

**Ridgway Fire Protection District**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Meeting called to order at 5:32 by Board Chair, Christen Williams, at the Ridgway Fire Department located at 251 N. Railroad Street, Ridgway Colorado. Also, in attendance were Board Vice Chair Pam Kraft, Board Members Mary Reinhardt, Adam Johnson, and Steve Duce as well as RFPD Admin Katy LaSala, RVFD Chief Chris Miller, and RFPD legal counsel Bo Nerlin (via Zoom).

**FINANCIALS**

Kraft suggested that we further separate the Wildland portion of the budget from the District's general fund as to present a clearer picture of what the cost/benefit analysis of the program looks like. Duce and Johnson agreed with her recommendation. Johnson and Williams further suggested opening a new checking account solely for the Wildland Program reiterating the importance of tracking expenses. LaSala questioned when they would like to open the account and how much to transfer from our current checking account. Kraft suggested using our total year-to-date wildland income as an opening balance after we are compensated from the State for the previous two bills, we have sent in. It was decided that we amend the wildland bookkeeping and open a separate bank account at a later date. LaSala will consult with our accountants to determine the best way to implement a further separation within our budget and recordkeeping software and bring their recommendations back to the next meeting.

**BILLS**

❖ MOTION by Reinhardt to approve the bills as presented. SECOND by Duce. ALL IN FAVOR.

**MINUTES**

❖ MOTION by Johnson to approve the 6/1/22 minutes as presented. SECOND by Kraft. ALL IN FAVOR.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**District Restructuring**

Chief Miller reiterated that all that is left to accomplish is the creation of the new policies and stated that, due to the busyness of the summer, he would like to take a pause and reconvene any workshops regarding policy creation until the fall. Nerlin echoed that but requested that the District have everything finished and implemented by January 1, 2023. The Board agreed.

**OCEMS Lease Agreement**

LaSala presented the current lease agreement between the RFPD and Ouray County Emergency Services (OCEMS). She and Chief Miller proposed lowering the rent paid by OCEMS for the north-west wing of the firehouse to a more reasonable amount and creating a new contract that does not include an annual percentage increase. The Board echoed LaSala and Miller's with Duce stating that the fire district should "not be making money on EMS." Further, Johnson mentioned that we would like to keep them in the building and lowering the annual rent might prove to be an incentive for them to stay.

❖ MOTION by Kraft to change the lease between OCEMS and the RFPD in which OCEMS will be required to pay a locked-in rent rate of \$24,000 annually to the RFPD in quarterly installments beginning January 1, 2023. The lease will expire after 3 years in which all terms will be reassessed by both parties. SECOND by Duce. ALL IN FAVOR.

Nerlin will create a contract to be given to OCEMS Chief Mitchell and Ouray County Administrator Connie Hunt to sign.

## **Generator**

Chief Miller, Duce, and RVFD Captain reassessed the generator, changed the fluids, and ran the engine for several hours. It seems to be in perfect working order. Chief Miller will keep an eye on it, but for now, it seems the previous issue of it not functioning was an isolated event. No action was taken at this time.

## **CHIEF'S REPORT**

Chief Miller reported that we have had few fires and a couple of extrication calls. During an extrication call, our hydraulic cutters failed, which is not supposed to happen. Holmatro will bring us an extra set so we have working tools until we can get other battery powered tools. Kraft inquired as to why we have not purchased new tools already. Chief Miller will bring a quote to the Board at the next meeting with the cost of purchasing new extrication tools.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **FAMLI Program**

LaSala presented documents explaining the FAMLI Program. Nerlin stated that it is an opt-in or opt-out for full-time employees, noting that the District currently only has one full-time employee. Reinhardt suggested opting-out, and once we have more paid employees then we can reassess. Nerlin noted that the Board has until the end of 2022 to decide and suggested we table the discussion until a later 2022 date. Williams suggested to put the discussion on the December agenda. The other Board members agreed.

### **Mill Levy Increase**

Duce stated he doesn't believe it's the right time to ask for a mill levy increase due to current political turmoil. Reinhardt and Kraft disagreed stating that we have not had a tax revenue increase in many years, and the District is underfunded. LaSala presented a spreadsheet describing what the tax increase would be for our District's constituents based on their current properties' assessed valuation at three different mill amounts. Williams questioned if we have a clear vision in place. Duce also pointed out that while the rates have stayed the same, property valuation has increased significantly over the last year. Johnson questioned whether we should ask for a temporary mill levy increase that would then drop down to "x" amount at a time in the future. Nerlin stated that is possible. Kraft reiterated her belief of the importance of increasing our tax revenue as we cannot move forward with our current income. Chief Miller said we "will actually move backwards".

Nerlin stated that we do have time to put a taxing question on the November ballot. We would need to submit a letter of intent to the County Clerk before August 1, 2022. We would also need to meet in the month of August to submit ballot question before early September. He noted that, if at any point, the District decides they cannot meet the November 2022 timetable, we can always put it on the May 2023 ballot. He suggested we work with a consultant to help justify to the public as to why we need a mill levy increase. LaSala also mentioned that Nerlin was highly recommended by Telluride Fire Protection District Chief Bennett to write the ballot language. Nerlin further noted that once the ballot language is set, we cannot use District funds to advertise. LaSala stated that the Ridgway Volunteer Fire Department (a 501c-3) voted to spend up to \$10,000 on advertising and marketing for a 2022 ballot question.

Williams asked if we are comfortable with the impending cost to promote an election, which is not in the current budget. LaSala asked Nerlin what he believed the cost to be. Nerlin suggested reaching out to a consulting firm. LaSala will do so and come to the next meeting with an estimate.

❖ MOTION by Kraft to notify the Ouray County Clerk that the RFPD is going to proceed with a ballot question on the November 2022 election. SECOND by Reinhardt. ALL IN FAVOR.

The Board tasked LaSala and Nerlin with researching a consulting firm and a possible marketing/advertising person to help the District promote the Ballot initiative. They will bring the estimates and information to the next District Board meeting.

### **Chief Salary Request**

LaSala presented a document with the current salaries of twenty-one fire chiefs at combo or volunteer fire districts throughout Colorado. Williams noted that the District has committed to look within its finances and near future budget

so that the District can offer the Chief a salary. Johnson suggested a graduated salary increase that would increase over a set number of years. Reinhardt and Johnson both also suggested we find money to pay up to three firefighters including the Chief. Reinhardt asked if the Chief would take an offer of an \$80,000 annual salary to which Miller replied, "yes." Kraft and LaSala noted that that amount of money isn't feasible within our budget and income. Duce questioned whether a mill levy increase will be the deciding factor on what salary we can offer the Chief. As such, Kraft and Reinhardt reiterated the need for a mill levy ballot question this November.

LaSala asked the Board what they believe the District can pay a Chief from RFPD monies and tax revenue without a mill levy increase. She further suggested taking the \$50,000 contingency fund that is in the 2022 budget and use it to pay the Chief, while also cautioning on the risks of doing so. Finally, she stated that she does not believe it to be responsible to take money from the Wildland Program's income and use it for a Chief's salary as it is not a fixed amount each year. Johnson suggested a \$40,000 part-time salary. Miller stated that he would not take that offer if presented. Kraft suggested we continue to explore avenues within our current finances to offer a Chief's salary while also tabling the discussion until after the November election.

#### **Firehouse Cleaning Conflict**

Reinhardt is concerned that, as a RFPD Board member, she cannot legally work as a contractor to clean the firehouse. She and Johnson recently asked lawyers from the Special District Association (SDA) the same question, to which they responded that she cannot work for the Board and be a member of the Board. LaSala suggested reimbursing the RVFD for cleaning the fire department. Nerlin questioned the SDA's comments and did not see the conflict so long as Reinhardt does not vote on the matter. The consensus by the Board members was to keep everything as is while Nerlin contacts Legal and brings his findings back to the next meeting.

#### **Wildland Program Discussion**

This discussion was pushed to the next board meeting.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

❖ MOTION by Johnson to Adjourn. Second by Duce. ALL IN FAVOR

Meeting Adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectively Submitted,  
-Katy