

BIG MOUNTAIN FIRE DISTRICT (BMFD) BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MEETING MINUTES AUGUST 29, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – 3:03 PM

ROLL CALL – Board members Sue Oemichen, Tony Patterson, Tom Sato, Steve Cosby, Paul Silverman; Chief Ben DeVall; Bookkeeper Tracy Armstrong (via Zoom)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Steve Cosby made a motion to approve, as amended, the Minutes from the Board’s Meeting of June 3, 2022. Tony Patterson seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

FIREFIGHTER REPORT –

- Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) awards have still not been awarded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). BMFD is waiting to hear if it will receive funding for Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), and Flathead County is waiting to hear about mobile radios.
- BMFD firefighter Robert Sharp installed a replacement window in the back bedroom of the firehouse.
- Chief DeVall talked with an Anderson ZurMuehlen representative, who is waiting for BMFD information to determine the firm’s ability to perform a Department audit.
- Chief also met with a Carver Engineering official regarding a home built on the Episcope lot. They discussed ingress/egress and the layout of the two structures planned.
- Firefighter Colin Christopoulos has started the BMFD Data Officer job and has been going through District resident lists.

- The Department's 2031 engine is back from being repaired and is functioning within manufacturer specifications, although there is a loose steering linkage which the mechanic is looking into.
- There was excellent participation between the Board and firefighters for Chair Sue Oemichen's wage/benefits presentation.
- Chief met with County officials for a demonstration of an upgraded emergency notification system they will be using. The only issue is that persons will have to register to receive all messaging. DeVall will be one of two fire chiefs and law enforcement representatives on a task force to determine how fire/police will use the system. This group is being identified now and will begin meeting soon.
- All BMFD employee performance reviews have been completed. As a result of firefighter comments, the Department has re-implemented the Briefing Book. Any employee can add information, and firefighters coming on shift can check and initial that they have read the information.
- BMFD firefighter Brandon Hoerling has resigned, and Colyn Bray started work on August 15th. He is in the Paramedic Program at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC), has three years' experience as an Emergency Medical Technician-B (EMT-B). He's also been a firefighter at the Evergreen and Bigfork Fire Departments.
- A second "Fire Danger" sign has been installed at the bottom of Big Mountain Road, and "No Fireworks" signs have been installed throughout the District's residential subdivisions.
- The District's Firewise community picnic was a great success, with 107 persons attending. Local homeowner associations (HOAs) contributed a total of \$1,000.00 (\$200.00 each), and about \$400.00 was collected at the door. A profit of \$252.00 was made, which will accrue to Firewise. Many participants at the event hoped to discuss home fire safety assessments with Ernie Nace,

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's (DNRC's) Community Preparedness Specialist. However, he was called away to Washington to undergo a kidney transplant. He had been on the list for two years and finally received one.

- Carver Engineering has begun development of infrastructure for the planned new Glades condo project.
- Pintler Billing Services was instructed by BMFD to implement new ambulance run charge amounts and has been doing so.
- Chief has talked with Glacier Insurance Strategies, the District's health insurance agent, and has requested a comparison of additional providers regarding plans/costs. The BMFD plan renews on Oct 1st.
- Chief DeVall, Board Treasurer Steve Cosby, and Bookkeeper Tracy Armstrong met to go over numbers for the preliminary District budget being submitted to the County.
- Big Mountain Firefighters Association (BMFA) donated \$92,633.05 to the District in Fiscal Year 2021. Purchased items included a new ambulance with a tire change and decals, all season tires for the Department's engine, a new laptop computer including information technology (IT) to set it up, and uniform and personal protective items. So far this year, BMFA has receipts totaling \$7,703.00. An additional \$15,018.00 for a cot load/mount system has not cleared the bank yet.
- All BMFD firefighters have completed their annual physicals, and all personnel are fit for duty.
- The Department was denied Health Resource & Service Administration COVID relief funds. Chief believes the decision was based on lack of a significant hardship being shown. The District had a higher labor expense with employees out sick, but increased ambulance revenue offset it.

- Chief has spent time looking at new properties within the District. There are many new residences under construction. The finished homes appear on Geographic Information System (GIS) sites, and the State has been adding them to property tax rolls as they are completed.

TREASURER'S REPORT –

Financials –

- A. The May 2022 Financial Report appears below and was distributed to Board members prior to the August 29th meeting. Year-to-date (YTD), the District should be at 91.7% of Budget, and we are ahead on income and spot-on with expenses.
- B. Discussion of financial statement notes, statement of net assets, balance sheet, statement of activities, labor detail, and budget-versus-actual are all attached.

May 2022

Budget Total Assets (Checking/Savings) YTD	\$410,682.35
Total Income YTD	\$643,535.98 (104.9%)
Total Expenses YTD	\$599,443.75 (91.7%)
Net Ordinary Income YTD	\$44,092.23 (209.4%)

- C. Financials for June and July 2022 have not been finalized by the County. We plan to send our County-approved June/July financials once they are received.

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

OLD BUSINESS –

- Chief DeVall continues to pursue a District property tax rate analysis.
- BMFA is currently covered under BMFD's insurance policy. The situation will be examined by the Board, including a review of BMFA's tax returns.
- Tom Sato and Colin Cristopoulos are close to implementing the District's website.
- Renewal of BMFD's employee health insurance policy is scheduled for October 1, 2022 but will be postponed until April 2023. The deferral will permit provider consideration of lowered premiums to reflect the hiring of younger firefighters. The Union may or may not participate in the analysis. There are no plans for a cafeteria (family) plan.
- Sue Oemichen, with input from all Board members, completed Chief's performance evaluation on June 29th.
- A Board of Trustees informational workshop was held to discuss "Firefighters Compensation: Salaries and Benefits Overtime." The purpose of the workshop was to give BMFD Trustees and BMFD firefighters the information needed to accurately respond to questions regarding BMFD firefighter compensation. BMFD firefighter compensation changes are negotiated with the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).
- Chief DeVall presented his Annual Insurance Review to the Board. Payne West's liability/equipment insurance bill of \$11,647.00 is due to be paid shortly. The Volunteer Firemen's Insurance Service (VFIS) policy

(administered by Payne West) renews September 1st. Board member coverage for liability was confirmed. Chief also noted that the firehouse building cannot be overinsured. Coverage for a rental fire truck must be clarified. Paul Silverman made a motion, seconded by Tom Sato, to approve the Review. The motion was passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS –

- A preliminary decision was made to publish an annual District report to the community. The topic will be placed on the next Board meeting Agenda.
- An election of Board officers was held. Tony Patterson made a motion, seconded by Tom Sato, to retain all Trustees in their current positions. The motion was passed unanimously.
- Chief DeVall and Flathead County Fire Service Area Manager, Lincoln Chute, are working on a mutual aid agreement.
- Tony Paterson made a motion, seconded by Tom Sato, to make small changes to BMFD's Discipline and Grievance Policy and Progressive Disciplinary Action Forms. The motion was passed unanimously.
- Sue Oemichen proposed discussion of a second egress route off Big Mountain. The topic will be addressed at the next Board meeting.
- Tony Patterson made a motion, seconded by Steve Cosby, to form a community committee to consider imposition of a District Resort tax to help fund BMFD. The motion was passed unanimously. Among the relevant issues is preservation of the District's Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating, which can be retained in the future only if four firefighters are available to respond to fire incidents. The latter goal will be categorized as a Department strategic imperative.

- Potential annexation of Big Mountain by the city of Whitefish will be a continuing Board discussion item, as the initiative's impact on the District becomes clearer.
- Regarding the Board's Calendar of Activities revision, Chair Oemichen advised that by Montana code, the annual election of Trustees must occur during the June – August period every year. She also noted that Union CBA negotiations will await a final District budget.
- Paul Silverman briefed meeting attendees on a Firewise initiative which will recommend a certified tree service to District property owners to undertake hazardous fuel removal at owners' expense. Guardian Forestry has been selected from a list of candidates, and interested residents are being placed in contact with Guardian to obtain work estimates and take individual action.

NEXT MEETINGS – October 27 and December 12, 2022; February 27, April 24, and June 26, 2023; all at 3pm.

ADJOURNMENT – A motion to adjourn was made by Tony Patterson and seconded by Tom Sato. The motion was passed unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 5:09pm.