

Evergreen Fire District Board of Trustees Meeting

Meeting Minutes
Regular Board Meeting of March 5th, 2018 - 5pm

CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

Chairman Foust calls meeting to order at 5pm

TRUSTEES IN ATTENDANCE:

Jon Foust
Dave Edwards
Dave Adams
Jack Fallon

TRUSTEES ABSENT:

Kyle Nace

EFD PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE:

Fire Chief Craig Williams
Fire Marshall Ben Covington

Jack Knuffke
Jacob Pitcher

PUBLIC IN ATTENDANCE:

Beth Calderon

PUBLIC COMMENT:

At this time, public may comment on any public matter that is not on the Agenda of the Meeting and that is within the jurisdiction of the District.

FINANCIALS:

Discuss and Approve January 2018 Financials

Dave Adams states that he was able to get answers to his questions prior to the meeting and has no further questions. Jack Fallon states that the only reconciliations he hasn't reviewed is 4212. Chief Williams states that there has never been reconciliations given on 4212 because trustee signatures have never been on the account until recently. Fallon states it should have always been being reconciled because the Board is responsible for that account too. Chief Williams states that it will be done moving forward.

Dave Edwards makes a motion to approve and accept January financials as presented; seconded by Dave Adams; unanimously approved.

PAST ITEMS/UPDATES:

Approve meeting minutes of Regular Board Meeting of February 12th, 2018

Dave Edwards makes a motion to approve and accept the Regular Board Meeting Minutes of February 12, 2018 as presented; seconded by Jack Fallon; unanimously approved.

NEW ITEMS/UPDATES:

Levy Campaign Discussion

Chief Williams tells the Board that the department is well under way with the levy campaign. He

states there has been 1 article in the Daily Interlake paper and has done an interview with a news station and anticipates at least another 2 interviews within the next couple of days and that the signs that will be placed at various locations throughout the community are nearly finished. Cost of campaign so far has been approximately \$1400.00 for posters and signs. The posters will be used during 2 planned open houses; one on Thursday, March 15th from 4pm until 8pm and Saturday, March 17th for a green pancake breakfast social for St. Patrick's Day from 8am until 12pm. During each open house personnel will be stationed by a specific poster at various locations throughout the building that will address any questions the public may have about why EFD is asking for the levy. Chief Williams states that his goal is to make sure that all questions get answered. He states that if a question cannot be answered by personnel assigned to a poster station then that personnel will make the effort to get the information from someone else who can answer the question. Chief Williams tells the Board that it has been tedious getting all personnel informed as there have been so many new recruits recently. He states that in addition to the poster stations he will have 2 personnel at computers who can give tax implications upon request. Chief Williams states that the Administrative Assistant will be taking phone calls and providing tax implications and answering other questions during the weekdays from 9am until 5pm. He shows the Board the informational index cards that have been developed and states that the department has done social media posts that have been very effective. Chief Williams states that a sponsored ad will start next week on social media and that the ad will 'pop up' on the newsfeed of anyone who logs into FaceBook. The ad will simply say "Please Vote. Evergreen Fire Levy." The ad will not tell anyone how to vote. He states that he has talked about distributing the literature and having everything available to someone who is not a registered voter but by the time of the first open house it would be null and void due to expirations. He will be ordering the updated mailing list in the near future to distribute the next newsletter which is currently being finished and will go out by next week. The newsletter is data based and will have a lot of information similar to the slides that were developed from the Advisory Committee meetings including graphs with data, the department story, and very good testimonials of some prominent community members. Chief Williams states that he had permission to use the testimonies. Jack Fallon asks what is meant by 'permission'. Chief Williams states that some people requested that their testimony be used in full while other told him that he was free to use their testimony however he wanted to; from a sound bite to paraphrasing it. Fallon asks what the County Attorney's opinion is of using testimonials in something that is supposed to have a neutral presentation. Fallon asks "Is that permissible?" Chief Williams states that it is permissible because the people giving the testimonials are not advocating votes for the department. He states "There is not a testimonial that says 'Please vote for Evergreen Fire.' The testimonies speak to the community service and/or the relationship that the department has built with the community through public service. Chief Williams states "It is an opinion of the value that we have brought to either them as an organization. He uses Sheriff Curry as an example and the mutual value of the departments.

Ben Covington asks Jack if he got the answers to his questions concerning the levy ballot language. Jack states that he understands the answers but disagrees with them.

Chairman Foust states that his concern is that he doesn't want the information to mislead the public into thinking that if the levy doesn't pass that the department 'will close it's doors'. Chief Williams states that it is not stated that way. He states "That is a pretty bold statement and I don't like the doomsday stuff. It'd be difficult but we'd keep truckin'." Ben Covington states "Our current call volume right now is ridiculous and I perceive that if something doesn't happen we're going to have to pull back somewhere." Chairman Foust states that he agrees with Ben. Chief Williams adds that there will absolutely be a reduction of service. "There's no way that we cannot say that. We cannot continue with our staffing model to have this amount of call volume without a reduction of services whether it's a delayed response. At some point, we have to have the realization that someone's going to call 911 and there's going to be a significant delay; either

in inexperience or a serious delay because we can't continue to do this long term."

Ben states that a question had been asked about the current 5 year voted overlapping and that the MCA states that those mills don't have to be pulled for that year and that it would expire. Dave Adams asks "So we just decline to tax people for that extra?" Ben states that is correct. Dave Adams asks "If this passes, there's that 3% increase that's annual; is that something that we can say 'well, we don't want that full 3%' if the cost of living increase that's usually across the board for everybody is a half of a percent; is that something we can lower our request for? That way, if I'm getting a half of a percent for cost of living and the fire department's asking for 3%, we can just say 'hey, we don't want to take that extra'?" Ben states that is correct according to his interpretation of Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Jack states "I believe if it said if it was up to 3% you could but when it says 3% it's either that or nothing and I don't know if that 3% can be brought in the following year. If the language said 'up to 3%' then you could vary it each year. But, because it says '3%', I don't know that you can vary that amount each year." Ben states "That 3% is just going to equate into a number of mills." Jack states that is correct. Ben continues "So...MCA Law states that you can not levy your total number of mills..." Jack interjects "On the permissive side. This is not a permissive levy. This is a voted levy and they're two different things." Ben states "No, this would be a voted levy." Jack states "A voted levy is different than a permissive. 7204 is a permissive levy and what we're putting out to the people is a voted levy and their both treated differently." Ben continues "Yes. I think the wordage on there is voted levy." Jack states "That's correct. But, as a voted levy, it is treated differently than a permissive levy that can allow for fluctuations but a voted levy may not allow for the fluctuations." Dave Adams states "This is confusing. So, would instead of taking the full permissive levy we could back off then to offset that 3%?" Jack states "There are allowances for it, yes." Dave continues "So, we might not be able to not do the 3% since it's the voted side but you could take the permissive and say 'let's cut that back so we're not dinging as much'. Ben reads from MCA that "governing body is defined in (MCA 15-10-425) may reduce an approved levy in any fiscal year without losing the authority to impose in a subsequent fiscal year up to the maximum amount or number of mills approved in the election. However, nothing in the subsection authorizes a governing body to impose more than the approve levy in any fiscal year or extended duration of the approved levy." Jack states "A permissive levy is one that does not require a vote. We're allowed, for 7204, to access whatever the mills work out to be based on our budget. That's called a permissive levy. We're permitted to assess those mills. Ben states that the MCA specifically states 'voted levy'. Dave Edwards states that is the kind of levy being discussed. Dave Adams states "So we couldn't say we want the 3% plus what we take last year." Dave Edwards states "But we can also ask for the exact same amount that we had in the 3%."

Chairman Foust asks if there are any other questions and there are none.

CHIEF'S REPORT:

February 2018 Call Volume

Chief Williams calls the Board's attention to the last page in their packets. He states there were 233 calls in February which put the department up 83 calls for this time last year. Inter-facility transports are holding steady and fire calls are a little lower than this time last year. EMS calls are where the significant increase is. He states there were 74 calls in district; 52 inter-facility transports with 34 of those in the City of Kalispell which translates to them having an ambulance about once a day. Chief Williams reiterates the difference in numbers being reported (233 vs. 175). There were 233 total calls for February and 175 have been reviewed. It is not a delay in the department reporting but that some reports have been kicked back one reason or another ie.; more information needed and etc. He stresses that the numbers show the department is breaking records every month with EMS calls and that the current numbers are what is expected during the summer months of June, July and August. Dave Edwards asks if the increase in call volume

incorporates the inter-facilities covered in Kalispell last month (in reference to both pages) and Chief Williams states he is correct. Edwards continues "So, you got another 86 calls into Kalispell and inter-facility which represents 86." Chief answers "Correct." Edwards states "This is roughly the same number and I'm just curious if this is the same tracking that you've done in the past or is there something changing in Kalispell?" Chairman Foust states "Kalispell mill levy; they didn't vote it in so they literally only run one ambulance." Chief Williams states "This is unofficial yet but they did bring in a consultant and haven't released the report yet but I've heard from their administration that they're going to continue with one ambulance." Chairman Foust adds "So the guys on the fire truck will not get in their other ambulances and go. They'll just run one ambulance." Chief adds "Which is the new norm for them." Chairman Foust continues "So if that's out on a call then they, 911, just automatically dispatches us, I believe. Right?" Edwards asks if 2 ambulances arrive or 1 engine and an ambulance. Chief states it is a Kalispell engine. Edwards states "So if the people in Kalispell over on the West side suffer a heart attack have to wait for Evergreen to respond up there?" Chief Williams affirms Edward's question. Edwards continues "My concern with these inter-facilities and covering Kalispell...that a person in Evergreen has the same or similar emergency response need and we're over on the West side providing services. Dave Adams and Chief Williams state that could happen right now (due to the current staffing model). Edwards continues "The Evergreen tax payers are paying for it." Jack states "The inter-facilities don't come into play because that's a separate crew." Edwards states that he understands that the inter-facility crews are different than the station staff crew but says "if this levy passes, additional or services that could potentially be the benefit of somebody in West Valley." Ben Covington states "The difficulty is that in order to maintain current staffing, we have to chase the dollar and that's where the dollar comes from." Chief Williams states "If we pass the levy, I will publicly state that we now can assure the (Evergreen) community that way more than currently, we will have an ambulance available for the members of the community in Evergreen if they're willing to pay for it; for that additional staffing. As it is right now, it's scary because we can go 4, 5, or 6 hours a day when there is not anybody down here. It happens almost daily where there is nobody. If somebody across the street were having a heart attack right now; across from our station; I can tell you probably 20 to 30 percent of the time they're going to be waiting for 3 Rivers because we're all over the place chasing the nickel. It's what we have to do to pay our guys. We're not the only ones giving mutual aid; other people are giving mutual aid to other places too. The bigger problem is; and there needs to be a Daily Interlake investigative journalism: because the bigger issue is that the Flathead County as a whole is in a crisis. Flathead County EMS is in crisis Valley wide and it's been in a crisis for years. Nobody has asked those hard questions yet. So, what you're going to start seeing in conjunction with our levy is some prominent people asking questions and some letter-to-the-editor type of editorial stuff that's going to go hand-in-hand with what we're asking for. We're not the only ones who are doing a levy. Big Fork's going to be running a levy; Smith Valley's going to be running a levy as well. It's just not our in the media yet. The point I'm trying to make in all of this is that if the Big Fork Fire Chief is going to say 'Citizens, if you don't support our levy, we're out of business; our ambulance service is out of business' and that means that Evergreen is going to Big Fork, now." Dave Adams adds "And further into Creston." Chief Williams states that if Big Fork closes their ambulance service it will be Evergreen responding to Big Fork and not Kalispell. Dave Edwards asks why it would be Evergreen and Chief Williams states that it is because Evergreen is the closest available provider and by state law, Evergreen has to respond. Jack asks if state law requires an ambulance or fire truck to respond because mutual aid is for a fire truck to respond. Chief Williams states that the mutual aid compact is for fire but for Evergreen to receive any tax or any mill levies through Flathead County EMS; Evergreen has to provide EMS services. Dave Edwards asks if it would be the same thing if 3 Rivers closed their doors and Jack tells him that because Evergreen receives \$50,000.00 a year from the County that Evergreen EMS is obligated to respond but if Evergreen refused that \$50,000.00 it would

eliminate that liability. Dave Edwards asks what the tax payers of Evergreen are currently paying for and is told that they are currently paying only for fire suppression in the levies. Edwards suggests making that clear to the tax payers because he didn't know they were only paying for fire suppression even as a Board member. Chief Williams states that the tax bill is for fire suppression only and that is why Evergreen bills for mva's. Edwards states that he most likely isn't the only one who thought that the tax payer is paying for both fire and ambulance and Chief Williams tells him that it has been addressed several times including in the newsletter. The letter states that the "ambulance program is subsidizing the fire district". He states that it is well known and very public and easily defendable by the numbers given. He reiterates the need to chase the nickel for EMS services because it provides the cross-trained personnel who also respond to the fire calls. Edwards asks that if the levy passes the tax payers will then start paying for the ambulance service as well and his question is confirmed by Chairman Foust. Chief Williams states that he can then say that the Department appreciates that the community is now supporting the EMS service and that a first due ambulance will still be sent out to satisfy a mutual aid compact but the second due ambulance will remain in Evergreen Fire District. The Department is currently unable to do so because of having only 2 personnel on shift. Jack asks if the 3 major types of increases could be broken out; District; Inter-Facility; Kalispell. He states that they are the major categories in the two annual increases according to the call volume reports. Those 3 types are influencing the 86 additional calls in each of those areas. Jack states that he feels it is important to see the year to date number of what the increases are from each of the 3 major categories. He suggests running a year-to-date report to see how the numbers are relative to each other. Dave Edwards states that his question is how much of the call volume have we voluntarily taken on outside of Evergreen and does it adequately represent our increased call volume. Chief Williams states that Evergreen is increasing on its own within its own District regardless but that the department experiences significant spikes from outer lying agencies. He continues that Evergreen Fire will reserve the right to hold back equipment and personnel if the levy passes but that the District can't currently afford to do it. Jack Fallon states that he presumes all of the un-reviewed calls will eventually be reviewed and reiterates why he feels it may be more important to have year-to-date numbers. Chief Williams states that he will look into being able to present numbers in a year-to-date report along with monthly call volume.

(Chairman Foust asks if there is any further discussion or comments and there are none)

Adjourn


Chairman Foust adjourns the meeting at 5:41 pm.

The President of the Board of Trustees, as presiding officer of any meeting of the Board of Trustees, may close the meeting during the time the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy; and, then, if, and only if, the presiding officer determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure. The right of individual privacy may be waived by the individual about whom the discussion pertains; and, in that event, the meeting must be open.

Submitted By: _____


Dave Adams/Secretary

Signed By: _____


Jonathan Foust/Chairman