South Arkansas Fire Protection District

MEETING MINUTES

Date: February 24th, 2025

Time: 0900 Hours

Location: 611 Oak Street, Salida, CO 81201

Board Members Present

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

Board Members Absent

- Fred Jackson (excused)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Harold Starbuck at 0858 hours.

2. Approval of the Agenda

- Motion to accept the agenda as presented:
  - **Motion by:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second by:** Art Hutchinson

  Vote: Passed unanimously

3. Approval of January Board Meeting Minutes

- Motion to accept the January Board Meeting Minutes
  - **Motion By:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second By:** Art Hutchinson

  Vote: Passed unanimously

4. Open Session

Mike Sugaski inquired whether any funds from Resolution 2024-06 would still be directed towards community projects for 2025. It was explained that the allocation was specifically for the purchase of apparatus, which needed board approval. Chief Aaron Jonke clarified that mitigation efforts were underway through NCCC & SCC crews that were operating in the district until April.

5. Reports

Financial Report

- Laurie Todesco reported that year-to-date (YTD) invoice totals $1.7 million, with $800,000 received since the January board meeting. She noted that while the state continues to process bills slowly, she is actively managing the billing process. Currently, $2.3 million remains outstanding, though the timeline for receipt is uncertain.

    - Harold Starbuck inquired whether any of the outstanding funds would be allocated to personnel costs. Laurie clarified that while a small portion will be used for personnel expenses, the majority is designated for reimbursement to the District.
- Sarah Marques provided an update on the South Arkansas High Country bank account, which has been increased to $250,000. Additionally, $630,000 was transferred back into the Colorado Trust. She assured the board that no major expenses are anticipated until the end of March, aligning with the first installment of the city's IGA payment.
- Sarah also highlighted a necessary adjustment to the 2025 budget, noting that the Pension Expense line item should be approximately $7,100 for the year, rather than the current allocation of $5,804. After discussion, the board opted not to amend the 2025 budget at this time.
- Motion to accept the monthly financials:
    - **Motion:** Jeff Graf
    - **Second:** Rich Edgington

  Vote: Passed unanimously

Fire Chief's Report

Chief Aaron Jonke discussed several critical issues:

- The FRWRM grant was not awarded. However, he plans to collaborate with Kent Maxwell of Colorado Firecamp to develop a community mitigation plan despite the lack of funding. Chief Jonke noted that Kent may be able to provide alternative funding for mitigation efforts and assist in securing a chipper through coordination with the City of Salida.
    - **Radio replacement:** The radio grant has been awarded and will be assigned to Chaffee County. These radios will be cached in the county and SAFPD will be able to utilize them.
    - **Chaffee County Community Foundation Grant:** The First Responder Grant was also received and is intended for Driver/Operator/Pumper Training in April.
- **SFD Staffing / Personnel:** It was reported that a firefighter has returned to full duty from medical leave, and another will resume light duty starting the week of February 24th. Additionally, the department recently hired a full-time firefighter, bringing staffing back to full capacity.
- **SAFPD Staffing / Personnel:** The ongoing need for a Wildland Fire Chief was acknowledged, emphasizing the critical importance of expanding the administrative side of the program due to increased workload.
- **Training Plan:** A refresher course for the Wildland team will be conducted in early spring. Chief Jonke emphasized his commitment to significantly expanding community mitigation efforts and training, utilizing SAFPD firefighters. Additionally, he and Captain Bainbridge plan to develop a volunteer program focused on mitigation efforts throughout the community.
- **Equipment / Fleet:** Salida Fleet Management (formerly the Multi-Use Facility for the City of Salida) will now handle apparatus repairs at a discounted rate. Large truck repairs will cost $150, without a travel fee, compared to the $600 one-way fee currently charged by Front Range technicians. Chief Jonke assured the board that this change will result in significant cost savings for SAFPD. Additionally, it was noted that utilizing local services will improve turnaround times for repairs.
    - E-311 is currently undergoing repairs in Fountain, Colorado, for wheel seal and leak issues and is scheduled to be transported to Fort Collins later this week for additional servicing.
    - Harold Starbuck inquired whether all repairs would be covered under warranty. Chief Jonke confirmed that all major repairs are covered, with the exception of a few minor leaks on both tenders that will need to be addressed separately.
    - Chief Jonke emphasized the need for a regularly scheduled maintenance program for all fleet vehicles moving forward. He noted that past maintenance practices have been

inconsistent and stressed the importance of a proactive approach to ensure the longevity and reliability of the apparatus.

- **New Fire House:** The new firehouse is now fully operational, with all calls being run from the facility. Landscaping is scheduled for early spring. Chief Jonke noted that while the station is in use, it is not yet open to the public as final punch list assessments are still being completed.
- **Elections:** An announcement regarding the upcoming election has been posted on the SAFPD website and in The Mountain Mail. Three positions, each with a 4-year term, are available. The District has received three self-nomination forms and will continue accepting submissions until February 28th.
- **Mitigation:** Mitigation efforts by the National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) and the Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC) crews are underway on and around the Hutchinson property. Chief Jonke inquired about the progress, and Art Hutchinson expressed appreciation for the work being done. Additionally, significant mitigation work has been completed on city property at the water galleries. These efforts have been made possible by providing housing at the old firehouse in exchange for mitigation work. This important program not only benefits the community but also teaches young people valuable trade skills.
    - Chief Jonke also provided an update on the Ranch Hand Mitigation Program, which is designed to support the community's ranchers and residents by offering expert weather monitoring and a dedicated fire crew to oversee controlled burns. The department has already begun receiving calls from community members interested in scheduling their burns.
    - Chief Jonke noted that he has been actively trying to coordinate with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to conduct mitigation efforts near Wildland Urban-Interface (WUI) subdivisions but has not yet received a response. He also acknowledged that interactions with the federal government have been particularly challenging due to actions by the current administration.
    - Chief Jonke recognized Sheldon Morgan's efforts in addressing mitigation challenges around his subdivision and expressed appreciation for his time, dedication, and commitment to community fire safety. He also acknowledged Sheldon's work in coordinating with crews to improve mitigation efforts in his community.

Assistant Fire Chief Report

Chief Rohrich reported on a few administrative items:

- It was reported that 120 E Street did not historically have property insurance, which was a significant oversight. However, coverage has since been secured. Chief Rohrich informed the board that the annual cost for this insurance will be $9,000.
    - Rich Edgington of the South Arkansas Fire Protection District Board asked Chief Rohrich if the city was aware that the property is currently unoccupied. Chief Rohrich clarified that the property is, in fact, occupied by both the NCCC and SCC crews.
    - Sarah Marques suggested that the 2025 budget be amended to include the cost of property insurance coverage and to increase the Pension Expense line item from $5,804 to $7,100.
- **Motion:** That SAFPD amend the 2025 budget to include property insurance coverage and adjust the Pension Expense line item to reflect the appropriate funding.
    - **Motion By:** Rich Edgington
    - **Second:** Jeff Graf

  Vote: Passed unanimously

Wild Land Coordinator

Captain Bainbridge reported:

- **Crew Deployment:** The California crew returned from the Eaton Fire on February 1st. Captain Bainbridge reported that overhead personnel are expected to be called out to Texas in early March.
- Equipment Deployment:
  - Engine 311 is currently prepositioned in Oklahoma for potential deployment.

6. New Business

- **Motion:** To table the implementation of a Wildland Division Chief.
  - **Motion By:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Art Hutchinson

  Vote: Unanimous
- **Motion:** That SAFPD investigate the establishment of a single fire protection district in the community.
  - **Motion By:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Art Hutchinson

  Vote: Unanimous

7. Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn the meeting at 0944
  - **Motion to Adjourn:** Rich Edgington
  - **Second:** Jeff Graf

  Vote: Passed Unanimously

Submitted by: Jeff Graf, Secretary Treasurer

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