

BIG MOUNTAIN FIRE DISTRICT (BMFD) BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MEETING MINUTES FEBRUARY 18, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – 2:57pm

ROLL CALL – Board Trustees Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, Paul Silverman, Steve Cosby (departed 4pm), Tom Sato; Chief Ben DeVall; Firefighters Ken Wensel, Kevin Wise, Robert Sharp

APPROVAL OF MINUTES - A motion to approve the Minutes from the Board meeting of January 7, 2022 was made by Tony Patterson and seconded by Tom Sato. The motion was passed unanimously.

FIREFIGHTER REPORT -

- BMFD finally has received its engine back from the manufacturer. Lots of repair work was completed, and everything is working correctly.
- The District's power cot is still having issues. Chief DeVall has ordered a new battery, which hopefully will be the fix. Otherwise, maintenance will have to be scheduled.
- The individual suggested by Bookkeeper Tracy Armstrong for the District audit is unable to perform it for a local government entity such as BMFD. Chief has a list of auditors who are qualified. There are two in Kalispell. Chief has emailed both of them requesting information they would need to perform an audit. No response to date. The District does not have to use a local auditor, if it chooses not to.
- The Board Trustee Orientation Manual is ready for printing and review. Board Chair Sue Oemichen and Chief DeVall resolved that when new Board members arrive, they should have a sit-down with the Chief and a current Trustee to answer questions.
- The new firefighter hired by the District has accepted a job instead with Kalispell Fire Department. At this point, BMFD plans to fill the position with an emergency medical technician (EMT), not a paramedic. The last time the District advertised an opening, no local medics applied, and the likelihood of having someone move to this area with its high housing costs is low. By opening the position to a greater applicant pool, the Department should be able to hire locally. Three medics will then be employed rather than four.

- Chief DeVall will soon be renewing BMFD's Federal System for Award Management (SAM) account. This will allow the District to apply for and receive Federal grants.
- The Department has ordered a replacement window for one of the firehouse bedrooms at a cost of \$238. Firefighters will install it themselves, but it likely will not arrive until the end of March at the earliest, or May at the latest.
- Chief DeVall has talked with Big Mountain Firefighters Association (BMFA) Treasurer Rhona Meislik about the database information transfer. As soon as a District firefighter volunteers to undertake the project, a computer technician will be enlisted to determine what program the District should use and to help set up both sides for information sharing. Board Chair Oemichen has created a job posting.
- Flathead County has been awarded \$2 million from a Joint Chief's grant for fuels mitigation work. The Flathead proposal was largely developed through collaboration with FireSafe Flathead, which includes participation from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Flathead County, the Northwest Montana Hazardous Fuels Program, and the National Forest Foundation. Funds will be prioritized through Sean Johnson, NRCS District Conservationist. The funds can be spent as soon as they are available. Multiple areas have already been identified as high priority by use of the County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP).
- Chief reviewed proposed hydrant placement at the Landmark building and was comfortable with the additional hydrant locations. He provided the developer with confirmation that the sites were sufficient. It appears this was the last step before the project could apply for a building permit.
- Board Chair Oemichen, Bookkeeper Armstrong, firefighter Colin Christopoulos, and Chief DeVall still need to get together to resolve the firefighter vacation accrual conversion issue. A meeting date has been difficult to set because of previously-scheduled personnel vacations.
- Chief has not heard anything back on the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act grant request, and follow-up has been difficult.

PUBLIC COMMENT – None

TREASURER'S REPORT –

Financial Review – The December 2021 Year-To-Date (YTD) Board Packet was distributed to Board members prior to the meeting. The District has not yet received the January 2022 Financials from Flathead County. December 2021 Financials were discussed. YTD, BMFD should be at 50.0 % of budget.

Budget Total Assets (Checking/Savings) YTD \$376,866.12

Total Income YTD \$388,846.01 (63.4%)

Total Expenses YTD \$379,782.91 (58.1%)

Net Ordinary Income YTD \$9,063.10 (122.5%)

Notes – Sue Oemichen and Steve Cosby worked on and transitioned the Board Treasurer position to Cosby effective February 1, 2022, following Cosby's Board appointment approval.

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 –

- The BMFD Data Officer position will be filled by a current firefighter. It will be a salaried position, and Chief DeVall will post the job opening. Among the duties will be development/maintenance of both a District website for public access and a community data base for firefighter use. Tony Patterson made a motion to formally create the new position at an annual salary of \$3,000, to be reviewed on a quarterly basis. The motion was seconded by Tom Sato, and it was passed unanimously.
- Among the guidance resulting from Sue Oemichen's attendance at a Flathead County Leadership Training Conference was a revision to the public posting procedure for BMFD Board meetings, in the future to also include task force meetings. Agendas for upcoming meetings should encourage public participation before Board actions and will be posted at least 48 hours rather than two weeks in advance. They will be displayed at four mailbox locations within the District, as well as on the Big Mountain Community calendar.
- Sue Oemichen solicited suggestions from Board members regarding the Firewise Action Plan. She also noted an upcoming address on wildfire issues by DNRC official Ali Ulwelling at Flathead Valley Community College.

- The District's Revenue Source Task Force met this morning to discuss the funding of competitive firefighter salaries, new equipment, and one additional firefighter per shift. It was concluded that reliance on mill levy increases and/or impact fees is not practical or realistic. A resort tax on such Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR) activities as lift tickets, merchandise, restaurants, and property rentals may be a good alternative, possibly modeled after Big Sky's approach. Should such new revenue, which could total around \$1 million annually, be generated, the BMFD Board would decide how to spend the funds allocated to the District. New employee housing, of interest to both BMFD and WMR, is a likely candidate, in addition to the above. The SNOW Bus is the sole potential recipient of both Whitefish resort tax funding and a possible Big Mountain tax.

NEW BUSINESS –

- An Annual Insurance Review is under way. The question of BMFD Board member protection from liability was raised. Chief DeVall confirmed that such protection is already in place.
- The Board Meeting Packet will be transmitted electronically via Yahoo by Chair Oemichen in the future.
- A motion was made by Steve Cosby to have three authorized BMFD Board check signers, the Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. The motion was seconded by Tom Sato, and it was passed unanimously.
- Chief DeVall noted that the Winter 2021-2022 BMFD Community Newsletter is in process.
- BMFA's Annual Report will be presented to the Board at its next meeting.
- A District Bylaws revision to better define the term, "property owners," will be addressed at the next Board meeting, as will a draft of Trustee Election Procedures.

EMPLOYEE COMMENT – Firefighter and union representative Ken Wensel applauded the work of the Board’s Revenue Source Task Force and its continuing efforts to develop new funding for increased firefighter salaries.

NEXT MEETINGS – April 8, 2022, 3pm, and June 3, 2022, 3pm

ADJOURNMENT – A motion to adjourn was made by Tony Patterson and seconded by Paul Silverman. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 4:33pm.