

Evergreen Fire District
Board of Trustees

Approved
2-1-16

Minutes of Board Meeting
January 4, 2016

Board members present: *Shawn Baker, Jack Fallon, John Foust, Kyle Nace, Dave Edwards*

Board members absent: *None*

District Staff/Employees: *Fire Chief Craig Williams, Fire Marshal Ben Covington, Administrative Assistant Laurie Pein*

Public Attendance: *Captain James Boyce, Lieutenant Josh Cox*

MEETING OF JANUARY 4, 2016 CALLED TO ORDER AT 12:08 P.M.

PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE RECOGNIZED:

SHAWN: Public in attendance are James Boyce and Josh Cox. Do you guys have anything you want to address the board about or put on the agenda?

JAMES & JOSH: No.

ADOPT THE AGENDA:

Jack moves to adopt the Agenda as presented, Dave seconds the motion, the Agenda is adopted.

Kyle indicates that he has received his official notice from the County and is now a full voting member of the Board. He forgot to bring a copy of it but will get one to us.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

None

FINANCIALS:

1. November 2015

Shawn had questioned the \$7,000 insurance payment via email prior to the meeting. Jack now asks if that payment is quarterly or annual. Laurie explains that it is paid in three

installments of approximately \$7,000 each. Craig confirms that it is for the work comp disability insurance. Jack believes that five years ago it was only \$5,000 or \$6,000 total for the year. Craig explains that it has indeed gone up that much in the last five or six years and says that the department also has more personnel now than back then. Craig also says that we will probably get a refund back soon. Last year we were refunded somewhere around \$5,000 or \$6,000.

Dave moves to approve the financial statements as presented for October, 2015; seconded by Kyle; motion passed unanimously.

PAST ITEMS/UPDATES:

1. Finalize Bylaw Revisions

It was affirmed that the changes to the Bylaws were approved at the last Board meeting but it was not made clear who would be finalizing and printing out the Bylaws for signature. Jack says that he will find the version that Craig emailed to him and make the changes so it can be printed and signed.

2. Approve Meeting Minutes of December 7, 2015.

Shawn would like to move Approval of Meeting Minutes to the "past items" section of the Agenda. Laurie will make the change prior to the signing of the minutes for December 7th.

Jack moves to approve the minutes of the December 7, 2015, with the changes; seconded by Dave; motion approved unanimously.

NEW ITEMS/UPDATES:

1. Glacier Bank Account Changes.

Craig explains to the Board that we are no longer receiving our paper copies of our Glacier Bank Statements because the bank had not changed our mailing address from the old P.O. box to the new street address. In attempting to make this change with the bank, he also discovered that he is a signor only on the account and cannot make these kinds of changes. Jack is the only one who can do it at this point because he is listed as the person in charge of the account; however, they also had him showing as deceased. In fact, every one of the Board members listed on the account as signors were also showing as deceased with the exception of Julie Reid. Craig spent 40 minutes trying to get them to understand that no one is deceased. Ultimately, the bank said they needed something in the Board meeting minutes that listed all the signors on the account that need to be removed and listing all the current Board members who need to be added as signors. Laurie indicates that she also spoke with a representative at the bank who said as long as

we provided a copy of each board member's photo ID with their signatures then that can go along with the minutes to accomplish the changes so we don't have to try to get all the board members in there to sign. Craig was told they no longer do the individual signature cards. The board members all question how everyone got tagged as deceased and Craig says that no one seems to be able to explain that. Craig was dealing with the Evergreen branch of Glacier Bank and suggested that when Jack goes to deal with this he might want to go to the main, downtown branch.

Jack moves to let the record show that Denise Cofer, Frank Miller, and Julie Reid are no longer Trustees of the District and that the current Trustees and signatories of the District, effective January 1st, 2016, are John Fallon, Shawn Baker, John Foust, Dave Edwards and Kyle Nace; Dave seconds the motion; motion passed unanimously.

3. Pager Pay Discussion.

Craig reminds the Board of the last meeting and his discussion regarding the "bubble" transports of 35-125 miles and how it is becoming difficult to find personnel willing to take these transports because of the low pay involved. Since then he has spent a great deal of time working with Leslie at Pintler Billing and she reiterated that it is extremely difficult to identify how much money we have made on these transports due to the way Medicare, Medicare parts A-C, Medicaid and Indian Health Services pay and the length of time it takes for them to do so. They were able to identify the number of these transports for 2015 but not the revenue as so many of them are still pending. Leslie gave Craig some things he could look at but explained that her coding is proprietary and she cannot convert a lot of them into Excel; therefore, Craig was unable to provide the raw data requested by Shawn and Jack at the last meeting. Leslie said the only thing she could suggest we do is schedule a meeting with her, Shawn and Jack so that she could try to explain what they are looking at because there is no way they could look at it on their own and even begin to understand it.

Consequently, Craig went back and looked at the 30,000 foot view and identified the biggest issue the department is dealing with which is finding consistent inter facility transport coverage. Looking at the bigger picture brought him back to looking at the possibility of pager pay. The pager pay would not apply to emergent 911 calls, only inter facility transports. Craig spoke with KRMC, who has a similar program where they pay between \$3 and \$4 an hour to carry a pager and they are responsible to respond to KRMC within one hour.

Craig was thinking in terms of having two people on call from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., which is the time period during which most transports occur, seven days a week, at \$3 per hour each. We would then have two people pre-identified to take transports which would ease the burden of getting on the phone with the phone list trying to find someone to take it when KRMC or someone needs a transport. Pager pay would allow people to sign up in advance. James and Craig feel this would help with personnel retention problems as well. Pager pay would be in place until a crew responds for a transfer, then, once a run

card is started, they would get the regular pay for the transfer and would return to pager pay when the ambulance is back in service.

Craig indicates that if we had two people on pager pay for 12 hours per day, seven days per week, which breaks down to \$86 per day. The total maximum cost would be approximately \$29,000 per year, including 20% for taxes, etc. However; he does not believe the cost would be that high because in reality we may not always end up with all the pager pay shifts filled seven days a week. In addition, during the summer, June through September, when we have a hydrant crew working, they will probably cover the inter facility transfers much of the time reducing the need for pager pay during those months. The 9428 Ambulance account has averaged approximately \$50,000 per month since September, with revenue in and revenue out, which meets Craig's comfort level and he feels that we can afford it. Craig would like to try it for a month to see how it goes and find out if people are really going to sign up for it. He has polled the membership and personnel are excited about it but he has explained to them that it's not a done deal and they are aware that they would go off pager pay when taking a transport then go back on when they return. In addition, if a long transport is required that the person on pager pay cannot take, they will be responsible for finding someone else to take it. Personnel feel that it would be worth it for \$3 an hour to be available. Otherwise they have to refrain from making other plans with family, etc., on the off chance that there will be a transfer and if there isn't, they make nothing. Craig and James believe pager pay will be invaluable incentive for people to cover the short duration transfers as these are the ones we have the most trouble filling. Lots of personnel want to do the longer transfers because they pay so well.

Shawn questions whether we are turning transports down currently because we don't have anyone available to take them; in other words, will we pick up more transports to offset some of the additional payroll costs incurred for this program. Craig confirms that we have turned transfers down due to lack of staffing. The department has begun tracking these as of January 1st. Transfers that are turned down don't hit the system so there was not tracking of these done prior to January 1st. James indicates that we've had to turn down three just in the last month. Craig say that the missed transfers could actually cover a great deal of the additional expense over the span of a year, depending on the distance of the transfers turned down. He explains that we make \$7,000 on one transfer to Billings.

Jack questions why personnel get burned out on radiation transports. Craig explains that there are so many of them and while they pay relatively well in general, they do take about an hour and a half total and the crew has to wait for the treatment to be done then return them to the hospital, but there are also times when it is the patient's first visit to radiation and those calls can take three and four hours start to finish. This makes the pay for that transport very low.

Dave and John express concerns about trying this on a temporary basis and how it will affect morale if it doesn't work out and we have to stop paying the pager pay. Craig indicates that he can't think of any other way to gain the ability to forecast some of the

staffing for transports and improve retention. Personnel will understand up front that it is a trial run and if people are not signing up regularly for the pager pay shifts and if the revenue doesn't end up penciling out then the program will be discontinued. He also wants to remind the board that the \$29,000 is not coming out of the account all at once and is a relatively small amount per month, especially since the \$29,000 is the maximum amount that would be paid out over the course of a year and he feels the total will actually be considerably less.

Dave would feel more comfortable starting out at a smaller level and increasing coverage if necessary than starting out bigger and having to scale back. James believes that this would be starting small. Kyle indicates that he could see it starting out at 12 hours a day and maybe moving to 18 or 24 hours a day if the need is there and it pencils out because he knows there are a lot of 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. transfers as well. James adds that for some reason we seem to get the airport transfers at night too. Craig acknowledges that we can't do the pager pay for 24 hours a day and believes the hours he has requested are the hours when the need is greatest and reiterates that he believes the total outlay will be closer to \$17,000 or \$20,000 than the \$29,000 maximum.

Shawn suggests that continuance of pager pay be tied to a requirement that if you sign up for a pager pay shift, you will take the transfers that come up during that shift so people can't take advantage of the opportunity and then decide they can't take calls that come in on their shift, and if that starts happening, it will become the justification for dropping the program. If, however, people really put themselves out there and are making it happen and we're making back a portion of the expense then it would be worthwhile as an additional expenditure to help with retention and morale.

John suggests paying a flat \$50 for a 24-hour on-call shift. Jack doesn't feel that would work because you might end up with three or four people during that 24-hour period and they'd have to split the \$50. Craig does not believe people would go for that because they all have other jobs and may be able to commit for 12 hours but would not be able to commit for 24 hours.

There is some discussion about whether the \$3 per hour pager pay is in addition to the money received for the transport. It is explained that the pager pay stops when the run card is started and begins again when the transport is complete. Craig confirms that taxes do have to be paid on income from pager pay. It is acknowledged that the "bubble" issue will still exist but Craig feels the pager pay will at least help with the "bubble." Kyle suggests that maybe the person driving comes off pager pay for the duration of the run but the care provider could remain on pager pay in addition to the inter facility pay because that person will still have to complete the paperwork when they get back to the station.

Shawn would like Craig to come up with a proposal that he can email out to the Board and doesn't want the Board to micromanage the issue. He thinks Craig should figure out what's going to work best and write it into the proposal because it's not that big of a net cost. Craig agrees and indicates that all he needs is the Board's blessing for "x" amount

of dollars and he will figure out the rest. Jack is not willing to do a trial run and wants it to be all or nothing but he wants it all thought out really well, including the “bubble” issue.

Craig indicates that, bottom line, he is just looking for approval for the maximum of \$29,000 and that he will be responsible for the operations end of it. Jack will not approve it until Craig has an official proposal done.

RESOLUTIONS:

None

PROPOSALS:

None

CHIEF’S REPORT:

- 1. December Call Volume.**
- 2. 2015 Call Volume.**

There were 168 calls for December although there are a few calls still outstanding for the year. Craig estimates the total for 2015 will probably be right around 2,060. This is an increase from 2014 which ended with about 2,000 calls.

Craig provided a new report for the board which shows the different zones, including other districts and inter facility or out of area calls, that Evergreen has responded to over the past month as well as the type of incident and number of incidents of each type in each zone. This report will provide the board with a good idea of what the department is doing and how often we respond as mutual aid to other Districts. The report shows that we went into the City of Kalispell 95 times for EMS calls and had 69 cancellations.

There were 644 inter facility transports in 2015. Approximately 31% of our call volume is inter facility that we’re getting paid for which will help pay for the pager pay and the “bubble” area that we are trying to address.

In working with Leslie at Pintler Billing, Craig has determined that we are generally always making some profit on transports. The anomaly is if we send a male and female on a long distance transport that requires an overnight stay in a hotel. In those cases profit is reduced because we have to pay for two rooms instead of the one we would pay for if the transport is staffed by two males or two females. Ben provides a sheet to the board that shows the base rates we charge for transports and what Medicare or Medicaid pays for these transports versus what private insurance pays. Ben and Craig explain that this is for the use of the crews to determine if we can afford to take a transport or not.

Ben points out that the problem is the transports in the "bubble" area, or between 50 and 75 miles, because we're not making very much money on those.

Craig guesses that of our total transports, maybe 10% are private insurance, 70% Medicaid and 30% Medicare. Shawn would like to see an average profit for each call and an idea of how many calls we're turning down a month so we can get an idea of how much of the cost of pager pay we might be able to recoup by not missing those transports, with the understanding that it's full of approximations.

3. 2016 Goals.

Craig indicates that last year's goals of 100% seat belt usage and the response times of 2 minutes for EMS and 3 minutes for fire have been met. He will continue those for 2016. He also wanted a minimum of thirty hours of training for everyone in the department and all but two hit that threshold. He also wanted to focus on Emergency Driver's Training but that's pretty much on hold as there are no trainers in the valley any more. If someone else in the valley doesn't become a trainer, Craig may be coming to the board to see if funding that can be added to the budget for next year. It is very expensive. KRMC is also looking for a trainer and we could possibly either share the cost with them or get someone here certified and charge for the training.

Threats to the District last year were identified as loss of personnel due to low wages and lack of benefits. The District lost 7 personnel in 2015 to other employers that offered higher wages and benefits, two were officers. Craig believes that in 2016 we will continue to lose personnel due to wages and benefits and we may be about to lose another. Goals for 2016 are to maintain seat belt usage and response times and to take a hard look at what we can do to prevent personnel loss. Even though we are only a couple of years into the levy he would like to find out what the bottom line really is on benefits. While the people lost were replaced, they were replaced with inexperienced people so there is a huge investment in time and training. Some of the people lost had five, six or even seven years with the department. Some of the new hires have been on other departments but they're all still green, even though some of them are already EMT's, so the continued loss of experience is a real threat to the District.

Exit interviews are conducted with all personnel when they leave and it has always been attributed to pay and benefits. Two were lost to Williston, but, of course, there is no way we can compete with the wages or benefits there. Josh indicates that he makes a little bit more as a basic in Bigfork, but also has full health insurance there. Part of the issue is attributable to the demographic of the tax base for Evergreen versus some of the other Districts in the area.

Craig and Shawn both agree that a newsletter would be a good idea to keep the tax payers informed as to the challenges faced by the District but are also aware that it will be an uphill battle. The last levy was not passed by a landslide but wasn't by the skin of our teeth either. Shawn feels we should let the public know that we don't have a high

income District so we are unable to fully collect what it costs us to run and we are unable to pay our people what they are worth or what they can get in other Districts. Craig indicates that we are still working on getting the non-profit status with the postal service so that we can afford to send out a newsletter.

Craig indicates that we are preparing to work on the audit and have been in touch with the auditor and Stahlberg & Taylor in that regard. Jack asks if Stahlberg & Taylor turned in the financial report that was due to the State by December 31st since the audit was not yet completed. Craig did not know. Laurie will follow up on that.

Craig will send out an email with some general topics of discussion regarding the employee handbook prior to the work session scheduled for January 18th. Craig will also try to have a draft of the pager pay proposal ready for the work session just so everyone can take a look at it.

Jack asks how much of the wild fire income is related to equipment and how much to labor. Craig says it is all equipment because labor was paid directly to personnel by the State. Jack indicates that amount could be transferred to 7250 at some point. Craig agrees but points out that we are still waiting for some of the money to come in and that he will want to negotiate a percentage of the wild fire income to go into the department account as has been done in the past.

Meeting adjourned at 1:24 p.m.

Submitted by: *Janice Pina, Recording Sec.*
Secretary

Signed by: *Shawn W. Baker*
Shawn W. Baker - Chairman