

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

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

**December 7th, 2023-6:00 PM**

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

1. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Archie Walker at 6:00 p.m.
2. Commissioners Present: Chairman Archie Walker, Commissioner Jim McGann, Commissioner Charlie Harrison
3. Staff Present: Fire Inspector/Battalion Chief Brandon McGuffee, Administrator Cathy Bonde
4. Others Present: Manuel Torres. Arriving later: Saina Carey

## **B. 6:00 P.M. - PUBLIC HEARING-MVFPD 2023 AMENDED BUDGET AND 2024 PROPOSED BUDGET:**

1. Chair Walker opened the public hearing on the 2023 amended budget and 2024 proposed budget at 6:00 p.m.
2. Chair Walker invited Manuel Torres to ask any questions as Cathy presented the budgets including the general budgets and capital projects budgets.
3. Cathy Bonde presented some minor changes to the 2023 amended budget. The District received additional income since the last review of the amended budget. We received a \$1000.00 grant from Williams for general operations which is allocated to fuel expenses. We also received a \$1000.00 grant from Red Rock 4 Wheelers to support our summer Junior Academy. Those funds are allocated to our Fire Prevention expense as that is the line item our Junior Academy is expensed to. Commissioner McGann asked if the contributions were donations or grants and what the difference was. Cathy explained that if a contribution is for something in particular it is recorded as a grant and if it has no spending designation it is recorded as a donation.

The income in State of Utah Wildlands also increased as the billing glitches in relation to our contract for fuels mitigation with the State have been worked through. This billing added \$2,650.00 in income. Other fee schedule billing also increased due to a Hazmat billing that has been submitted.

Income from Apartment 1 rent was decreased by \$200.00 as there was no tenant in that unit in December.

The Employee Benefit expense line item is decreased from the previous version of the amended budget. As we are getting closer to the end of the year, that number can be more accurately projected.

Dues and Subscriptions increased because the fee for being registered with SAMS was not included. Cathy explained that a SAMS registration with the government is required in order to submit for federal grants. Fire Marshal annual dues were also added to this line item.

Motor Fuels decreased.

The New Grant expense line item increased to match the Grant income line item.

4. On the 2024 proposed budget, Cathy Bonde stated the only change from our last review was to adjust rental income from Apartment 1 down by \$400.00 as it currently is empty. The Non-Wage Compensation expense line item was then adjusted down by \$400.00.

The \$200,000.00 we quoted the County for services remains in the budget. The County has not approved their budget yet but has discussed only offering \$150,000.00. We did submit another letter to the County showing them once again that the cost to provide services to greater Grand County this year came to about \$270,000.00, and we are only quoting \$200,000.00. Commissioner McGann asked how many calls we had this year in greater Grand County. Cathy stated she did not have the exact number with her, but between calls represented in our justification to the County in 2023 and calls in our justification to the County for 2024 showed an increase of just over 50% from 2022 to 2023. Just shy of 17% of our calls as of our last meeting were to greater Grand County. Cathy also conveyed that last year our calls calculated by fee schedule came to \$147,000.00 and we only quoted \$100,000.00. We have consistently quoted less than our actual cost calculated by fee schedule. Commissioner Harrison stated the \$200,000.00 is a bill to the County, not a negotiation.

Commissioner McGann stated it is the taxpayers who are paying the bill, and we did already ask for a tax increase last year. Cathy stated it is the County's decision where they draw the funds from. They received a \$6,000,000.00 grant from the American Rescue Plan Act that could be used which would not draw on County tax revenue. When these grant funds were brought up in relation to annexation, Chris Baird stated the funds could be used but added that it would just be moving money around. Commissioner Harrison stated that if Grand County doesn't pay for fire services in the areas outside of our District then our District residents end up paying for that service. Chair Walker added that everything we have been doing for the last couple of years has been toward annexation which would ultimately solve the taxation issue.

Saina Carey asked about the implications of annexation, and Cathy stated Castle Valley Fire Protection District would remain and Moab Fire would absorb Thompson and the areas of Grand County not covered by a fire protection district.

Saina Carey asked to make comments, and she reiterated statements made at a previous meeting in relation to getting businesses impacting fire services to pay a fee to cover those needs as opposed to the taxpayer having to cover those costs. She also reiterated taking

into consideration what is a want and what is a need. BC Brandon McGuffee explained a plan for future businesses wanting to increase heights beyond our current capacity to contribute the cost of apparatus to provide that service. He also spoke about impact fees that would be paid by new development. Chair Walker thanked Saina for her comments.

Commissioner McGann stated his concerns with what we have budgeted for the wildland program in both income and expense with expenses outweighing income. He stated he feels it is a big expense without a lot of gain. Cathy asked if he was proposing to cut the 5 positions that are used in the wildland program, and Commissioner McGann clarified he felt we should use those five positions for annexation as opposed to the wildland program and keep those employees. He stated we started the wildland program to make money, and Chair Walker stated a purpose of the wildland program was to prepare for upcoming annexation. Cathy asked how we would keep these employees on if we don't have the income to pay for them. Commissioner McGann said we don't need to hire the new positions now but could when the annexation happens, and we have more tax revenue. Discussion was had on annexation and its impacts. Commissioner McGann stated that it is okay to ask the County for help in annexation, but he felt we asked for too much. Commissioner Harrison stated that the County never actually began working through it with us. Chair Walker stated that the County has not made a counter offer. Discussion was then had on employee wages compared to the County.

Manuel Torres asked about responsibility of wildland fires outside of the District, and Chair Walker said it depends on whose land it is on. Manuel Torres stated the funding should come from the State or Federal agency that the incident takes place on. Chair Walker conveyed it is the local municipalities that take care of the incidents. Manuel Torres also stated he felt that with emergency response, the number of responders from all agencies can be excessive. He suggested the agencies work cooperatively to be as efficient as possible. Discussion was had on different needs for different scenarios and responsibilities and the allowed duties of different agencies. Discussion was also had on staffing the Thompson Fire Station including employees and housing.

Manuel Torres asked if people can be charged for nuisance calls. Brandon McGuffee stated in some cases they can, based on our fee schedule. He also explained what can be defined as a nuisance call.

Commissioner McGann brought the conversation back to his concern with the budget and stated that perhaps we do not need to hire a new engine captain and firefighter now but that we are going to need people when we annex. Cathy added that we will find out about a large five year grant we applied for in February which is before we have scheduled to bring on the two new employees. If the grant is awarded, it will offset some of our personnel costs.

4. No comments on the budgets were received by voice, email, or letter.

### **C. Closure of Public Hearing:**

1. Chair Walker closed the public hearing at 6:40 p.m.

**D. Temporary Adjournment of Commission Meeting:** Chair Walker temporarily adjourned the Commission meeting at 6:40 p.m. with intention of reopening the meeting after holding the LBA meeting and budget public hearing.

**E. Reopening of the Regular Commission Meeting:**

1. Chair Archie Walker reopened the regular meeting at 7:04 p.m.

**D. Resolution Approving the MVFPD 2023 Amended Budget:**

1. Commissioner McGann motioned to approve Resolution 2022-01, a resolution approving the 2023 amended budget. Commissioner Harrison seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**E. Resolution Approving the MVFPD 2024 Budget:**

1. Additional discussion was had on the 2024 proposed budget. Cathy Bonde stated that the income and expenses can change through the year resulting in an amended budget. If the grant comes through, that will result in an amendment to income. It is also possible the fee schedule billing will see higher revenue as it did in 2023.

2. Commissioner McGann said he has voiced his concerns about the wildland program. He also pointed to the COLA at 3.7% with the County being at 3.2%. Cathy stated our COLA is based on the inflationary rate in October which is how we also calculated the 2023 COLA. Further discussion was had on COLA. Chair Walker asked when we should follow the County's pay schedule and where we don't, stating that we don't pay wages comparable to the County's wages. Commissioner McGann stated he felt our wages are now comparable. Chair Walker said he did not think that was the case. Commissioner McGann suggested we add consideration of having a salary survey done for the District to our January agenda. Cathy stated she did present Commissioners with a survey of comparable salaries for each position with the District. Comparisons were made with similar City, County, other special service districts, and industry positions. Commissioner McGann said he would rather see a salary survey from someone outside the District. Cathy stated we would then need to budget for it. Cathy will add the consideration of a salary survey to January's agenda.

3. Further discussion was had on the wildland program. Commissioner McGann reiterated his concern with income and expense for the program. He stated the biggest gain is fuels mitigation in the area. Cathy stated she saw a benefit to having those employees in District responding to calls for the majority of the year. Commissioner McGann said there are volunteers to respond. Cathy shared data from a report she ran showing response to incidents of all staff and volunteers. It showed only two volunteers as top responders. The rest were paid staff. She added that there were a number of volunteers responding in the medium range. Commissioner McGann stated that we went from 3 employees in 2017 to 9 employees this year, mostly due to the wildland program. He said although they are helpful when in District doing fuels mitigation, he doesn't feel there is enough call volume to justify the employees. Cathy stated that calls in greater Grand County used to justify quotes for service to the County increased by over 50% between 2022 and 2023. Commissioner McGann asked how many of those calls were fires and how many were nuisance calls. Cathy said she did not have those numbers in front of her, but stated regardless of type of call, we still need to respond. Commissioner Walker asked if Commissioner McGann's position was to cut the five wildland positions from the 2024 budget and then consider

bringing them back if and when the annexation takes place. Commissioner McGann stated that he thinks we should not hire the two new positions until we are in the process of annexing and then look at how many people we need. He reiterated that he is not referring to current employees.

Manuel Torres asked how many volunteers the District has. The District has 26 volunteers and 8 paid staff who are also firefighters. Discussion was had on why some are unable to be regular responders to incidents. Chair Walker stated a huge issue with our North responses is that volunteers are not as easily able to leave their paid jobs to respond to an incident. Commissioner Harrison stated that twenty years ago volunteers could leave their job and go to a fire, but now they can't as easily due to employers being shorthanded. Brandon McGuffee added that if it is a big incident, they will respond. Commissioners agreed we do not have the financial resources to become a paid department. Commissioner Harrison added that quick responses result in lower insurance rates for homeowners. Having paid staff has decreased response times.

Chair Walker asked if there were more discussion points and added that the discussion has been valuable. He entertained a motion on approving the 2024 proposed budget.

4. Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve Resolution 2022-02, a resolution approving the 2024 budget. Commissioner Walker seconded the motion, and it passed with Commissioners Harrison and Walker voting in favor. Commissioner McGann voted against. The motion carried two to one.

5. Commissioners thanked Manuel Torres for his participation.

#### **E. General Business:**

1. Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve minutes from the November 21, 2023 regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner McGann and passed unanimously.
2. Citizens to be Heard – None were present at this time.
3. Approval of bills was postponed until later in the meeting.

#### **F. Approval of Auditing Contract:**

1. Cathy Bonde informed Commissioners that although she has been in communication with Larson, she has not yet received a quote for auditing services. Commissioner Harrison motioned to approve the three year auditing contract with Smuin Rich & Marsing. Commissioner McGann seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **G. Set Public Hearing for Consideration of CDBG Funds:**

1. Cathy Bonde informed Commissioners of the Community Development Block Grant process. It was believed Moab Fire may need to hold a public hearing in relation to the grant, so setting the public hearing was added to the agenda. It has now been conveyed that the application may need to be sponsored by a municipality being either Moab City or Grand County. The City is already sponsoring a different application, so we are reaching out to the

County. In this case, the County would hold the public hearing. As grant applications are due January 31<sup>st</sup>, and time is of the essence, Cathy asked that Commissioners schedule a public hearing in relation to the CDBG in the event we are required to hold one. The funds would be used for a rescue truck, and discussion was had on the truck. Brandon McGuffee stated that the rescue truck that needs to be replaced has been with the Department for many years. It is overweight, and there is no more room in it. It cannot accommodate all of our extrication equipment. Commissioner Harrison motioned to hold the public hearing if needed on January 16, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. Commissioner McGann seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Brandon McGuffee added the value of having Shea Walker on staff focusing on grants as well as Clark Maughn on staff handling wildland billing and coordination.

Cathy Bonde reminded Commissioners that the state legislature changed the election cycle so that declaration of candidacy now takes place the first week in January. Both Commissioner Walker and Commissioner McGann are up for re-election in 2024.

#### **H. Approval of Bills:**

1. Commissioner Harrison motioned to approved bills. Commissioner McGann seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **I. Adjourn:**

1. Chair Archie Walker adjourned the meeting at 7:25 p.m.

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

**Archie Walker, Chair**

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

**Cathy Bonde, Clerk**