

Ridgway Fire Protection District
Regular Meeting
November 20th, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 5:01 pm by Board Chair, Christen Williams, at the Ridgway Fire Department located at 251 N. Railroad Street, Ridgway, Colorado. Also, in attendance were RFPD Board Members Pam Kraft, Jamie Gomez, and Adam Johnson (via phone); District Fire Chief Chris Miller; District Administrator Katy LaSala; District Legal Representative Bo Nerlin (via phone), Daniel Schmidt from the Ouray County Plaindealer; and RFPD Board Member applicant Chris Bolane.

MINUTES

❖ MOTION by Gomez to approve the 10/16/23 regular meeting minutes and 10/23/23 special meeting minutes as presented. SECOND by Johnson. ALL IN FAVOR.

FINANCIALS

❖ MOTION by Kraft to approve financials as presented. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

OLD BUSINESS

2024 Budget Discussion - Designation of Budget Officer

❖ MOTION by Johnson to designate Katy LaSala the 2024 Budget Officer. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

2024 Budget Discussion - Salary Survey

Members of the board held a primary discussion pertaining to the attached salary survey as presented by LaSala in relation to Chief Miller's wage increase request. Williams noted that it seems as though most of the fire agencies on the Western Slope are seeing the same "pinch" with the desire to pay their employees fair wages while trying to balance budgetary restraints. Nerlin added to Williams's statement by stating that one fact many boards are dealing with is the cost of housing and lack of workforce housing. Chief Miller inserted that he believes it important to incentivize and pay more to retain our employees as all our employees have other sources of income. As such, he believes our fire district will suffer as those employees will not be able to attend incidents while not on shift and working for their other employers. Kraft and Gomez stated that we need to be cautious as our revenue is primarily from property taxes that can fluctuate, and we have responsibilities to our tax base. No action was taken at this time. Further discussion was pushed to the next District meeting.

2024 Budget Discussion - General

Gomez asked the board members how comfortable they are with showing an estimated deficit in 2024. Williams noted that, right now, the District is sitting on reserves that we are able to spend a portion of in the short term, while also determining the District's long-term goals. Miller built on Williams's statement saying that we would be in a deficit in 2024 due to a few large purchases, but then not again over the next few years at least.

Additional discussion regarding the proposed wage increases for employees ensued. Kraft noted that she is not comfortable with the proposed wage increases. It was suggested that either the new Brush Truck or Draft Commander purchases be postponed. It was decided to keep the Draft Commander purchase in the budget. Miller insisted that our employees are more important than the immediate purchase of a new truck. Williams also noted that we have officers working here that have 20+ years of experience, and we are paying them entry level wages. Williams suggested leaving the allocated money for the Brush Truck in the budget but not purchasing the truck until the middle of the 2024 year when we could reassess our funds.

LaSala added that in all of her years working for the District and with Chief Miller, we have never gone over our budget but rather, made money, and if you keep in mind that the two large purchases will come from our savings, everything else

that is budgeted is mostly within our revenue limits. Gomez acknowledged that, when described in that manner, the proposed budget looks more reasonable, as did Williams and Johnson.

LaSala and Nerlin noted that we now have until early January to adopt the budget and certify the new mil levy. Further budget discussion was moved to a December 4th Special Meeting. Gomez tasked Miller and LaSala with creating an hourly wage spreadsheet that includes 5% increments to all salaries and the overall estimated cost to the District.

CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Miller provided the attached document listings the Districts run numbers for the previous month as well as his Chief's Report as recommended by the Board at the previous meeting. He added that he and Captain Kunz are working with Ouray County to obtain a land use permit for the new training building. He is also attempting to obtain a temporary permit from the Town of Ridgway so we can put the building on the RFPD's property in Trail Town.

Kraft suggested that we post a "incident summaries" report in the Plaindealer on a quarterly basis to bring more awareness to the public. Gomez suggested adding it to our social media pages and website. LaSala will contact the Plaindealer to request pricing.

NEW BUSINESS

New Board Member Application

Williams thanked Chris Bolane, on behalf of the Board, for applying to the RFPD Board vacancy position. Kraft asked if we had advertised for the opening. Williams noted that we have never advertised but rather, put "feelers" out to the public.

❖ MOTION by Kraft to advertise a vacancy on the board with letters of interest due to be received by 12/15/23. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

Continuing the discussion, Kraft asked that the board create a policy in which volunteer firefighters are not permitted to be on the Board with Johnson being grandfathered in as she views it as a conflict of interest. While acknowledging that the Board should not be made up of a majority of RFD firefighters, Williams views the firefighters, such as Johnson and Bolane, as assets who understand the firefighting world. Nerlin noted that several fire districts have a non-voting board member that can consist of a member of their fire department, which could be an option. Gomez acknowledged that while it may present as a conflict of interest, our community does have that many people who are available to be on the Board. However, he, along with Johnson, did support a policy. Williams did not support the creation of a policy without a full board to vote. Nerlin was directed to research changes in board member policies and bring his findings to the 12/18/23 regular RFPD Board Meeting.

2024 Workman's Compensation Renewal

LaSala presented the documents to the Board for informational purposes only. No discussion was held.

2022 Audit Report

LaSala presented the 2022 Audit Report to the Board and stated that she was unable to contact our auditor but will ensure that he is available next summer to present the report to the Board. No further discussion was held.

OTHER NON-AGENDA BUSINESS

ADJOURNMENT

❖ MOTION by Williams to Adjourn until the 12/4/23 Special Meeting. Second by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR

Meeting Adjourned at 7:49 pm.

Respectively Submitted,
-Katy LaSala

