

# **Moab Valley Fire Protection District Commission Meeting**

**45 South 100 East, Moab Utah 84532**

**August 15th, 2023 - 4:00 p.m.**

## **A. Call to Order:**

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Archie Walker at 4:00 p.m.
2. Commissioners Present: Chairman Archie Walker, Commissioner Jim McGann, Commissioner Charlie Harrison
3. Staff Present: Chief T.J. Brewer, Battalion Chief Brandon McGuffee, Administrator Cathy Bonde, Maintenance Manager Donnie McCandless

## **B. General Business:**

1. Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve minutes from the regular Commission meeting held on July 25th<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McGann, and it passed unanimously.
2. Citizens to be Heard – None were present.
3. Commissioner McGann asked about some payments made, and discussion was had in relation to requirements for testing and certification on the Ladder truck and our pumps. Commissioner Harrison then motioned to approve bills. Commissioner McGann seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
4. Cathy Bonde and Chief Brewer took the Commissioners line by line through the profit and loss statement as well as provided an accounting of revenue and expenses in relation to the wildland program. Several line items were discussed in detail. Trucks and apparatus were also discussed in relation to current and anticipated future needs of the Department.

## **C. Chief's Report**

1. Chief Brewer reported 28 total calls to service since the last Commission meeting. He also stated we currently have 36 members on the Department.
2. Many meetings have been attended including those related to the radio task force, curriculum development, Certification Council, MIFC, Dispatch, and annexation.

3. EMS Operations Captain Logan Brewer wrote and received a mental health grant on behalf of EMS and Moab Fire. With grant funds, mental health professional Stuart Palmer made a presentation to the Department. We had a good turn out, and participants signed up for individual sessions he offered. He will come down quarterly. The grant also includes the Cordico app to assist with mental health as well as anonymous therapy sessions with the Partridge Group. We will want to consider how we follow through with mental health assistance after the grant runs out.
4. We received the radios that were funded with the State grant we talked about at the last meeting. We will now submit for the grant funding that will reimburse us for part of the cost.
5. Staff and Department photos will be taken on Wednesday, August 30<sup>th</sup> from 4-6:30 p.m. We would like Commissioners to come in for photos during that time. This will be for headshots. These are being done in-house by Kirsten and Carter. They have both been involved in our social media and have contributed a lot to our Department beyond the roles of volunteer firefighters.
6. Our new engine is 900 pounds overweight. Pierce has suggested two options; one being to beef up the rear-end at a cost \$16,000.00 and the other to build a custom water tank with 150 fewer gallons of capacity for a cost of \$4,000.00. Chief Brewer suggested a third option which would be to change the truck to one with a 2500 gallon tank capacity. Discussion was had on the options in relation to operations. General consensus was to make a decision soon, and Commissioner Harrison offered to participate in a phone call with the manufacturer. A decision will be made from there.
7. The Department has acquired a newer 2023 Ford F-150 which will primarily be used as a Chief vehicle but can also be used for travel to trainings.
8. Our Engine 466 broke down again in California. The fix this time cost just over \$400.00 but the truck will need to be looked at by McCandless in Grand Junction to further diagnose and repair.
9. Some of our employees and volunteers will be going to a water mapping class at UFRA on Friday. We are working to find coverage from our volunteer base while a majority of our firefighting staff is out of town.
10. The Department is exploring bringing highly qualified instructors to Moab for a few days to provide training. The training was originally planned for this October but is now in consideration for next fall. The training could be open to participants from other departments for a registration fee.

#### **E. Old Business:**

1. Annexation – Chair Walker asked for a poll of the Commissioners as to their stance on annexation. Commissioner Harrison stated he would like to move forward. Commissioner McGann stated that the impact to taxpayers as presented is making him back out of the proposed annexation. Discussion was had on the impact to taxpayers and the County under a variety of options the County has in order to fulfill its obligation of providing fire protection. Cathy Bonde stated that the County already pays approximately \$169,000.00 for fire protection between Moab Fire and Thompson Fire, so the Department's ask from the County is approximately an additional \$280,000.00 per year for three years above what

they currently pay. After three years, the County would have no further financial obligation to Moab Fire.

In discussion of how annexation impacts the Department, Chief Brewer stated that there is a fire in Willow Basin outside of our current District and once annexed, the fire would be in our District requiring us to send an engine and personnel. Volunteers with other jobs and obligations cannot be expected to have the ability to respond at that distance for an unknown amount of time. Commissioner McGann voiced concern in affording enough paid staff to respond to such incidents. Chief Brewer stated that if we hire 3 people, we can have 7 day coverage. It would not be 24 hour coverage, but there could be limited paid personnel on staff 7 days a week. Volunteers would still be needed.

Chief Brewer asked Commissioner McGann for his ideas. One of his concerns is the cost of moving toward a full time fire department, and a model he presented was Price where they pay a stipend of around \$1200.00 per month per firefighter for firefighters to be on call.

Chief Brewer acknowledged there are many models to consider, but we also need to take into consideration that the dynamics of our community have changed drastically over the years. Our volunteers have other full time jobs with many, including paid staff, having more than one job in order to make ends meet. We have lost some of our committed volunteers to other communities because they could not afford to live in the area any longer. Chief Brewer has spoken directly to volunteers about their availability to respond to the further areas of our County, and he has been told they do not have the availability.

Chairman Walker asked for clarification on financial concerns with annexation and whether they had to do with the request of financial assistance for three years from the County or if the concerns are after that financial assistance ends. Commissioner McGann stated a concern was double taxation with the Fire District charging a fire tax and then the County needing to use tax funds to supplement, causing taxpayers to pay tax to both the Fire District and the County to cover fire service. He stated we raised taxes last year in order to hire more personnel and we have done that, but we really don't know what we are actually going to need when we annex. Chief Brewer stated that not knowing what we actually will need has been a concern of his from the moment annexation discussion began.

Commissioner McGann said he was looking at annexation from the perspective of a taxpayer. He also stated concerns in moving further from a volunteer department to a paid department. A concern is that the more we move to a paid department, the fewer volunteers we will have. Commissioner McGann stated we need to consider our call volume in relation to our ask, and if our call volume is remaining between 300-400 calls per year and is not increasing, increasing our budget cannot be supported. Chief Brewer stated that our call volume has increased but call volume is not the only measure in regards to budget needs. He stated 700 calls per year is usually when a department becomes full time. Year to date we are around 400 calls meaning our call volume is increasing. Our responsibilities are going up and we are doing more as a department including public relations relating with events in the community, work with the schools, meetings, and inspections. Chief Brewer stating that we also have to weigh that against the demographics of people that we have to pull from for volunteers and the time and willingness they have to provide to the Department. The call volume has to be weighed with the willingness to respond. Commissioner McGann stated that his concern is the more paid firefighters we have the

fewer volunteers we will have, and that we have always had 30-40 volunteers and they have always responded. He does understand the need for paid firefighters to respond further out in the County. Chief Brewer reiterated that the demographics of our volunteers have changed. Brandon McGuffee stated that a big change in expansion of the District is the legal obligation to respond which does not currently exist outside our District. Chief Brewer and Commissioner McGann agreed there are multiple issues to consider in annexation including taxation, volunteers, and budget.

Chair Walker stated the County has a legal obligation to provide fire protection outside of our District. Without annexation do we just bill Grand County for services to the north? Commissioner McGann stated that would probably be the option as we have done in the past although it does not fix the issue of double taxation. Commissioner McGann said input from the taxpayers would be valuable.

Chair Walker thanked everyone for the discussion.

2. Job Descriptions – This is ongoing. Staff has been working on refining job descriptions for each position.
3. MOU- Castle Valley Fire Protection District – The outcome of our last Commission meeting was shared with Castle Valley Fire, and their Commission is meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup> to discuss.
4. Mid-America Pipeline Settlement – Cathy Bonde informed the Commission that we are still waiting to find out if interest will be waived if payment is made by a certain date.
5. Equipment Purchases – This was discussed in other parts of the meeting.

#### **G. New Business:**

None

#### **H. Adjourn:**

1. Chair Walker adjourned the meeting at 5:37 p.m.

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Archie Walker, Chair**

**Attest:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cathy Bonde, Clerk**