

INDIAN HILLS FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

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SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, March 6, 2012

The Minutes are intended to reflect the discussions that occurred and decisions that were made by the members; they are not intended to be a transcription of the meeting.

MEETING ATTENDED BY:

Fire Protection District Board Members: Paul Pettit — President; Bret Roller — Treasurer; Marc Rosenberg — Secretary; Ron Walton

Fire Department Members: Emery Carson — Chief; Bob Fager — Rescue Captain; Matt Griffin — Rescue Lieutenant; Brian Kerby — Fire Lieutenant; Scott Case — Fire Lieutenant; Pat Sears; Loren Gilbert; Steve Bruns; Ray Vogler; Bruce Riley, Mike Fassula; Austin Kinney; La Resch; Brittany Salter

Non-Members: Karen Nelson — Board Recording Secretary; Millie Travis — Department Recording Secretary

Boots Members: Jackie Kniss; Kathy Kuhnlein

Community Member: Russ Nelson

Absent: Kelley Lehman

BUSINESS MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT: 19:01 Hrs.

DEPARTMENT BUSINESS MEETING:

Mr. Rosenberg presided over the Department's monthly business meeting until Mr. Pettit took the floor for the Board's session.

SPECIAL BOARD MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AT: 20:14 Hrs.

Mr. Pettit began by stating that there had been a dramatic shift the previous week with Mr. Schoenbein's resignation. Part of the struggle, he continued, was the result of a lack of follow-through on Mr. Schoenbein's part as well as dissention regarding the Employee Handbook. The actual meeting with Mr. Schoenbein had only lasted 20 minutes, Mr. Pettit shared. He then stated that it was time for the District to move on. He expressed concern about going backwards and said that a lot of decisions had to be made to allow the District to move forward.

Regarding the Employee Handbook, Mr. Pettit stated that he and Mr. Roller would work on it together once Ms. Nemer had forwarded her template. Mr. Pettit expressed that member

input was wanted. But, he continued, the voting rights of the members would be going away, although the membership should have the right to say who could join/leave the Department.

Mr. Pettit turned conversation to some positive news, citing that the application for the communications system frequencies had made it through the FCC. In addition, Mr. Pettit said that a down payment had been made on the Noble property. Decisions would have to be made about how to operate while building a new fire station. In addition, Mr. Pettit shared that Mr. Roller was working on the possibility of acquiring property across from Sit-n-Bull to build a substation.

Mr. Pettit returned discussion to the Department's organizational structure. He said that Mr. Walton and Ms. Lehman would serve as a grievance committee until a new Employee Handbook is finalized. Mr. Pettit advised members to work through the normal chain of command regarding grievances first, however. Mr. Roller explained that Mr. Walton and Ms. Lehman were a "transition committee" that was empowered to make day-to-day decisions should they arise rather than having to wait a month until the next Board meeting to address an issue. Mr. Pettit encouraged addressing issues rather than letting them fester.

Mr. Roller stated that Mr. Carson had graciously stepped up to take Mr. Schoenbein's place as Chief. But decisions had to be made and a course decided, Mr. Roller said. Input was desired. Mr. Roller said that the Board would like to hear from members what they thought worked and didn't work with the previous organizational structure. And a decision has to be made quickly. He expressed that he'd like to open the topic up for discussion that evening.

Mr. Walton expressed that Mr. Roller had summed up the situation well. Mr. Walton encouraged Department members to call or email him and let him know what they'd like to see. Mr. Rosenberg reminded that a Board of Directors election was coming up and Mr. Walton and he could be the only remaining members. Mr. Walton said that his intent would be to have a permanent organizational structure in place before the election. The current Board of Directors needs to take the responsibility. Mr. Roller stated that personnel issues didn't need to be discussed that evening; rather what lessons had been learned and what worked and didn't work.

Mr. Gilbert asked if ideas should be submitted by a certain date. Mr. Roller responded that he'd like to get moving that evening. Mr. Rosenberg reminded that there are only two months until the Board election. Mr. Riley expressed that he'd like to hear from the Board members what their thoughts were about the organizational structure.

Mr. Roller took the floor first to say that he liked the structure of having paid personnel. There was a tendency to load up volunteers, he said. He liked the accountability of having paid staff, which wasn't the same with volunteers. Paid personnel are motivated by a paycheck to keep things moving, Mr. Roller continued. At present, there are two real estate deals underway, apparatus purchases, an election . . . a lot for volunteers to handle. Plus, there's the paperwork. Mr. Roller said that he likes the idea of having two paid staff whose work plays to their specialties.

Mr. Riley said that different organizational structures had been tried at Elk Creek. There is an equally big need on the administrative side, he added. Mr. Roller recalled that the resignation of Elk Creek's administrator hit the papers because her value was so high. He acknowledged that Ms. Nelson does a lot and that Mr. Schoenbein did extremely well. Mr. Riley acknowledged that accountability is always a challenge.

Mr. Pettit chimed in to say that having the right person in the position is the key. All Front Range fire departments seem to go through three-year cycles, he added. Setting the right expectations up front is important. Mr. Vogler recalled that there wasn't a job description for Mr. Schoenbein. Mr. Roller responded that there was. But no one ever said anything if Mr. Schoenbein strayed off course, Mr. Roller added. Ninety percent of the pieces had been in place, Mr. Roller continued, adding that the accountability had been missing. In addition, the job description and contract had conflicted.

Mr. Riley asked if Mr. Schoenbein had been given a review. Mr. Roller admitted that it hadn't happened until Mr. Schoenbein had been two years into the job. So Mr. Schoenbein had been a "rock star" his first year and not so much his second, intuited Mr. Riley. Mr. Pettit expressed that Ms. Nelson was doing well and that he agreed with Mr. Roller in terms of keeping paid employees. In his current state, Mr. Carson would be burning the candle at both ends trying to get the work done as Chief, Mr. Pettit said. What is needed, offered Mr. Riley, is a person who understands the expectations and can meet them on a measurable basis.

The Board of Directors made mistakes, admitted Mr. Rosenberg. Mr. Roller agreed but said that the Board had the best intentions and has the ultimate responsibility. The Board didn't violate any documents since it operates under its own by-laws and not the Employee Handbook. Mr. Schoenbein had 30 years as a paid firefighter but had not managed volunteers, he said. The Board failed at that experiment, Mr. Roller said. But he admitted that he wasn't willing to give up on having a paid chief. Mr. Riley encouraged the Board to have all the pieces in place the next time someone was appointed to the position. Mr. Roller said that the District was relying on its attorney more now. She was drafting the Handbook presently, he added.

Ms. Sears asked if the Chief's job description was perhaps too much for one person. Mr. Fager agreed that it did include everything. Mr. Gilbert explained that he thought the mix of skill sets required to do the job was difficult to find in one person. Ms. Sears suggested looking for an administrative assistant and a chief. Or a chief and deputy chief. Mr. Walton said that he was open to suggestions.

Mr. Fager said that someone was needed who didn't necessarily have to be involved in fire operations. A paralegal, almost, he added. Someone who knows the laws and can write grants. Mr. Roller said that he likes the idea of having both positions, people who are there to stay and to get the systems in place. And someone needs to be in charge of personnel, he continued. Ms. Sears said that she'd like to have a chief who responds to calls. Mr. Fager asked if Mr. Carson and Ms. Nelson would cover the responsibilities. Mr. Roller said that he'd like to have both an office manager and chief who work part time, have different responsibilities, and report directly to the Board. Mr. Fager asked what type of day-to-day work there is for the chief. Mr. Fassula spoke up to say that he had worked for

two departments in New York that averaged about 1,500 calls per year. He proceeded to explain the organizational structure for both, which consisted of a district manager, who handled all administrative tasks, and a chief, who was unpaid and handled firefighting and EMS-related work. Mr. Gilbert said that he thought someone could be kept pretty busy from an administrative perspective. Mr. Roller agreed, adding that he didn't think Board members should be handling such tasks as day-to-day real estate deals. Discussion followed.

Mr. Gilbert then shared his vision of having an administrator that the operations personnel report to. Ms. Resch said that the administrator was like Mr. Schoenbein was. Mr. Bruns stated that a good grant writer was needed since the District's call volume and size put it at a disadvantage. Mr. Pettit expressed that there was a limitation to grants for the District. Mr. Gilbert said that he didn't think all avenues had been explored.

Mr. Pettit shared that Genesee has an excellent administrator in place and a volunteer chief. But, he added, he'd like to have a paid employee who also responds to calls. Mr. Griffin said that if there's not enough work to have a paid chief, perhaps compensation could be made in another way. Mr. Gilbert cautioned about such an approach. Mr. Riley reminded that pensions can be messed up as well by switching from volunteer to paid status. Mr. Roller admitted that it somehow seems crooked to have a volunteer step into a position that was previously staffed by a paid employee.

Mr. Riley said that he thought an administrator was the most needed position. The volunteers can run the calls and do the day-to-day work. But an administrative chief can write grants and such. He recalled that Elk Creek brought in \$500,000 in grants one year. Mr. Gilbert said that he thought Indian Hills had only received two grants. Mr. Fager stated that Inter-Canyon had received several as well. Mr. Carson said that area departments can also work together to procure shared grants.

Ms. Resch asked Mr. Carson for his opinion on the current organizational situation. Mr. Carson said that he'd like to see compensation for his work. Mr. Pettit said that he'd like to hear more from the membership about expectations for both positions. Discussion followed. Mr. Gilbert said that the administrator needs to have status and authority. Mr. Riley clarified that Ms. Eigel at Elk Creek was not making high-level decisions. Mr. Dolan had been brought in to do that.

Ms. Sears said that perhaps job descriptions were needed for the current personnel to understand how many administrative tasks there were. Mr. Riley said responsibilities could be listed on a white board. Perhaps that would help with forming job descriptions. Mr. Roller advised focusing on long-term planning rather than designing job descriptions around specific individuals. Ms. Nelson agreed.

Mr. Gilbert said that there are tasks that are not being done presently but need to be done. The District is light on interactions with other agencies, he explained, adding that Board members are elected locally but have responsibilities to the District that extend regionally and beyond.

Mr. Walton said that it sounded like people were leaning toward a dual role of leadership. He proposed fleshing out what had been discussed by having Ms. Nelson and Mr. Carson put

together a list of their job duties. Input could be received from Department members as well. Mr. Riley warned against not forgetting duties that are only done infrequently. Mr. Roller said that a couple of people could take a look at the input and take a first crack at job descriptions for operational vs. administrative roles.

Discussion turned to whether the chief needed to be a responding member. Ms. Resch said that members had wanted a chief on calls. Mr. Roller agreed and added that another staff member could perhaps take on the day-to-day work so that the chief could be out on calls and networking. Mr. Riley clarified that he was proposing a district administrator rather than an administrative chief. Mr. Gilbert said that it should be a uniformed position. Mr. Riley expressed that it's not usually. Mr. Roller said that he thought the administrator should be out of the politics and out of uniform. Mr. Gilbert disagreed. Mr. Walton suggested that perhaps the discussion should be held at a later time. Mr. Roller disagreed.

Mr. Gilbert explained that the skill sets are different. While the District might find someone with both, it would be rare. Ms. Nelson spoke up to say that there is a lot of administrative work that is necessary but probably wouldn't be appropriate for an administrative chief to do.

Mr. Rosenberg noted that the Department's last few chiefs hadn't worked out. Mr. Gilbert expressed that it was partly not having a good definition of the expectations for the position. The administrative position could be someone from the ranks, he continued. Mr. Roller said that he wouldn't make that a requirement. Mr. Walton suggested that there were merely differences of semantics. He suggested scheduling an additional meeting for the following Wednesday. Mr. Roller said that he'd prefer to figure out the situation that evening since he wouldn't be in town the following week. Ms. Nelson said she also wouldn't be able to attend a meeting the following Wednesday.

Mr. Rosenberg advised that the Board should move forward and continue discussions at the regular meeting on March 21. He acknowledged that both Mr. Carson and Ms. Nelson were doing a good job. In fact, the current structure could be the new plan, he said. It was again emphasized that the vision should drive the organizational structure rather than the people presently in the positions. Mr. Fager said that there could perhaps be two paid positions in addition to Ms. Nelson's role.

Brief discussion followed about the difficulty of finding a qualified chief in district. Mr. Pettit expressed the need that such a requirement be met.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT: 21:15

There being no more business to discuss, Mr. Rosenberg made a *motion* to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Walton and passed unanimously.

President:

Secretary:

MOTIONS MADE AND PASSED:

- To adjourn the meeting. *Motion made by Mr. Rosenberg; seconded by Mr. Walton; unanimous.*