

**Wasatch County Fire Board of Directors Meeting**

**Tuesday July 11th, 2023**

**Meeting held at the Wasatch County Administration Building located at 25 N Main, Heber City.**

**Those in Attendance:**

Eric Rowland

Steve Farrell

Spencer Parks

Kendall Crittenden

Luke Searle

Mark Nelson

Karl McMillan

Chief Eric Hales

Kierstan Smith

Dustin Grabau

The minutes of the June 13<sup>th</sup> board meeting were presented to the board for their review and approval.

**A motion was made by Councilman McMillan to approve the minutes of the June 13th fire board meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilman Crittenden and the motion passed five in favor with Nelson abstained.**

**Warrants**

Parks: Now onto warrants, in the amount of \$419,804.11. Chief, is there anything in the warrants that stands out?

Chief: Just one quick comment on the Warrants-moving forward you will see quite a few expenses related to the new station. As Kendall mentioned, we are starting to move dirt so a few of these in here are larger impact fees and inspection fees so this is just a fore warning, as we move forward that you will see some larger than normal numbers.

Parks: Any questions? We can now entertain a motion to approve the warrants as presented.

**A motion was made by Councilman McMillan to approve the warrants as presented in the amount of \$419,804.11. The motion was seconded by Councilman Crittenden and the motion passed all in favor.**

**Chief report**

Parks: Next onto the Chiefs report-Chief.

Chief: I will try to make this as painless as possible, but I figured I'd go over a few things since we have a couple items on the Chief Report.

#1-We do want to recognize, the first part of June, we did hold our Engineer promotional ceremony. And we actually promoted 6 engineers officially, it was actually January 1<sup>st</sup>, because last fall they took a pretty extensive testing process-a written, practical, oral interview process and they were selected as our first engineers. But we had to wait for the badges to come in and all the pomp & circumstance so we could actually have a formal promotional ceremony, which was a great time.

As Kendell mentioned before, we are starting to have movement on our ground. We do have the excavator out there, exposing the current culvert and in process of getting that relocated. Next Thursday is when the actual large vaults, that are being created/pre-cast, will be arriving and we will have the cranes there to set those in place. We are working with Utah Water just to divert any water in pipe upstream. There is very little water coming through there right now, it was quite full at some point in the spring but we are going to divert it up top so we aren't going to have to have the expense of pumping water around which was an option if we had to do this sooner. So, that is moving forward and is a great milestone I believe.

I did have an opportunity last Thursday to attend a meeting with the Community Impact Board and requested, as we spoke about last month, the additional \$800,000 for the cost of the station. And we did receive that additional \$800,000 at 2%, so our total ask and total amount that we will receive from the CIB in a low interest loan, is \$15 Million. And that was only set because when we did our perimeter resolution last fall, we set our max at \$15 million. Anyway, anything over that will obviously cover in capital and impact fees and things like that. I thought that was a great win, I will tell you that I can never read that board because as you're preparing to go up next and they have denied all these different things, it is like 'they are not going to give us anything' but here we are.

Crittenden: They are sold on our project.

Chief: Apparently, they are. It was actually the state treasurer who drove by a huge tanker rollover last year, going to Strawberry and coming back with his family. And he is the one that typically abstains or is against most projects, but he is the one who always leads our charge, so we appreciate that.

Crittenden: Where are we on approval for plans with Heber City?

Chief: Well, with the permitting, some of the checks that you just signed are actually some inspection fees and there is actually a warranty bond. At one point, they actually wanted a full cash bond on this culvert project, but we were able to work through with the City Manager and said 'we aren't going to give you \$750,000 in a check for you to hold while we do this'. So, they did want a warranty of 10% so there is a check for \$72,000 that you guys just signed, that as soon as I leave this meeting, if they are still open, we will have all that done.

Crittenden: When you drop that check off, remind them how eager they are to get that land over there.

Chief: Yes, I honestly did meet with the City Manager today and he did mention they're looking forward to that and I was like 'you can't have that until we have this. It like not even on the table until we get this.'

So that is for the culver project, we are moving forward and those are the fees. Thursday I should have the performance bond and agreement and everything for the actual building permit with the station. They have just finished calculating that. So my hope is, I will probably be chasing a few of you down over the next few weeks to get some checks in between our meetings just so we can get the process moved along.

Crittenden: Do we have anything from this station that can be transferred over there, connection fees and things?

Chief: I don't know about that. I know we have some equipment like some washers and dryers, extractors and cascade that fills out air bottles, that stuff we will move over but I don't know about that.

Crittenden: I mean fees we paid, we have connections. Have we been able to move the connections over? How are we going to move past without these things?

Chief: I mean, I really don't know how that works.

Farrell: It usually stays with the property.

Chief: Yeah, I don't know about those.

Farrell: Because when we market the property that will be an asset because it will already have the water and sewer and everything.

Chief: Next thing on the report is a few months ago, we talked about the engine purchase and we have moved ahead on that, but we also spoke about an ariel apparatus that we would need to purchase another one of those moving forward. You will see in the packet I actually have a quote for that ariel apparatus and also what you need to know is it is 40-41 months out. So, signing this now, we will essentially not see this until 2027 and that is almost to the day, 10 years from when we got our last apparatus. They will be 10 years apart, our current apparatus is in great shape and has done a great job, and we are pretty much buying this identical truck again but yeah it is just unbelievable to be that we are 4 years away on this project. So the request is, are you guys okay with us to get in the que to move this forward?

Parks: Absolutely. Do you need a motion on this or what?

Chief: You tell me if I do or not because if not, we will just...

Farrell: I think just a nod will do (not clear recording)

Crittenden: What are the requirements to get in that que? Is there a downpayment or...

Chief: There is no down payment

Crittenden: Just needs a firm yes.

Chief: Yes, we are just signing that we are committing to \$1.7 million basically. And they will hold the quote, we are putting ourselves in that line to get one. And probably about 1 ½ out we will start that pre-build process, which is much like building a property or house and is quite extensive with all the stuff. But we will probably see this in 2027, it'll be built in Wisconsin so we will see with the weather it might be the spring of '27. So, if we are good with that, we will get that signed.

Farrell: And I imagine with this, if we didn't go through with that down the road, there would be a waiting list to fill that.

Chief: Oh absolutely. If we don't take a spot, someone else will take it.

Next thing I want to touch on a little to get your thoughts on, we don't need to make any firm decisions but just going over our thought process moving forward. As we have talked in previous meetings, the need for additional stations and everything. Hideout has a property on SR-248 that they are willing to donated to the fire district to build a fire station which is great. We have actually done site testing from that location and pretty much, our goal is about a 5-mile radius and it pretty much covers that entire east side of the lake, from one location which is pretty amazing. I guess its better to be lucky than good I guess but we are lucky with that spot. We did have our architect AJC, kind of sight fit what a station would look like on that property and that is about as far as we have gone with that. Now Hideout and several of their large HOA's, whether it be Tuhaye or Deer Crest HOA and Hideout Town, are saying 'how do we fund this' and they have thrown out everything. And some of these thing...

Farrell: Did they throw out the idea of a special assessment?

Chief: They did, they actually did. And I was told by the gentleman from the Deer Crest HOA, where this all came from, that the person that initiated the lawsuit was the one that threw out this 'why don't we do this special assessment'. Obviously, we have history and that is off the table. I get it.

Farrell: Yeah, that is not a possibility.

Chief: So with that, they have talked about 'oh, lets do a fund raiser', we have fairly affluent people in this area, why don't we do that? But what I try to sell and steer them towards is this sales tax initiative. And that we need support for that. Because we truly believe that if we get that money, that we will be able to utilize it to fund the infrastructure that we need in the future. So that is kind of where we are at in addressing that. But I just wanted to throw that out in case you start hearing about this special assessment, they have brought it up, obviously we don't want to go down that road again.

Crittenden: Any fund raising they want to do, I think that would be great.

Chief: Yeah, I just...how do you...

Farrell: What is the ISO rating for that area?

Chief: See the interesting thing, our ISO rating right now is a 4. We are very close to getting a 3 and I think by the next time, with everything we have done and the changes that we have made, I think we can get a 3 but right now it is a 4. But where they sit 5 miles outside of our response area, they are a 4X so they are basically not...

Farrell: So what's the difference in fire insurance?

Chief: It is huge and at first, I will tell you that, some of the people are saying fire insurance isn't a big deal but as people are starting to lose their insurance and are unable to maintain that, it is becoming a big deal. Which leads me to my next question: yes we have a piece of property; yes, we can get this designed fairly inexpensively but it is actually the funding of the station that will be our biggest hiccup. And if we were even going to start today it would be 3+ years before we could even start that. But one of the things I would like to throw out tonight, just for consideration, is that they just about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a mile

from this station location is their public works building. We have talked to them and they would be willing to give up 1 bay of that heated building that we could stick a fire truck in and then with that, we could also bring in a modular home and put it right next to it. So if we could stick one apparatus that has first response medical and fire and a couple employees, fairly quickly and fairly inexpensively, we could start providing them the coverage. Getting their insurance rating back to where it needs to be while we are waiting for a new station. Obviously, the station will solve a lot of problems but if we could do that within the next 6 months...and the only reason I am talking about adding these additional sleeping quarters is, over the next year to staff the new station, we are going to need to hire like 15 people which we don't have room to sleep. So if we could take 6 of those and stick them-two a day, 24/7 over in this area in a modular home which you could buy for \$100,000-\$120,000 and what's nice about it, is once we are done there and that new station is built-maybe we need something like that out in Victory Ranch or the Benloch Ranch area. We could move that trailer over there and again have a fairly modular station and start providing coverage inexpensively while we are getting the site plans and building and all that stuff while providing the coverage they deserve. So those are some of the, I guess, in the box or out of the box ideas that we have had and we want to get your thoughts on pursuing that and seeing what the actual cost would be.

Farrell: I think that is a good idea Chief, but how do you set that priority list? Why go to Hideout first instead of Victory Ranch first? How do you determine where to go next?

Chief: Well, we actually have a priority list and the reason I would go to Hideout next is based off of call volume and just the impact over there. And then, once you're in Hideout, then you look at where's the next populous, where is the big hole at. Where do we have this big pocket, like in Victory Ranch, that has very high dollar homes, from \$5-15 million homes and all this property, are we better to stick it there or do we go to where we have a higher call volume? So in my mind, based off call volume and the town size, Hideout is the next. But as soon as that is built, I think our sights need to be on the South side of Jordanelle off SR-32.

Crittenden: Steve, do you remember way back when, I think it was Sorensen was donating, just after you go through the top, wasn't there a property off to the left hand side of the road?

Farrell: Yes

Chief: We have been looking into that. We can't find a lot of documentation of exactly where that is. However, the other day, a member of the Victory Ranch HOA mentioned that that site was suppose to be co-located at the entrance of the Rock Creek. And was co-located with the JSSD site, which was the first time I had ever heard that. That is what they mentioned, that this site or the JSSD site is right on the corner of the Rock Creek Park entrance.

Farrell: I know it was up by the pump station.

Crittenden: You know where you go through the cut...

Chief: And that's what Jason was saying, he was a hired specifically for that station.

Crittenden: You go through the cut on the left hand side, north side of the highway. In discussion, there was concern because it didn't have great sight coming through there, you'd have to have lights when coming out.

Chief: Yeah, and if we had any idea where that was and if we could still look at something like that but I know that Benloch Ranch and the new development (I don't remember what's its called) but they have talked about a piece within there area as well. But anyway, needless to say, I believe this modular idea would be able to kind of help us as we try to navigate this growth, to help us do that without a lot of money and having to wait longer for the infrastructure.

Crittenden: And they would let you put this modular next to their public works building?

Chief: Their would be some site work, Chief Jason and I, went out there and looked at it with the Fire Marshall and the Mayor and everything so there is a little site work that we would have to do but it is just one of those things that we would be able to provide coverage fairly inexpensively and fairly quickly. I did list, on here, about a mini pumper and this is basically a F-550 with anywhere from a 500 to 1200 gallon/minute pump and it is very small but they have a few used ones out there that we can get for fairly inexpensively that would provide us our first response medical and fire coverage. Having them just have a fire station in their community would be a game changer. So this is just something I would like to propose for you to think about and provide direction on how to move forward with that.

Parks: I mean, the biggest cost of that would obviously is going to be the employees.

Chief: Yes, and in some of that would be that we would shift. If we have 5 people in Midway, 5 people in Jordanelle-maybe we go 4 & 4 and stick 2 in Hideout. But as we are building this new station in Heber, we can't hire all those employees at once...

Parks: No, but your still going to have to staff this Hideout, once it's staffed, it'll always need to be staffed.

Chief: Yes and we know in perpetuity this one will always need to be staffed. Our hope would be, if we had the sales tax thing, its going to be almost a non-issue; if not, we are going to have to figure that out. And I totally agree that, 100% our highest line item on our budget is employees, every time. The material is fairly inexpensive in perspective.

Just really quickly, our attorney for the district has put together the resolution, has been sent through Dustin, to Scott for review with the County attorney. Just of what that would look like to put this ballot initiative on next ballot. We will need to come and set what that rate will be and I am working closely with Kierstan on what does that look like to our budget and what should we afford, what would be to much. I would hate to say that 'X' number would be too much but we need to balance what that is. So, she is working the numbers from historical data, inflation and all these things of what our needs are.

Lastly, you are all aware that a year ago this month, you entered into a contract with McGrath to establish a wage survey for the county. You graciously allowed the Fire District to piggyback off that and last Friday, even though I had previously seen some numbers sent to me by Dustin, last Friday was the first time I got to meet with McGrath. But they kind of talked about what their numbers are, and they presented that top sheet that I presented to you. As you are aware, they looked at: 9 Counties, several municipalities, 3 fire departments and other special public safety and public utilities agencies. Prior to. even to this day, the fire district does not have a formal pay structure. It has been something that, actually last May when I was put in as interim Chief, I started working with Kristen on what that formal structure is and I know I have shared it with Steve and maybe a few of you in the past, of what our idea was. In doing so, we actually got input from various departments-14 different departments, within the

Wasatch Front and Wasatch Back, to try to get an idea of where we sit. With that, we identified a few things, we identified that they all had different compression rates. Some were just a minimum & maximum model and others had a 14+ step model, each of those steps would range from 2.5%-5%. There was just no rhyme or reason for how the various municipalities and jurisdictions did their wage study. They varied their starting wage, which has no rhyme or reason to that either and they varied quite a bit. So, with that, Kristen and I put together our version, using what our starting pay was and where people were at and then built it around that. We used a 12-step model, as a fire district we like our 12 step plans in anything that we do, and we just used that as a model. We have used that model if we have hired someone but nothing has been really formal or adopted by you, we just wanted to make sure we stayed within the parameters of our budget and make sure that we are doing what we needed to do. This rendition is version 5 back in last October, and from there I think we are on version 6.4 now. It has just continued to evolve, essentially, as we waited for this study, I knew the study was happening but I also needed something in place because I didn't know when this was going to be done. As we kind of look at the district, and I know that Heber did a great presentation back in May for you guys when he introduced this plan to you, he talked about the county and compared but just our average tenure in the fire district is 6.5 years on average is where they are at. Obviously with our Battalion Chiefs and more senior folks, they are more at 17.5 years on and our Captains are at about 13.5 years on but as we get to our engineers those newly promoted folks, we are at about 4.3 years on. And when we get to our firefighters that is about 3.5 years of experience which isn't a lot and that is the bulk of our employees. That is not a lot of experience and I will tell you, if I take out our one firefighter who is eligible for retirement, that would drop us down to about 2.3 years of experience, which is very young and very new.

Farrell: Is that typical with other fire departments?

Chief: With age, we are just a new career department. Most other departments have folks that have 15-20 years on and it used to be at 20 years is when they are retiring but I would say that average age is closer to 10 for firefighters and 15 years for Captains and so forth. So we are fairly young, and over the next 1-5 years, 6 of our folks are eligible, if not now, to retire and those are our senior men and women in the department. So as we do that, we need a pay structure that is definitely competitive, we know that, we know that has been your direction as a council, that you want to be competitive to attract and retain qualified and good employees. We realize that there is nothing we can do on this pay scale, that is going to allow my entry level folks to ever buy a house here just in the current state, we know that. But we need to be able to give them a reason to come up here, because right now, we have anywhere from...most of our folks that live in the wasatch front, they pass 6 to 9 other agencies that they could work at, that pay very similar, what brings them up here? We want to say, yes it is us and they call volume, the diversity and the beauty of where we work but when they are taking an extra hour + out of there day to commute from their families and the cost, wear and tear on their cars, winter storms and all that stuff, what is actually attracting them up here? That is why, having a competitive wage scale is important, and I know you all believe that and I know that is the direction the county wants to go, but as we look at this and move forward there are a few directions we need. Because we have no formal pay plan, we have a few that as I plug into this grade scale that they created, we have some that are off in left field, anomalies out there, with that I have talked with Dave Rollin and a few others, and there is a red circle concept out there that I think you are all aware of, that if you have this anomaly, an employee out here, you need to circle them and they need to stay in place. But we need direction from the board

of what our policy is going to be, so if we have that person sitting out there and we come to a COLA or something, they are not going...we are going to hold them, freeze them in place or what are we going to do with them? And then we have a few folks, as I plug them in here, that their pay and where they sit on the step, they are in the right grade but they are one or two steps ahead of where they should be or are qualified so, what do we do with those? That is the type of direction I would look for from the council on that.

The first page that has the McGrath symbol, that is what they provided to us and their recommendation on there. Which for all and all, is good. I believe they missed a couple of positions, I know on the counties (wage scale) they list like either letters or numbers assigned that you just plug whatever position into that. Ours is a little more job specific, you are either a firefighter or EMT, AMT, paramedic, engineer, or Captain. So we needed to have that spelled out in our job descriptions and have those grades defined. As I looked at this 11-step plan, it was about a 2.5%. As I looked to other agencies and what Kristen and I came up with, to me some of it was a little low, obviously the starting wage was a little higher which I appreciated them identifying that, but the top end, we wanted to extend that a little further on some positions. And then there are a couple of positions, couple grades that we wanted to add to that. One of them was a critical care paramedic and then one was a fire inspector and then another staff position, basically an executive assistant that really wasn't identified on there. So our proposal to you as we look at this we would like to adopt something that includes our critical care paramedics at a separate grade and then my initial proposal that is if we need to stay in within that 11-step plan that we increase each step by 3%. Sorry not by 3% but to 3% from 2.5%. So, each step would progress at 3% not 2.5%. If for some reason, we are stuck at 2.5% to keep it consistent throughout the County, I would ask that we add a 12<sup>th</sup> step at least for the fire district so we can have that longevity and offer just that little more incentive.

So obviously my first recommendation, if we want to keep it similar with the county lay out and the 11-step, I ask that we just allow the fire district to bump it to 3% per step. And essentially that 3% starts at market, if you remember on that line where it is yellow, that is that market rate and then from there and above is the 3%. Everything else below that yellow, is exactly the same on all the proposals of where the starting is...I felt good about what they came up with on that, it was just getting that longevity on there.

Councilman Farrell: Dustin, do you see any problems with the modifications for the Fire District?

Dustin: You will find that every entity has slight variations to the number of steps the distance in steps. Where they do their separate payroll, it doesn't really effect us.

Councilman Farrell: The job descriptions in the fire district are much more precise and identifiable.

Councilman Crittenden: And they have to have certificates to have them.

Councilman Nelson: Chief, in the shortest answer possible why did you go with 12 steps instead of 11?

Chief: Well, no and again the 12-Step isn't...the only reason I put 12-steps is if we needed to maintain that 2.5%. if your open, that just extends it out and it just get me close to where I feel we want to be. That is the only reason on that 12-steps. Why I choose the first I don't know, I thought it looked good and would work for us. But if we wanted, I would be happy with as I said again with adding a couple of those grades like I mentioned like the critical medic and doing the 3%, we could stay at 11-Steps. I don't

mind that, if we wanted to compress it even more and just up that again that would just be a policy decision so again there is really nothing about the 12...

Justin Grabau: Chief, I am curious if you would consider staying with the 11-steps at 2.5% increases but increasing the whole rating by 2.5% so all those numbers are increased?

Chief: I'm not sure the math would work out.

Grabau: Its just a thought. If the council wanted it to be consistent with those numbers but to still achieve the same maximum or increase to the 3%, what that would do instead is raise up the (unable to hear recording )

Chief: Yeah, either way. Again, it is totally up to you. Just as you think on that and just as we ran the numbers to implement that 3%, if we were to start that, I don't want to say July 1<sup>st</sup> because she just did payroll so the next pay cycle, if we were to implement that it would increase our budget for the year \$166,000 which in talking with Kierstan, it is very doable. It is in our budget, and we did count that we were going to have some adjustment, we did like a 5% cola to start out, we let out some over because we didn't know where this would come out. So as far as funding this, we are able too. Its just again that policy on where we want to make those adjustments, obviously if we adjust that 3% these numbers change slightly but ultimately, we have the funds to cover that. Again, that's...like Dustin said, it's a policy decision and how you want us to proceed moving forward.

Farrell: What is the boards feeling on this? We can't get all the SSD's to be consistent with the county because I think JSSD and some of the others fall in the industry wide standard.

Crittenden: Well do they have a pay scale do we know?

Grabau: We can ask Max if you want to

Farrell: We they have a pay plan but it comes out of a industrial standard that they belong to, an association, and I imagine fire has the same thing.

Chief: It is not as consistent as that I will tell you. There are some unionized departments, whatever that means, in Utah but...

Nelson: I am fine with your recommendation of 11-Steps at 3%.

Parks: Me too.

McMillan: I agree.

Chief: How do we move forward with that?

Farrell: Um, why don't you put a pay plan together like that, based on the standard and...

Chief: By resolution?

Farrell: And we will do it by resolution.

Rowland: Recognizing the additional positions as well.

Farrell: Yes.

Chief: Okay. We will put those together and get that to you by next board meeting.

Farrell: Yes, we would like to do it next board meeting and we would like to maybe make them in the same time period as the County. That way they go into effect July 1...

Grabau: Effective the current pay period which I believe started June 25<sup>th</sup>.

Farrell: Yeah and then the Chief was hired with the assumption, when we got this wage study that his salary would be adjusted, reactive to when he was appointed with whatever salary we came too.

Chief: You guys have to worry about that part, I can't do anything about me.

Farrell: It was promised to you.

Nelson: But I think, even though the next board meeting we can formalize the resolution, your planning on going ahead with the changes next payroll and I think that would be fine.

Chief: Can we do that?

Grabau: Strictly speaking, I don't think you need to pass the resolution before implementing the change. You Chief have the administrative authority to adjust pay for the staff

Parks: We still have to do the resolution though for the Chiefs pay.

Farrell: Yeah, we would. So the Chief could do the resolution for the...

Grabau: He can adjust the pay for the staff.

Chief: Just not me.

Grabau: So if you are comfortable with the Chiefs pay...

Farrell: We are comfortable but I think to protect the Chief we still need to have some formal actions stating that we approve it.

Kristen: 42:13

Chief: Numbers to you...

Farrell: Something on the public record that we went ahead and approved it. Because 5 years down the road we don't want someone to come back saying that Chief Hales did it on his own without any direction.

Grabau: And that's why we trying to prevent in getting your approval, direction and change in policy.

Parks: Who would need to write the resolution for the Chiefs pay?

Farrell: Well...

Grabau: He's got to draft it and pass it along to me and then I can forward it to you.

Parks: And we got the value or numbers from this wage study.

Farrell: I would leave that up to the fire district, to the Chief and Kristen to go ahead to write that resolution for us to pass.

So why don't we entertain a motion to approve the wage policy presented by the Chief.

**A motion was made by Councilman Parks to approve accept the Chiefs proposal on the 11-steps at 3% adding the new 3 positions. The motion was seconded by Councilman Crittenden and the motion passed all in favor.**

Chief: Just to clarify about the ladder truck, we are good to go on that?

Everyone: Yes.

Chief: Thank you. Any questions?

Farrell: Dustin anything?

**A motion was made by Councilman Nelson to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilman Parks and the motion passed all in favor.**