South Arkansas Fire Protection District

MEETING MINUTES

Date: January 13th, 2025

Time: 0900 hours

Location: 124 E Street, Salida, CO 81201

Board Members Present

- Harold Starbuck
- Fred Jackson
- Jeff Graf
- Rich Edgington
- Art Hutchinson

Board Members Absent

- N/A

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Harold Starbuck at 0902 hours.

2. Approval of the Agenda

- Motion to accept the agenda as presented.
  - **Motion by:** Fred Jackson
  - **Second by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

3. Approval of December Board Meeting Minutes

Fred Jackson suggested that board members who are absent from meetings should be marked as "excused." He also addressed a typo in the financial section of last month's minutes, which was corrected and resubmitted by Dani Hauger.

- Motion to accept the December Board Meeting Minutes.
  - **Motion by:** Jeff Graf
  - **Second by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

4. Open Session

Sheldon Morgan shared an update on the progress made by the fire camp in mitigating risks around Methodist Mountain. He asked if Chief Jonke had received any response from BLM regarding access to certain areas. The Chief confirmed that, although he had reached out, he had not yet received a reply. The Chief agreed to collaborate with Sheldon to develop an action plan for access and to conduct a walkthrough of the area to address any concerns.

5. Reports

Financial Report

Sarah Marques from Walke and Associates provided a financial update for the board concerning the $3.1 million that is currently outstanding.

- Chief Jonke informed the board that although the state is processing funds more slowly, the $3.1 million should be received in the near future. He also noted a significant increase in billing from 2023, which has risen by 206%, placing additional strain on administrative duties and processing. Captain Chris Bainbridge from South Arkansas Fire Protection District added that the state often delays payments for receipts if any reported information is slightly incorrect, further contributing to delays.
- Rich Edgington from the South Arkansas Fire Protection District board raised a concern about the significant cash flow difference, pointing out that there was $3 million in the bank earlier in 2024, compared to the current balance of $1.1 million. He expressed worry about the impact on the department's ability to maintain a financial cushion. Chief Jonke attributed the backlog to insufficient administrative staffing and the district's current capacity to process bills.
- Harold Starbuck, president of the South Arkansas Fire Protection District Board, suggested moving the monthly board meetings to the fourth Monday of each month to allow Sarah Marques to provide a more up-to-date financial report.
- Motion to amend the scheduling of the South Arkansas Fire Protection District Board Meetings to be held on the fourth Monday of each month.
    - **Motion:** Rich Edgington
    - **Second:** Jeff Graf
    - **Vote:** Passed unanimously
- Motion to accept the monthly financials.
    - **Motion:** Fred Jackson
    - **Second:** Art Hutchinson
    - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

Fire Chief's Report

Chief Aaron Jonke discussed several critical issues:

- Operations: Chief Jonke provided an update on upcoming operational changes, specifically the implementation of First Due, a software tool designed to enhance the department's administrative functions, such as tracking hydrant locations and organizing pre-plans.
- Staffing / Personnel: Two members are still recovering from surgeries but are expected to return to shifts in February and March. The Chief also shared that the department aims to hire a full-time firefighter. Of the 10 applicants, 8 were selected for interviews, each scoring 80% or higher, and will now move to hands-on training once the new station is open. Additionally, there will be open positions for Engineer, Medical, and Swift Water trainers later in 2025.
- Fleet Condition: Chief Jonke stated that he is collaborating with Captain Bainbridge to assess the current fleet and determine any necessary actions.
- Harold Starbuck, President of the Board, asked Chief Jonke about the availability of a Type III. Chief Jonke acknowledged the question but noted that, due to the ongoing crises in Los Angeles, a Type III may have been deployed to assist with emergency response efforts. Chief Jonke agreed to investigate this a bit further.
- Chief Jonke addressed grants that are currently being worked on:
    - FRWRM: Chief Jonke is hopeful in the likelihood of obtaining this grant, though official confirmation is not expected until March 2025.

    - Radio replacement: The request has been submitted to the South Central Hazards Group, but a response has not yet been received.
    - AFG: SAFPD was unable to apply for the Assistance Fire Fighters Grant because the district was not registered in the federal system. Once access is granted, administration plans to apply next year when the grant opens again in December 2025.
    - Chaffee County Community Foundation Grant: The First Responder Grant has been successfully submitted and is intended for Driver/Operator/Pumper Training in March. Administration is still awaiting confirmation on whether the grant was approved.
- New Fire House Report: Construction has been delayed due to inclement weather, with an expected opening now set for February 3rd. Chief Jonke mentioned that furniture installation is still underway, and final walk-throughs will take place soon. Currently, the NCCC team is staying at Fire Camp at the Ponderosa Lodge, where they are conducting basic training and plan to begin mitigation efforts the week of January 20th.
- Elections: An announcement for the upcoming election has been posted on the SAFPD website. Three positions are available, each with a 4-year term. The District will be accepting self-nomination forms until February 28th.
- Staff Comments: Chief Jonke has introduced a pre-plan meeting one week before each scheduled board meeting, allowing staff to discuss current issues and align on action items.
- During the January 6th meeting, staff noted that the current administrative team is approaching its operational capacity. With a 206% increase in billing from 2023 to 2024 and staffing levels remaining unchanged since the District's inception, Chief Jonke believes that adjustments are necessary in both staffing and operating processes to effectively manage the growing workload and expanding service areas.
- Staff members also expressed the need for clear communication regarding the board's future direction.
- Chief Jonke also addressed SAFPD's involvement in community-based mitigation efforts, noting that while the District is actively engaged, there is a lack of formal action and recognition of these efforts. He discussed the need for consolidation efforts to expand the protected area as the county grows, pointing out that 600 residents in Poncha Springs and 1,200 in Salida have been approved for new development in 2025.
- Finally, Chief Jonke touched on the current Mill Levy, highlighting how it is relatively low compared to other counties. He expressed a desire to address raising the levy but acknowledged the challenges, as any increase would be tied to higher taxes.

Assistant Fire Chief Report

Chief Rohrich reported that the SDA Transparency Notice has been filed and the SDA Renewal was successfully completed at the discounted rate. She also mentioned plans to remove the former fire chief from all SAFPD accounts.

Wild Land Coordinator

Captain Bainbridge reported on the district's current equipment and crew deployments:

- Crew Deployment: Four crew members are currently deployed in Los Angeles to assist with the affected areas. Wind events are expected in the region throughout the week.
- Equipment Deployment:
    - Engine 311 has been deployed each month during the 2024 season, except for December, and is currently deployed with the crew in Los Angeles. Currently, Arizona, Texas, and Oklahoma have requested equipment deployment for anticipated assistance in March 2025.

6. New Business

- Motion to Remove Doug Bess from South Arkansas Fire Protection District Accounts.
  - **Motion by:** Jeff Graf
  - **Second:** Rich Edgington
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously
- Resolution No. 2025-01: Resolution Designating the Official Posting Location for Meeting Notes on File.
  - Motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-01.
  - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Jeff Graf
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously
- Resolution No. 2025-02: Resolution Adopting the 2025 Fee Structure for Services Provided by the South Arkansas Fire Protection District.
  - Motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-02.
  - **Motion by:** Fred Jackson
  - **Second:** Art Hutchinson
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously
- Resolution No. 2025-03: Resolution Establishing the 2025 Payroll Structure for Employees of the South Arkansas Fire Protection District.
  - Motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-03.
  - **Motion by:** Jeff Graf
  - **Second:** Art Hutchinson
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously
- Resolution No. 2025-04: Resolution Establishing the 2025 Per Diem and Mileage Reimbursement Rates for the South Arkansas Fire Protection District.
  - Motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-04.
  - **Motion by:** Fred Jackson
  - **Second:** Jeff Graf
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

7. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn the meeting at 1028 hours.
  - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Jeff Graf
  - **Vote:** Passed unanimously

Submitted by: Jeff Graf, Secretary Treasurer

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