



## SOUTH BOUNDARY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

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(208)267-8052 chief@southboundaryfire.com

Minutes of Meeting  
Wednesday, November 9, 2022

### Attendees:

_____ X	Chairperson – Wayne Cavender
_____ X	Commissioner – Chad Kimball
_____ X	Commissioner – Jayceen Swisher
_____ Absent	Fire Chief – Tony Rohrwasser
_____ X	Assistant Fire Chief – Wayne Wilkerson
_____ X	Treasurer Debbie Youngwirth
_____ X	Secretary – Michelle Rohrwasser
_____ X	Firefighter – Mike Vandecoevering
_____ X	Firefighter – Cori Vandecoevering
_____ X	Firefighter – Tim Magee
_____ X	Firefighter – Allen Merritt
_____ X	Jr. Firefighter – Alexis Vandecoevering
_____ X	Firefighter – Dave Devereaux
_____ X	Captain Roy Holzhauser
_____ X	Firefighter Owen Vandecoevering
_____ X	Firefighter Wes Portrey
_____ X	Firefighter Leonor Saldana

Also present: Graham Fenwick, Angie Wilkinson, Richard Pick, Sherry Pick, Ellen Fenwick, Jon Vangesen, Aiden Janssen, Mike Elam, Steve Armstrong, Anne Armstrong, Kris Wickwire, Peter Polt

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Commissioner Swisher moved to approve the meeting minutes from October 12, 2022. Commissioner Cavender second. Motion passed unanimously.

### Treasurer's Report.

Attached. Discussed.

Commissioner Kimball moved to approve the Treasurer's report. Commissioner Swisher second. Motion passed unanimously.

## Chief's Report.

Assistant Chief Wilkerson provided a chief's report.

## Old Business

Assistant Chief Wilkerson provided updates. The heat panels on Unit 651 fell off and he will look into new panels and associated costs. A couple of LED grill lights have been purchased for a truck at station 3. Unit 652 needs a light bar to match other trucks. The cost of the light bar is \$750.00. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said he would like to replace a couple of thermal imagers and the cost is from \$4000 to \$6500.00 each so he will get more information. Thermal imagers have been used on structure fires and to help locate people involved in auto accidents. Assistant Chief Wilkerson spoke of repairing nozzles, but new nozzles may be needed as parts are hard to get. Unit 671 was sent to North Idaho Welding and Supplies and they finished the work, but an oversight error was made so they're working to fix it. More welding is needed.

## New Business

Commissioner Cavender commented that the five or six candidates for the chief position will be interviewed on Saturday starting at 8:00 a.m. and lasting from 1:00 p.m. until 1p.m. Commissioners and officers will review applications after the interviews.

Mike Elam said the website for South Boundary is up and running. Mr. Elam explained that the public can go to the website to request reservations for the community room via email to the chief's address. Mr. Elam said he will make changes to the roster. The site is running well and the address is SouthBoundaryFire.com. The meeting minutes for this year can be added to the site as well.

Firefighter Leonor Saldana asked Commissioner Kimball about him having spoken openly about hiring a part-time chief. Commissioner Kimball said currently the Fire District is accepting a full-time chief position. Firefighter Saldana stated that she has retained Attorney Jeffrey Boiler, but wouldn't explain why when asked by Commissioner Kimball.

Angie Wilkinson mentioned candidates for the chief's position, and she asked if the advertisement went statewide and nationwide. Ms. Wilkinson asked if the six candidates were local or from the outside. It was said that 50% of the applicants are from within the South Boundary Fire District. Ms. Wilkinson questioned if the other applicants are currently in the fire service. Ms. Wilkinson explained that she is attending this meeting because she is concerned about hiring a new chief. She wants to make sure the Fire District is hiring someone who is qualified and knows the job of chief. She would like to know that an adequate, knowledgeable and capable chief is chosen. Above the Commissioners is the taxpayer. Ms. Wilkinson commented that she wants someone who knows how to write grants and knows the priorities of the fire department; the first priority is safety.

Ms. Wilkinson said it's been a year since she attended a board meeting, but that last meeting had arguments about broken equipment and there were some who didn't feel it needed to be fixed

and that was a concern. Ms. Wilkinson said she wants a chief who knows the job well and is not a favorite in the department, and she added that she is concerned about the cliques in the department. The problems in this department make her worry that if she had a fire, some personnel wouldn't respond because other people are responding, and she would not want to find that out. Ms. Wilkinson said she doesn't care about personalities; she just wants to know someone will show up at her house. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said he's been here for 30 years and personnel issues have increased over the last 10 years. He hates rumors and they're hard to control, but he is not in the thick of opinions of others. Chief Rohrwasser, having been here full-time, had a much better idea with people talking to him. This is a huge job. If anyone knows Chief Rohrwasser, he was dedicated, the effort he put into the events and the community. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said he doesn't have an answer and he hasn't heard any specific issues. If we hear about something, we try to bring it up and discuss it. If we've had issues with personnel, we try to bring them into the room and find out what happened. Sometimes with people it doesn't work out very well. As for responding, those coming to training, responding to calls and staying updated, it's important. The personnel do what they can. Assistant Chief Wilkerson explained that if someone had a problem with him and didn't want to come, he would say that's fine...and he wouldn't want them to come, but the department will come. This is a volunteer department and you may get one person. If you want 24/7, you will see taxes increase. If you want that, you would have to move to a bigger city. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said the District wishes it had trucks that can access the hills in the middle of winter. We chain up.

Commissioner Kimball said he has the same concerns Ms. Wilkinson does as he lives here. He works in an old building; we all live here. We all want the best for the department. There are a few things he's learned since Chief Rohrwasser's intention to resign. He's made phone calls and learned some things. Commissioner Kimball was concerned about how the tasks are going to be delegated and was concerned about authority until the District has a full-time chief. There have been discussions at length and he sees matters running just as smoothly as they could. Personnel have picked up the reigns. Commissioner Kimball said he has also learned that in the State of Idaho a taxing district does not have to have a chief. Commissioner Kimball addressed Firefighter Saldana and said there was the question of do we need to have a full-time chief and he had asked other departments and other volunteers at the City of Bonners Ferry to see how they do things in the downtime and if it's possible to have a part-time chief. Commissioner Kimball said there are a lot of things Chief Rohrwasser does that the entire county benefits from so maybe that can be spread out. Twenty years ago, when this department was built there were a lot more grants available. Assistant Chief Wilkerson commented that there are probably still grant funds, but they're hard to get. Commissioner Kimball said he asked around and he is of the opinion to hire a full-time chief. If the Fire District finds an excellent candidate who can fill those shoes, he would like to hire, but if they don't find someone, he would consider part-time. Mr. Janssen said he didn't think Idaho Code was written that way. Commissioner Kimball said in his phone calls to Boise, it would indicate otherwise. Commissioner Kimball explained that he contacted Idaho Counties Risk Management Program (ICRMP) first, then he asked the question of if the Fire District was required to have a full-time chief. Commissioner Kimball added that this was beforehand when he was thinking of not having a full-time chief and he wanted to make sure it was possible.

Mr. Janssen commented to Commissioners that they need to keep in mind that property taxes have spiked and his taxes for the Fire District were \$300.00 and are now \$1,000.00. Mr. Janssen spoke of the County Assessor's property valuations needing to be within 90%. The actual amount of taxes paid to the county did not increase 3%. Mr. Janssen referred to a letter from the County Assessor that explained this increase being due to state law. Mr. Janssen explained that he used to be a firefighter with South Boundary Fire and if it settles down politically, he will again. Based on the amount of taxes paid, there is an assumption that there are two or three fire personnel full-time. If the Fire District went part-time, he feels people would not be in favor. Firefighter Saldana said there is a process, for part-time and now she knows that a full-time position is being considered. Firefighter Saldana asked that Commissioner Kimball look into that as it's a fact. Commissioner Kimball said we are all experiencing these growing pains. Twenty years ago it was a lot different. There is a lot more training and equipment, but there are also a lot more residents. All of us who have lived here forever have been accustomed to things just working and when you live in a big city and taxes are high there is a level of expectation of public service, all sidewalks are taken care of by the city, etc. Here we've been doing it differently as historically there has not been extra money in the county and taxes are quite low. Commissioner Kimball said his property taxes are also increasing, but it's quite inexpensive to live here as far as property taxes are concerned. Mr. Janssen said not anymore since taxes are within a certain amount of money compared to Seattle taxes. Commissioner Kimball said he's trying to say that the level of service that is expected comes with a much higher cost than what is being taxed. Countywide, we are all experiencing a bunch of growing pains and he asked to have a little patience while the Fire District works through this for the best situation. We're all in the same boat and we're all doing the best we can. Mr. Janssen said the fire department hasn't had a reduction in budget so why would the budget drop if the Fire District went to part-time. Commissioner Kimball said he doesn't want the level to drop. Mr. Janssen said that Commissioner Kimball had stated he would've considered a part-time chief if the Fire District couldn't find the right person. Commissioner Kimball said he doesn't know where these rumors came from, but the Fire District is looking for a full-time chief. Firefighter Saldana said there is more to follow.

Ms. Wilkinson said for her personally, her husband was a part-time fire chief, and he worked an extreme number of hours. It's not part-time. You could have part-time and this person would work 80 hours per week. It was said the firefighters help keep things working. It was also explained that this fire department used to be membership-based. Commissioner Swisher said she's lived near the fire station for 24 years and she has seen this fire department grow. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said we're just scraping to keep up with that level. Ms. Wilkinson said she agrees with Commissioner Kimball in that you could see Chief Rohrwasser everywhere. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said our equipment has come so far. With funding we have progressed. We need to raise the bar as best we can. Assistant Chief Wilkerson commented on the fire department families involved, etc.

Commissioner Kimball said this is a volunteer department and as a volunteer, personally, this whole county pretty much runs on volunteerism. Commissioner Kimball listed the Fair Board, 4H, FFA, etc., as just some of the volunteer organizations. Commissioner Kimball said he loves this county, and he wants to pursue a career in politics here. That being said, being a volunteer on this board, he's getting dangerously close to turning in his resignation and he questioned what

is the point of showing up here and not getting support from the community? Ms. Wilkinson said Commissioner Kimball is absolutely right and speaks well of slogging through the “BS”. There is still the want and desire to help the community. Commissioner Kimball briefly commented on Ms. Wilkinson’s discussion about the majority of volunteers and putting differences aside, and volunteering.

Mr. Fenwick said he moved here in August and that he had moved from California, but was from the northwest. He spent 30-plus years in the fire service. Mr. Fenwick said there is the Highway 95 corridor and the rail system. Mr. Fenwick said to tell him what kind of professional doesn’t respond. The infighting in this department, keep it behind closed doors. Mr. Fenwick said he came from a volunteer department. It’s not “train until you can’t get it wrong”. His life and his wife’s depend on it. It was unbelievable to him. The level of support from the community, these are the people here. Commissioner Kimball explained that he was referring to certain comments made. Mr. Fenwick said he attended a meeting and saw red flags. A new chief will need to get on the same page. Commissioner Kimball said when referring to a volunteer department, all of these personnel could turn in their gear and still eat next week. Mr. Fenwick said he really appreciates what the volunteers do, and he encouraged personnel to get back on track and stop infighting. Commissioner Kimball said Mr. Fenwick’s observations are not lost on the department. Mr. Fenwick said he wants the fire department to be successful and just really focus a little bit. South Boundary is a professional fire department.

Jon Vangesen said he has 35 years in public safety. Mr. Vangesen commented on what he has heard in the last few months. Mr. Vangesen explained why they want to bring in someone with experience and who is willing to build a better team. We all know it’s a difficult job and he thinks they demand the same level of service and professionalism. Mr. Vangesen said if the Fire District doesn’t find someone, don’t abandon the thought as there are good leaders in the community. You just need to find the right person.

Ms. Wilkinson said she attended a meeting last year and most people here were at that meeting. Ms. Wilkinson said she was horrified by what she saw. The behavior was so bad she that when she went to bed she couldn’t go to sleep. The Commissioners behaved badly; the Chief behaved badly. Firefighter Cori Vandecoevering explained the reason was having had to deal with the stress for so long. Firefighter Cori Vandecoevering added that there are always two sides to every story and only one side is being heard so the public is coming in and seeing the tension. Ms. Wilkinson explained what she saw at the last meeting in that she only saw Mr. Janssen and Firefighter Saldana raising concerns. Captain Roy Holzhauser said Firefighter Saldana was also a member of the department and could’ve taken care of those issues. It was said that Firefighter Saldana is still on the department and she is also on Medic 6. Mr. Janssen provided information on his employment background and said he’s never been a part of an organization that is this dysfunctional. There are cliques.

Mr. Janssen described a recent call he responded to and said he was directly called last week to help and transport someone. Someone had then contacted the chief about him responding to that call.

Assistant Chief Wilkerson explained that if personnel are not current, they are not to go on calls. Those personnel know that if they aren’t current, they cannot go on calls and we have to be on

the same page. Without Chief Rohrwasser here, it's been different. When personnel have been gone, they need to give the Fire District a call so they can get back into training, etc. Mr. Janssen said he fully agrees, and he would like those rules to be applied equally as there are several firefighters who are not current who are responding. Assistant Chief Wilkerson said if that is happening, he would like to know about it.

Steve Armstrong said he's had the advantage of not coming to these meetings. There is an opportunity now to select a new chief and to get the best person qualified for this job. He would think the Fire District would want to set up a system where you get input from the Commissioners and the Chief gets input and all of the personnel issues get handled separately. It puts people on the spot and Commissioners and staff need to work together and set up a mechanism. This is a professional fire department; although they're possibly not getting compensated as much as they should. Thanks was voiced for Chief Rohrwasser for all that he has done. The Fire District needs to focus on being a professional fire department. Property taxes are increasing so hopefully that will provide equipment. The Fire District needs to prioritize equipment that might be needed. Mr. Armstrong wished the Fire District good luck.

Peter Polt requested that when the fire chief gets picked, it would be great for him or her to meet with the community to hear concerns, etc., and to have open communication.

Various members of the community and District personnel left the meeting.

7:13 p.m., Commissioner Cavender moved to go into executive session pursuant to Idaho Code 74-206(1)b, to consider the evaluation, dismissal or disciplining of, a public officer, employee, staff member, individual agent, or public-school student. Commissioner Swisher second. Commissioners voted as follows: Commissioner Cavender "aye", Commissioner Swisher "aye" and Commissioner Kimball "aye". Motion passed unanimously. The executive session ended at 8:06 p.m. No action was taken.

8:06 p.m., Commissioner Swisher moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Cavender second. Motion passed unanimously.