddell. Steve Cosby seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously. Steve Cosby agreed to serve as new Board Treasurer.
- Sue Oemichen made a motion to appoint Tony Patterson as Vice Chairperson. Paul Silverman seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.
- Phil Waddell completed Chief Ben DeVall's performance evaluation, pending the CBA ratification. Sue Oemichen made a motion to give Chief DeVall a 6% pay increase, in parallel with the approved firefighter raise. Tony Patterson seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.
- Paul Silverman attended an October 14 developer briefing on the proposed Mountain Gateway project at the bottom of Big Mountain Road. Approximately 50 community residents also participated. The overwhelming view was that the proposed density of over 300 new residential units would be excessive and would result in unacceptable traffic congestion beyond current road infrastructure handling ability. The proposal will be considered by the Whitefish Planning Board on October 21st. (Resolution of the issue was not reached at that meeting, and a follow-up hearing was scheduled for November 18th.)

EMPLOYEE COMMENT: Firefighter and Union Rep Ken Wensel conveyed his appreciation to the Board for its ratification of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

NEXT MEETING: Regular meeting November 8, 2021, 2pm. Hopefully, the approved June 30 financials will be available.

ADJOURNMENT:

- A motion to adjourn was made by Paul Silverman and seconded by Sue Oemichen. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 8:54am.