

Moab Valley Fire Protection District Commission Meeting

45 South 100 East, Moab Utah 84532

September 12th, 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, Emergency Coordinator Shea Walker, Operations Coordinator Ryan Burraston
4. Citizens Present: Sophia Fisher-Moab Times-Independent, Sam VanWetter, Saina Carey

B. 2022 Audit: Ryan Rasmussen was not available to present the audit.

C. General Business:

1. Approval of Minutes - Commissioner McGann requested an amendment to the draft minutes. Under Annexation, the minutes currently read "After three years, the County would have no further financial obligation to Moab Fire." Commissioner McGann asked about some of the terms that have been discussed and whether we would still be pursuing them. Since there has been no decision on terms, the minutes were amended to "After three years, the County may have limited further financial obligation through agreement with Moab Fire." Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve minutes from the regular Commission meeting held on August 15^h, 2023 as amended. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McGann, and it passed unanimously.
2. Citizens to be Heard - Sam VanWetter spoke to the issue of annexation. He asked about the consulting firm involved and if a report was available in terms of options they presented for annexation. Chief Brewer conveyed that the consulting firm's main focus was guiding the process of annexation and keeping things moving forward. Cathy Bonde stated that at the first meeting of the Fire District and the Grand County Commission subcommittee tasked with pursuing fire protection in Grand County, it was decided to move forward from

that point without further services from the consulting firm. Sam VanWetter stated that the cost of annexation including the District's three year funding request of the County and a possible future tax increase was steep to the taxpayer. He suggested finding a balance between not making the annexation exorbitantly expensive and also using this process to increase tax base. Chief Brewer stated that one of Sam's platforms was looking at other ideas and that he is open to ideas and conversation. Chairman Walker thanked Sam for his time.

Saina Carey spoke in support of the Fire Department and stated that the residential population has not really changed in number over the recent decades. What has changed is tourism. She stated tourism requires more services, but it is the local population that pays for those services. She said that increasing taxes is rough on residents. Saina further stated that if a fire truck is needed for a three story hotel, the cost of that should come from a permanent tax on that hotel, not from the local tax base. Chief Brewer stated that the Fire District is not proposing a tax increase this year. Chair Walker stated that if Saina knew of a way that we could do what she is proposing, we would be very interested, but we are not aware of a mechanism that would allow us to place an annual tax or fee on the tourism properties as she suggested. Chief Brewer suggested Saina speak with the County Commission as they may have means other than what the Fire District has. Saina also suggested the Fire District look at surplus equipment instead of new, and Cathy stated that we do have engines that were purchased used. Chair Walker thanked Saina for coming to the meeting to speak with the Commissioners and Department.

3. Approval of Bills - Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve bills. Commissioner McGann seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

C. Chief's Report

1. Many meetings have been attended including administrative staff meetings, radio task force meeting, and NFPA meetings.

Chief Brewer and Emergency Coordinator Shea Walker went to a creek stewardship meeting that Kara Doherwend spearheaded. The meeting included people from the City and County. It was a good group of people coming together to discuss fuel mitigation and potential grants.

Chief met with some County Commissioners in relation to annexation individually.

The State of Utah came down and did a presentation at the request of the County. It was a good meeting for everyone to understand wildland aspects and responsibilities.

Meetings have taken place with Mallory and Quinn to discuss annexation and go over Moab Fire's budget request in relation to annexation.

2. Our presence is being felt in the schools. We have attended safe schools coalition meetings, fire drills, and back to school night. We will have fire trucks in the homecoming parade.

3. Chief Brewer and Cathy have been working on the 2024 budget, and a first draft will be presented later in the meeting.
4. Last Friday the inter-faith coalition organized a dinner to thank public safety personnel. Staff and volunteers from both fire and EMS showed up. Our personnel helped serve food and sold some T-shirts. On Saturday the same group helped organize a community volunteer day in which they cleaned up some of the creek bed. The clean-up was headed by Clark Maughan and Kara Dohertwend and Clark, Ryan Burraston, and Brandon McGuffee operated the chipper for the project. Clark said there were well over 100 community members who showed up to help with the project. Some funds from the dinner will be donated to the Fire Department.
5. Clark and Shea are working on a couple of grants that could help us acquire some equipment.
6. The Red Rock hand crew will be back late tonight. Traedyn Brewer and Ben Ryan represented us well while on assignment. They were in Oregon.
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. Staff went out to Station 2 to clean up. There have been is problems with the swamp cooler, and there was a water leak inside the wall from plumbing. The building is old and having issues.
9. Shea Walker put in a grant for extrication equipment. Commissioners discussed extrication equipment a couple of meetings ago and that \$50,000.00 purchase has been put on hold until we find out if we are awarded the grant.
10. The water mapping class attended by a number of Department members was well worth the time. Members left at 4:00 am and returned around 11:00 pm to avoid the cost of hotel rooms.
11. Currently the closest big wild land fire is the Lighthouse Fire in Emery County.
12. We have some minor equipment issues that our mechanic, Donnie McCandless, is able to handle.

E. Old Business:

1. Annexation – Chief Brewer stated we are right at the threshold of the timeline for completing annexation this year. Both parties have agreed to not force the timeline. Bringing Grand County Commissioners into the conversation and the switch from Chris to Mallory have slowed the process. A lot of people didn't know how we got to this point, so we thought it was better to start again and make sure everyone understands what we are getting into. This decision has taken some pressure off of us. Cathy stated that Mallory has asked us to submit our budget request for providing service outside our District in 2024. Chair Walker stated that the concern with double taxation is not then addressed for 2024. He said the only way forward that will do away with double taxation is for the County to work with us for three years as we have proposed, and then double taxation goes away. Chief Brewer said he felt Chris Baird was in agreement with the District proposal for moving forward but that it is good to bring others into the conversation. Cathy clarified that the double taxation is on the part of the County, not the Fire District. Commissioner McGann said he felt the amount of the financial request for annexation is what concerns the County. Chief Brewer said one of the values of the meeting with the State he briefed

Commissioners on earlier was that they supported the fact that our call volume would go up with annexation.

Discussion was had on how to best work with a combination fire department of some paid staff and mostly volunteers and the balance of retaining volunteers without burning them out or expecting more time than they can contribute. Chief Brewer said he is open to speaking at greater length with anyone who has ideas on how to maintain and improve this balance.

2. Job Descriptions – Cathy presented the Commissioners with salary comparisons for each position on payroll. Comparisons were made to positions in the City, County, and Grand County EMS. Some positions also had comparisons to similar positions elsewhere in the State and current similar job openings. Chief Brewer stated these comparisons show we are below average with some of our pay rates.

3. MOU- Castle Valley Fire Protection District – Commissioners reviewed a draft MOU with Castle Valley Fire Protection District and agreed to forward the MOU to Castle Valley Fire for their feedback.

4. Mid-America Pipeline Settlement – Cathy Bonde informed the Commission that the current refund owed will be deducted from our October tax deposit and forwarded to Mid-America Pipeline through the Grand County Treasurer's Department.

5. Equipment Purchases – Chief Brewer stated that the cleanup at Station 2 presented the need for equipment that can assist with maintenance. Ryan Burraston presented a proposal for a small tractor and attachments that would serve multiple purposes for the Department. Commissioner Harrison stated CAT offers a lease purchase agreement that could be considered. Ryan said the piece of equipment could be used for snow removal, community projects including fuels mitigation, and general maintenance of our properties. He presented a very thorough proposal including cost comparison of several makes and models, dealer locations for maintenance, labor cost savings, and cost to rent equipment as opposed to purchase. Commissioners discussed the possible need for a larger piece of equipment if it is used for fuel mitigation as well as whether grants would be available to cover the cost. Chief Brewer stated that the only grants that would cover this kind of equipment would be fuel mitigation grants.

G. New Business:

1. Draft Budgets – Cathy presented a working draft of the 2023 Amended Budget and a working draft of the 2024 Budget without annexation.

On the draft amended budget for 2023, income for inspections is much higher than the projection in the original budget. Cathy stated that this is a very unusual year for this line item, and we shouldn't anticipate similar income for inspections in 2024. The wildland program also brought in income that was not anticipated when the 2023 budget was originally approved. Barring any unforeseen expenses in the remainder of the year, the draft amended 2023 budget shows a net income of approximately \$75,000.00. These funds could be moved into our Capital Projects Fund to be used for large equipment needs. The 2023 amended budget will continue to see changes and updates as the year continues,

and we will need to hold a public hearing and approve the amended budget as we do every year.

On the draft 2024 budget with no expansion, there remains an income line item for Grand County in exchange for Moab Fire providing services to areas of the County not covered by a Fire Protection District. There are two ways to calculate this value. One is based on our fee schedule and the other is applying percentage of out of District calls as a percentage of our budget expenses. Current calculations for these methods range between \$175,000.00 and \$270,000.00. Chief Brewer suggested we ask for \$200,000.00. Chairman Walker stated that he believed an accurate number for cost of services would be calculating by percentage of budget. Commissioner McGann stated that if we were to go that route, we should do the same for San Juan County. Chief Brewer stated that the distance and time to travel to calls in greater Grand County are more than calls to northern San Juan County, so they are not fully comparable. Commissioner McGann asked where the funds requested of the County would be spent, and if that is going toward employees. Commissioner Harrison said he felt it would be spread across multiple expense line items.

Commissioners discussed going into closed session to discuss contracts and character and professional competence of employees. Chairman Walker moved the meeting to closed session at 5:18 p.m.

Commissioner Harrison moved to exit closed session at 5:56 p.m. Commissioner McGann seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Chairman Walker stated Commissioners need to make a decision on our 2024 budgetary ask of the County. He said he is in support of asking for \$200,000.00 while conveying to the County that as percentage of budget the cost is higher.

Commissioner McGann asked why the working draft has \$175,000.00 from the County. Cathy stated that number came from early numbers estimating average cost of calls by fee schedule. Finalizing numbers could come to \$200,000.00 as calls by fee schedule. Commissioner McGann said he prefers the \$175,000.00 ask. Cathy pointed out that on the current draft 2024 budget, that figure leaves us short approximately \$6,000.00 and does not leave any consideration for our increased cost of about \$5,000.00 in software for incident reporting, nor does it include consideration of raises other than a COLA.

Commissioner Harrison suggested we give the County the real number of cost by percentage of budget and go from there.

As a point of clarification, Cathy added that the percentage is calculated off of expenses in our general budget. Calculations do not include expenses in our capital projects budget.

Commissioner McGann restated that if we charge Grand County by percentage of budget, we need to do the same for San Juan County. Chief Brewer said the current San Juan contract goes through June 2024. Chairman Walker said that charging Grand County by percentage of budget would mean we are asking Grand County for \$270,000.00. Cathy

stated that if we charged San Juan County by percentage of budget, their cost would be approximately \$66,000.00.

Chairman Walker made a motion to ask Grand County for \$200,000.00 and show them the real numbers as to cost as percentage of budget. Commissioner Harrison seconded the motion. Chairman Walker and Commissioner Harrison voted in favor of the motion. Commissioner McGann voted against. Commissioner McGann stated he would have preferred an ask of \$175,000.00.

As to budget, Commissioners discussed the wildland program. Commissioner McGann voiced concerns with the program costing the Department money. It was clarified that two of the wildland positions are only part time, so wages are not as much as originally calculated. Commissioner Harrison stated that the wildland personnel also provide additional serves to the Department. Cathy stated the wildland crew was only dispatched out of District for the total of a month. Chief Brewer stated that one of the wildland crew was already a full time employee with the Department and is filling in as a wildland crew member. He also stated that a benefit of having the crew is to do fuel mitigation locally.

Additional conversation was had on the Thompson Fire Station and the possibility of creating some housing there that would help in effective response to calls in the further reaches of the County. Chief Brewer stated that when he brought this up with Chris Baird, he was told there is no water to support housing at the Thompson Fire Station.

H. Adjourn:

1. Chair Walker adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Date _____

Archie Walker, Chair

Attest: _____

Cathy Bonde, Clerk