

Wasatch County Fire Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday July 9, 2024

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

Those in Attendance:

Mark Nelson

Erik Rowland

Steve Farrell

Spencer Park

Kendall Crittenden

Luke Searle

Karl McMillan

Chief Eric Hales

Chief Troy Morgan

Dustin Grabau

Councilman Farrell: Welcome to the Wasatch County Fire District Fire Board Meeting for the 9th of July. We'll start out with the approval of the minutes of June 11th.

A motion was made by Councilman Parks to approve the minutes from 6/11/24. The motion was seconded by Councilman McMillan and the motion passed all in favor.

Councilman Farrell: We go to the warrants for July. We have warrants in the amount \$964,092.92. Is there anything on the warrants list that stands out, Chief, that...?

Chief Hales: No, as we had last month, there was about \$37,000 of checks that you signed that weren't on that last one. They are included in this warrant list, so we're all caught up with that. The only thing differently you'll see on the cover sheet of the warrants in your packet is that it talks about payroll taxes. This past month we transitioned to a payroll company that will be

taking care of all of that for us so you will see a line item for what's called Paylogics in there and there'll be a large sum, basically our payroll that's covering those expenses. So you'll no longer see that payroll line item on that, but everything else will be the same.

Councilman Searle: Will be replaced by Paylogics?

Chief Hales: Yes, replaced by Paylogics inside the warrants list.

Councilman Farrell: Any questions on the warrants, as you review?

A motion was made to approve the warrants for July in the amount of \$964,092.92. The motion was made by Councilman Crittenden and seconded by Councilman McMillan. The motion passed all in favor.

Chief Report

Chief Hales: So, this past month we were quite busy, we've reached 350 calls for the month, which is more than typical for this time of year. This month we conducted several trainings through the Fire Rescue academy, which is associated with Utah Valley University. As well as we did some training with life flight with their ground transport team just to get them in touch with our operation with our critical care folks. So, some good training, as you noticed during last month's meeting and saw a bunch of bodies lying out in the park. They were actually doing triage training and doing the same with medical training out there utilizing that field.

Councilman Farrell: Did they all survive?

Chief Hales: They did all survive and did very well.

Chief Hales: This past month we deployed a type 3 engine to Southern California. They are tied in with the US Forest Service. While they've been on deployment, they left on the 30th of June, and they'll be there for 15 days, and they'll be back on the 14th. During that time, they've tied in with the US Forest Service in Southern California and they've actually been deployed on five fires, so they've been actually fairly busy. We do have an engine boss trainee, Josue Armendariz, that has been getting great assignments and getting his task book complete. So, it's been a very successful deployment for them. And we're grateful.

Councilman Farrell: Who are the three employee's that got...

Chief Hales: What?

Councilman Farrell: Who are the three employees that you've sent?

Chief Hales: Um, Blake Denning, who is the engine boss. He came to us a few years ago from Utah County Fire.

Councilman Farrell: And he's the one getting certified?

Chief Hales: No he's the engine boss. And then Josue Armendariz, he's been around quite a while.

Councilman Farrell: I thought you said one of them was getting certified?

Chief Hales: Yeah, that's Josue. He's getting his engine boss training underneath Blake. And then we have one of our firefighters, Aaron Ferralles, that is with them as well. So, those are the three. But Josue is getting his task book so he can actually be an engine boss.

Councilman Parks: Wasn't there someone from public works that went too?

Chief Hales: Well, we reached out to them, but they didn't have anyone available to go out. And that's kind of the thing, is we have those with the engine boss qualifications, but those who are red carded, we want to give them the opportunity if they want to be deployed. So, we partner with public works on that. But this time around, there weren't any available with the holiday...and that's understandable.

Councilman Farrell: We house them and feed them while they're down there?

Chief Hales: Well, it's all reimbursed...on that. So, we get so much per engine, so much per firefighter and then for all their expenses...that we'll bill them for that.

Councilman Farrell: And we pay them for their time?

Chief Hales: We pay them for their time.

Councilman Farrell: and expenses?

Chief Hales: Yes

Councilman Farrell: The district actually makes a little bit of money on this?

Chief Hales: Yes, because, you know, for every hour the engine's making \$275 an hour, for just the piece of equipment, plus we're covering all the cost.

Councilman Farrell: Well and the experience they get.

Chief Hales: See and that's what...to be able to be in Southern California at this time with up to five fires that they're getting. Josue, as a trainee, was given a division with air units, hand crews and everything, so to get that kind of experience and bring it back to us is phenomenal, so.

Councilman Farrell: Troy went through that a number of years ago where they had to go with the log book and ... log that stuff in.

Chief Hales: Yep..that's what we're trying to do is build a deeper bench because we have Troy and we have a few others, but unfortunately our area is prime for that type of incident. So that's been very successful down there. And then that kind of leads us into a couple other things.

Station 51 update. As you're made aware, last time we were under an FAA hold, we did not have the permits that needed to build in that flight path. We do have the permits now. Um, the company Right Way Steel is there on site today. The crane is showing up tomorrow and it will be flying steel tomorrow. We do have our permits. We've been given all the Notice to Airmen. All the NOTAMs have been sent out so we are moving forward again.

So right now a lot's going on there, they're working on 1200 South the curb cut into the new um, 160 East. Um, and then we will start doing the steel. So a lot's going on at that site right now.

We are also put erected the steel columns for the temporary station in Hideout this today. Um, they're just finishing up securing those, and hopefully, in the next few days, we'll be putting the membrane on there to get that up and running.

With that, we're currently in the process of currently in the process of hiring part-time EMS personnel. Um, what was interesting this time is, we had 80 applicants for 10 part-time positions. Which is, has been unheard of that to have 80 applicants.

Um, we used a bunch, bunch of our staff and we went down through resumes and brought 40 of those to interviews.

Councilman Crittenden: How many local? Of those 80?

Chief Hales: Of those 80, probably 5.

Councilman Crittenden: People are reaching in.

Chief Hales: Slowly starting to reach in. So we had so 40 went to the interviews and the testing today. And from that, we want to select 20, for what we call a ride along program, actually get

them in the stations, see how they interact with the crews. From that, we'll select the top 10 for hire.

Councilman Farrell: Now, I thought we were working on a program where we were only hiring fire and EMS certified?

Chief Hales: Well that, that was the program and what happened with that is that...when we had fire and EMS folks on the ambulance, they're always gone out of the valley. And we didn't have to have firefighters in the valley. So, with that, we were able to find a subset group of college students, basically is kind of the group that we're finding and they just come up and work, basically, 12 hours. It's a peak demand from 8 A.M to 8 P.M, during the day and they cover our peak demand, our inter-facility transfers and all that to keep our fire resources in town. And yes, it's been going back and forth between fire and Ems trained, Um, and EMS only, but we do have some of each now. So, and as of right now, it's been taking a lot of pressure off our cross train staff of not always being gone. Like this afternoon, we had an inter-facility transfer to Utah Valley. We have that truck out but we also had a fire out by the airport. That we were able to take care of.

Councilman Crittenden: What happened down to the care center on Southfield today?

Chief Hales: At the care center? It was a medical.

Councilman Crittenden: I figured there was a fire engine in...

Chief Hales: Yeah, it was a yeah. It was a transfer and a patient that actually, they took down to Utah Valley. They've been down to the valley several times. And that's usually what we've tried to use these EMS only folks for those types of transports.

Councilman Farrell: Makes good sense.

Chief Hales: Yeah. Um, and with that, just a little update since the fourth. From the fourth to the seventh we ended up having 9 brush fires and 3 dumpster fires. All human caused, all related to fireworks. Of the fires that we've had, um, recently even the one today, they've all been human caused. Um, so we're actually going to have Chief Morgan chat with you a little bit about what are the next steps of fire restrictions in the valley as we're experiencing hotter, and drier temperatures, and the typical monsoons that come through are charted to hit Northern Utah. So what are the next steps that we, you know, you as a fireboard and a fire district want to make with... with fire restrictions. So I'll have Troy give you a little update on that and then we'll kind of go from that point.

Chief Morgan: Thanks Chief, thanks board, members council members, giving me time to come up here. So, as we discussed last month, when we talked about firework restrictions, so, our long-term forecast is definitely looking hotter and drier.

Uh, the models are showing that we may not get any monsoonal moisture. You know, throughout Northern Utah, which is obviously a problem for us. You can see outside now. Things are rapidly drying. Uh, the Great Basin actually is going to release, they may have done it today...a critical fuel advisory for the whole state of Nevada and the state of Utah as well. So, what that means is...I mean, it is what it sounds like.

With that being said, I just wanted to start the discussions with the Fire board on potentially going into stage one fire restrictions. Which stage one is basically no open burning unless it's in an improved campfire pit like uh, in a designated campground. If you're welding and grinding, you need a permit, which we can give those individuals permits and we just set guidelines that they have to have a fire extinguisher. Have to have somebody watching as they're grinding.

Councilman Parks: Welding and grinding where?

Chief Morgan: Yeah, throughout the whole County.

Councilman Parks: Like in a garage?

Chief Morgan: No no, like fence line... fields. We had a fire last week. Up, Current Creek, the DWR contracted with some people that were welding on a fence and they started a fire. So it does happen. Um, it would ban fireworks completely through the county. Um so that would be a different. We do have the firework restriction right now but it's in our high hazard areas that would bring that county wide so uh, in stage one on fire restrictions, it would be all an incorporated state and private land.

Councilman Crittenden: Into the city's jurisdictions, who didn't put a restriction?

Chief Morgan: No, the cities did put restrictions in some of their high hazard areas. We went to every municipality, uh you know, met with them. The same discussion that we had with you gentlemen last month. Uh, and they were able to do that. We would still probably have those discussions if the county wanted to go into the stage one restrictions. We would meet with the municipalities and have those discussions as well. Cause it's hard for...you can have a fire here but you can't have a fire there. You know, we like everybody on the same page. I don't believe the forest service will go into fire restrictions yet. But, I mean, that's..that's their land...they could...

Councilman Farrell: Would we be making a mistake, Troy, if we wait until they took action?

Chief Morgan: I think we would, honestly, uh, everybody around us is...right now, either in discussions, or already in fire restrictions. So Utah County, Salt Lake County, all of Northern Utah other than Wasatch and Summit County are in fire restrictions and I know Summit County is discussing this same topic tomorrow at their council meeting. So, Duchesne County as well is our is in discussions. I don't know what their thoughts are. I really haven't heard. Uh, but the plan would be, you know... if everybody's in fire restrictions, we probably ought to...

Councilman Farrell: Yeah

Chief Morgan: We don't want to be the last ones and have everybody come here for sure.

Councilman Farrell: It would be inefficient for us to go into it if the municipality don't go into it as well?

Chief Morgan: Right. Well, we have a lot more at stake land than the municipalities do like...

Councilman Parks: We've already got like firework restrictions on pretty much all of that?

Chief Morgan: Yes, I mean it would expand that boundary of our firework restrictions. Uh, and right now, I have not been issuing any burning permits in the county, just because of the conditions. You know, we are in closed fire season and the only way people can, you know, burn their rubbish and stuff is by getting a permit. And I haven't been uh, releasing any permits just because of the current conditions. But stage one fire restrictions would clear that up a little bit. I think it's something we definitely need to speak to the Sheriff's office about as well. Because they're going to be the ones that you know, have to enforce that if somebody does something negligent, you know?

Councilman Farrell: They're going to be the ones running no fireworks outside...in the county area.

Chief Morgan: Yep.

Councilman Farrell: And no outdoor...

Chief Morgan: Burning.

Councilman Farrell: Burning or anything else? Could create a fire

Chief Morgan: Right. Now, people can still burn in their backyard fire pits. That's not going to change any of that. If it's an improved fire pit, we're just talking outdoor burning mass vegetation like big piles of debris, stuff like that.

Councilman Nelson: And could entities...like if, if we enacted that, Charleston could still shoot off their fireworks on the 24th of July? Or whoever?

Chief Morgan: Yes. Yes. And literally, we want the people to do their firework displays within the city limits, you know, Southfield Park stuff like that. Where...where it's not the threat of causing brush fires. Um, I will say this last weekend our boundaries were 3600 East and East and we had two fires below the crossings. So, it does happen. They were legal there. It wasn't the smartest place to be lighting off fireworks, by any means. But they were legal where they were lighting them and unfortunately, it just... it caused us a couple brush fires this weekend. So I just...I'm just looking for, you know, thoughts from you gentlemen, if we want to pursue this, we could take it to the County Council. I just I would rather see us be a little proactive than reactive.

Councilman Farrell: I think I'd like to leave it up to you and the chief as being the fire experts in the county. And recognizing what is best. And I don't know how the council feels about that?

Councilman McMillan: I do, I think if you guys want to enact it, go right ahead. You're the ones that know.

Councilman Farrell: Well, they can...they can. But we gotta reenact it. Yeah, I think if it came as he said we recommend you doing it...I think I'd...

Councilman Crittenden: So, then I think we probably should.

Councilman Park: I would like to hold off as long as we could, past the 24th if we can, though. I feel like there's a lot of, that's...that's a big celebration event and I get they're still stupid but you are away from the restricted area already. And I would like to not restrict people anymore. I mean...

Chief Morgan: Yeah. It's a hard balance. It definitely is a hard balance.

Councilman Park: It's a free country.

Chief Morgan: It's a hard balance. It definitely is a hard balance. You know, we want, we don't want to infringe on people's rights. But we also need to take into consideration that we also have the right as a public entity to make sure that the citizens and property are safe within the county.

Councilman Farrell: We're not infringing on their rights as much as we're protecting the adjacent properties.

Chief Morgan: Right. And it is, it's a fine balance.

Councilman Farrell: I mean you look at that home in Pleasant Grove where the three that burned down there.

Councilman Park: They'd still be doin, though. I mean if we're staying away from the mountain sides and stuff, I think we're not really risking...except for the one (??) and you can't fix stupid. And you're still going to have stupid. Most people don't notice the news anyway.

Chief Morgan: Right. I'm happy to do whatever you guys recommend. The process would be to get your blessing. And then go through the State Forester and have them enact the stage one fire restrictions, and that usually takes 24 to 48 hours.

Councilman Rowland: So that map we looked at which showed the red highlighted areas, what more would change? It was basically...

Councilman Farrell: All the unincorporated areas.

Chief Morgan: Yeah, it would be all..

Councilman Rowland: It was already all red, wasn't it?

Chief Morgan: No, there was. There were some areas, so...

Councilman Farrell: It was the Urban Interface.

Chief Morgan: Yeah, so it would include all unincorporated... all of Wasatch County, pretty much. Other than the municipalities, so.

Councilman Nelson: But...but I think what you said, Troy just make sure I understand that the forest service hasn't enacted this, so you can go up Snake Creek into the forest area and have campfires?

Chief Morgan: Yep. Now, could they at some point? I believe, yes. Um, I know they're moving their fuel indexes over to extremes this week, or very high this week. With talk that, you know, it could go into extreme conditions. So, and usually, that's their tipping point when they get into extreme. Is when they start their discussions.

Councilman Farrell: If we were to enter this, would it affect our ability, if something was to happen? Would it limit our liability?

Chief Morgan: No, I mean... yes and no, because if we can be proactive and keep people from starting fires and adding that cost then yes that's... that's a saving to the taxpayers and to the county. Right? If we don't and somebody starts a massive fire like we're seeing down south... yeah, we can go cost recovery. But you know, as well as I do on a \$30 million dollar fire.

What are you getting from this individual? He's gonna pay you a thousand dollars a month for the rest of his life. If you're lucky.

Councilman Rowland: Maybe what Steve's asking, at least the way I just I took his question is.. If we didn't do anything, there's a fire...can someone come back and say, "Hey you as a government entity did not enact this restriction. Now, you have a higher level of liability." Is that?

Councilman Farrell: Yeah.

Chief Morgan: From the public? Yeah..I think you get a lot of...

Councilman Farrell: No, I mean...

Chief Morgan: From the state? I don't think so. Because we are in that MOU agreement and, and unfortunately, if we start seeing a bunch of human starts, then I think the state could come in and say, listen, this is because they, they share in that cost what the county they can ultimately come in and say, hey we need to go into restrictions. I don't see them going against your will. It would have to be something very catastrophic.

But no, as far as if you didn't and something happens? Yeah, I don't think they're gonna pull out and be like, well, you should have been in fire restrictions, I don't believe so.

County Manager Dustin Grabau:Troy, maybe you could talk about how the...our contributions to the funds are calculated?

Chief Morgan: Oh, okay. So, our MOU with the state in 2017, they created that new fire policy, which once a fire is delegated to the state...so um. If we get dispatched to a fire, they have what they call a run card. So it's a set designated resources that go. If we order anything above that, then that fire becomes delegated and the state picks up all financial cost.

Uh, if it's shared jurisdiction, multi-jurisdiction fire, it's delegated. There's, there's a few different things once that's delegated that goes to our 10-year average. Uh, of fire costs. So they take the high and the low of those 10 years, they average it out with our fire costs that we've accrued, as well as high hazard areas. It's some weird formula that that they use and then

they give us a cost per year that we do mitigation match for. So every fire that we have, that is delegated, it ups our...

Councilman Farrell: And it creates the fire fund for the state to use to buy fire and by April 15th, it's all used in Southern Utah.

Chief Morgan: Well that, that was, that was the, that was the old insurance system. This is what they're wanting prior to this year. You could meet your match with mitigation preparedness and prevention. So all the training that we did, we'd entered in. That eliminated some of that cost. All the mitigation work that public works does in the WUI areas, we track that, you know, now this year, if counties can't come up with all of that match money, they are accepting money now which they hadn't years prior.

Councilman Farrell: It was years prior that we got an assessment for like \$600,000 based on value, not on...

Councilman Crittenden: It was all used up down south before it got to our fires.

Chief Morgan: Yep, exactly. Yep. I think our match this last year was \$120,000 worth the match, so...

Councilman Farrell: But in the... when they started out Summit County and Wasatch County were the two highest contributors to the whole fund.

Chief Morgan: Right, and we had the less fire uh, problems. You know, ours are definitely later September...October, so.

Councilman Farrell: It was based on property value.

Chief Morgan: But to answer your question, I don't believe it would affect any of that stuff with the state and how fires are paid, so.

Councilman Farrell: Well, like I said, I think consensus is with the board. We would leave it up to the Chief and yourself to make that recommendation and come back and at that time, we can discuss.

Chief Morgan: Okay, we can definitely have the discussion with our cooperators with the state and as a department

Councilman Park: They have to come back, right?

Chief Morgan: Yeah, and we would like to probably come back council meeting to get your blessing as a County Council and then like I say, he usually takes 24 to 48 hours for the... the fire restrictions paperwork to get done and signed by the State Forester. So any other questions? Anything I can answer for you?

Councilman Farrell: What was it fire out by the airport today? I was up on the hill and it looked like a massive fire.

Chief Morgan: It burned about an acre, it was in a massive thistle patch and dry grass. Some employees were out there, trying to scare the deer. Off of the airport, and it worked. The deer ran.

Councilman Farrell: Was it on the airport?

Chief Morgan: Yes, it was in the airport.

Councilman Parks: It was your weed guys...sounds like.

Councilman Farrell: No, our weed people wouldn't be on the Heber City's airport.

Chief Morgan: Yes, it was on the airport . It was some airport employees, like I say, they were trying to chase the deer out there and it worked, but yeah, it burned about an acre.

Thank you for your time, appreciate it.

Councilman Farrell: How 'bout the Advisory Council? We got anything from the Advisory Council?

Dustin Grabau: We didn't meet this last month.

Councilman Farrell: Okay. So, there's nothing else?

A motion was made by Councilman Crittenden to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilman Searle. It passed all in favor.