

Wasatch County Fire Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

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

Those in Attendance:

Mark Nelson

Erik Rowland - joined online

Steve Farrell

Spencer Park

Kendall Crittenden

Luke Searle

Karl McMillan

Chief Eric Hales

Battalion Chief/Fire Warden Troy Morgan

Assistant Chief/Fire Marshall Clint Neerings

Kierstan Smith, CPA

Assistant Chief Clair Provost

Assistant Chief Jason Provost

Councilman Nelson called the Wasatch County Fire Protection Service District board meeting to order on Tuesday, December 10, 2024.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Councilman Park to approve minutes from the 10/08/2024 fireboard meeting. It was seconded by Councilman Crittendon, and it passed. Council Members Farrell and McMillan abstained.

A motion was made by Councilman Crittendon to approve minutes from the 11/12/2024 fireboard meeting. It was seconded by Councilman McMillan, and it passed. Councilman Park abstained.

APPROVAL OF WARRANTS

Warrants totaled \$1,844,712.77 for this month.

Councilman Nelson asked Chief Hales if there was anything that stood out other than the \$917,252.02 going towards the Heber Fire Station construction. The Chief pointed out the \$89,403.00 going towards the second payment on a refurbished ambulance.

Councilman Nelson asked what the refurbishment would include.

Chief Hales explained they would be putting an old box on a new chassis with updated paint and graphics. This doubles the life of an ambulance and is less money than purchasing a new one. This will be the third time the district has refurbished an ambulance using this method and it has worked out very well.

A motion to approve the warrants as presented was made by Councilman Searle. It was seconded by Councilman McMillan, and it passed.

2024 YTD - NOVEMBER

Chief Hales asked the Council Members to open their packets and reference the service call snapshot. At the end of November 2024, the district had exceeded 3,830 calls for the service year compared to 2023 YTD ending at 3,272 calls. Chief Hales estimated there would be around 300 more calls in December, putting the district up significantly over where it ended last year. This follows the trend the fire district has seen all of 2024. Some of the increase is due to backfill from South Summit, which will go away in 2025, as those staff members return to Wasatch County.

In November, the Grand Hyatt had their soft opening. The fire district helped conduct a CPR class for their security and personnel staff.

There were two significant fires during November. The first was to aid South Summit at Blazzard Lumber in Kamas. Wasatch County provided aerial support with a ladder truck.

The second fire was a cabin up at Oak Haven near Midway. Councilman Nelson asked if they had any problems getting to the cabin? Chief Hales confirmed there were very few problems getting into the area, but what did cause an issue was the private water system. It was under repair at the time of the incident and the hydrant right next to the house was inoperable. This caused a delay in getting water beyond what they brought to the scene in the tender.

Fortunately, on initial dispatch, the crew was aware of the problem with the water system and requested a tender to respond, which normally wouldn't be needed in that area. The fire was confined primarily to the main floor, but the State Fire Marshal was brought on scene for the ongoing investigation.

Councilman Farrell asked if the fire started in the fireplace or stove? Chief Hales said the origin was most likely the fireplace, but they are still working on that investigation. It's an older cabin that has been there for awhile.

Councilman Nelson asked if it was located pretty high up on the road system? Chief Hales deferred the question to Chief Neerings who was able to confirm the location was three roads up. Chief Hales added that it was nice to have our crew in Midway to get on the scene quickly.

Councilman Farrell asked when the fire occurred and if there was snow on the ground?

Chief Clint Neerings confirmed the date of the incident was November 15th, two days before snow. Councilman Farrell then commented that had there been snow, it would have been difficult to get up to the cabin. Chief Neerings confirmed that snow would have caused access problems.

Councilman Farrell reconfirmed that it's a private water company owned by the HOA and there are no individual water connections, other than the Oak Haven Water District. Chief Hales added that the HOA and the water company had representatives on site, which created a little bit of an access issue. But the crews were able to pull through scrub oak and the brush to get to the cabin.

Councilman Crittenden asked what do crews do in the middle of the winter? Just let it burn?

Chief Neerings confirmed the lower section of road is plowed through the winter. Chief Hales added that it was fortunate that they were able to gain access up there and no one was injured. Including the family that was occupying the cabin from Salt Lake. They were all able to get out safely.

For Thanksgiving, the chef at the Grand Hyatt brought over some leftover dinners to the crew at Station 52 and they were very grateful.

STATION 51 UPDATE

Construction at the new Heber station is going well. They are currently in the sheet rocking and mudding phase. Chief Hales extended another invite to the council members who would like to visit and do a walkthrough.

2025 FULL TIME HIRING

Over the last month, the district has worked on several different positions, including

a captain's promotional testing and engineer promotional testing. Starting December 12th, testing will begin for the full-time firefighter hiring pool. This testing incorporates the physical agility test, an oral interview and a medical scenario.

Councilman Farrell asked if there were a lot of applicants? And Chief Hales confirmed there were 52, which is an amazing amount of applicants. In past years, the number has been closer to 30. The goal is to get the top candidates through a ride along scenario and then final selections will be made. At the end of January to beginning of February, there will be an eight week recruit school with the top 9-12 candidates for hire. This will bring them up to speed so they are ready to go when the new station opens.

Councilman Farrell asked why there was such an increase in applicants. Chief Hales credited the Council for approving a competitive wage scale along with word of mouth about Wasatch Fire's growth. A lot of people want to get in on the ground floor and they see opportunity with the new HQ station opening in 2025, and immediately after, the Hideout station. In addition to the growth, the staff is really great to work with.

Councilman Farrell asked where the next station is planned after Hideout? Chief Hales confirmed Victory Ranch is next, then Fitzgerald Rd on Hwy 40 and after that is Lake Creek.

Councilman Park asked if the problems with UDOT on Fitzgerald Rd have been resolved? Chief Hales confirmed they are currently working those issues out. UDOT has met with the Council and Heber City and are aware of the fire district needing a break in the road barrier to turn left. There is frontage road access, but the condensed residential area is problematic for fire district access.

Councilman Farrell commented that Potter's Lane would be an ideal area and Chief Hales re-confirmed that he is working with UDOT on their proposal, but that station isn't planned until 2027-2028, so there is still time. But if there isn't access granted, the fire district will need to find a different parcel of land.

Councilman Park commented that the council is meeting with UDOT on December 11th to discuss. Chief Hales emphasized that anything they could do to help the fire district out regarding access would be appreciated.

Chief Hales expressed his excitement at having such a great selection of applicants. He also shared that as Chief Provost has been reviewing resumes, they appear to be top quality candidates.

Councilman Farrell asked what the experience range of the candidates was and if they were fairly new? Chief Hales said he was concerned about what he referred to as the "draft portal", which is when there is a lot of lateral movement between fire departments instead of people staying with one department for their entire +20 year career. The candidate pool for this hiring

period includes applicants with zero experience all the way up to 19 years of experience. Some of them are coming from departments in Salt Lake, but they reside in Wasatch County. It's more beneficial for Wasatch Fire to employ established individuals with more experience vs. new recruits who live in Salt Lake and are less willing to commute to Wasatch County.

Councilman Farrell asked how many openings were available? Chief Hales confirmed that the district needs to fill 12 full time positions for the new station. The new budget allows for 12 full time firefighters, one full time inspector and two part time seasonal workers for the chipping program.

FRAUD RISK ANALYSIS

This is an annual assessment that is performed to gauge the risk exposure of the fire district. Chief Hales shared that he is personally impressed with how the district is doing, being in the low category. There are some areas that did not have a score that can be addressed in 2025 through policy changes, such as IT & Computer Security. This should be addressed starting January 1st, when the district transitions to the county's IT platform. Internally, there are policy updates that can be made, focusing on separation of duties in cash receipting, that will positively affect our score. The districts' score is currently at a 332 out of 395, and the goal is to be at the "very low" fraud risk category in 2025, after these adjustments have taken place.

ADVISORY COMMISSION REPORT

The Christmas party took place on Dec 12th, so the Advisory Board meeting did not take place. At the January 2025, fire board meeting, Chief Hales will present the strategic plan to the council members.

Councilman Farrell asked if the Advisory Board is working out and Chief Hales said it has been hit or miss. It has been more of a sounding board to provide information too, versus the board advising direction. The purpose of the board, when it was put in place by Chief Ernie Giles, provided a great platform and foundation for the district. Now those plans just need to be executed and seen through to completion.

Chief Hales emphasized he is more than happy to continue to provide information to the Advisory Board each month, but he is open to evaluating its purpose and need in 2026.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilman Park. It was seconded by Councilman Nelson, and it passed.