

Wasatch County Fire Board of Directors Meeting

Tuesday November 13, 2018

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

Those in Attendance:

Spencer Parks -excused

Mike Petersen

Steve Farrell

Greg McPhie-excused

Kendall Crittenden

Danny Goode

Mark Nelson- excused

Chief Ernie Giles

BC Jason Provost

BC Gary Sessions

BC Ben Fitzgerald

Fire Marshal Clint Neerings

Fire Warden Troy Morgan -excused

Wasatch County Advisory Board

ESCI Presenter -John Stauffer

Items of Business to address:

Minutes

The minutes of the October 9, 2018 board meeting were presented to the board for their review and approval.

A motion was made by Councilman Crittenden to approve the minutes of the October fire board meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilman Goode and the motion passed all in favor.

Warrants

The listing of warrants totaled \$144,435.32. This total included the added warrants and the payroll transmittals.

Councilman Goode asked about the landscape bond.

Chief Ernie Giles explained that if someone doesn't have their landscaping in, they can bond. Once they finish their landscaping we reinspect and release the bond back to them.

A motion was made by Councilman Peterson to approve the warrants as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilman Goode and the motion passed all in favor.

Chief report

Chief Ernie Giles asked the council to review the 3rd quarter financials and approve them for his yearly audit.

Councilman Steve Farrell commented that the legal fees are looking much better.

Motion to approve 3rd quarter financials made by Councilman Goode seconded by Councilman Peterson motion passed all in favor.

Chief Ernie Giles presented the preliminary 2018 budget amendment as well as the preliminary 2019 budget. He stated that there might be some last-minute changes to the budgets as we just send firefighters to help on the California fires and that will affect the budgets.

Councilman Crittenden- How long does it take for the payoff from California to come through.

Chief Ernie Giles- Last year we didn't receive payment until July the 11TH

Councilman Crittenden- Who pays it and does it cover wages and equipment?

Chief Ernie Giles- California has declared it a state of emergency so FEMA will pickup about 75% of the cost of the fire which covers Wasatch County's costs.

Chief Ernie Giles- The guys who went to California are: Ryan Lafontaine, Troy Morgan, Jeremy Hales, Chet Crook, Charlesworth, Preston Borne, Danny Bueller. On the district side the firefighters that went are: Dylan Vanwagoner, Kenneth Kendall, RL Duke and Jed Olsen. We also sent 3 engines, we had a little issue with one of them in Cedar City and had to have the turbo changed out.

Councilman Peterson- how do these fires compare to the ones earlier in the year? Are these fires worse or are they bigger?

Chief Ernie Giles- - the Santa Ana winds are anywhere from 50-75 mph

Councilman Steve Farrell- lets finish the budget and then we can get into this

Public- Can you explain the legal fees and why they have gone up 300%?

Chief Ernie Giles- We are done with everything as of about a month ago, we won the assessment lawsuit as well as the ERU case. They have done a massive amount of work to prepare for the trial and we are still seeing billings for it. This is work that has been done this year as they have been to court 3 different times.

Councilman Steve Farrell explained that the law firm still has to write the motion for the judge to approve to wrap up the legal matter.

Public- Is this the last of this year's fees that we have to allocate for next years budget to wrap it up.

Councilman Goode- There may be some outstanding fees while they close the lawsuit up.

Councilman Steve Farrell asked if the judges decision is appealable.

Chief Ernie Giles- said that they have already passed their 15 day window.

Public- Where did they money come from to bump those legal fees up so much?

Chief Ernie Giles- We increased the budget last year for legal fees and we have pulled from other portions of the budget that came in slightly under budget.

Public- Is there anything on the budget that we decided not to do in order to pay for these legal fees?

Councilman Goode- There is not really one specific thing, we have tightened our belts everywhere across the board

Councilman Steve Farrell- We also had some reserve funds from prior years

Chief Ernie Giles presented the 2019 proposed budget and stated that we will be posting this information on the website later this week. He also said that tonight we will set our budget hearing date. If anyone has any issues, please to talk to him before the budget hearing. Last year we actually ended up making about 60k extra for going to California.

Councilman Danny Goode- So they pay for use of the equipment as well?

Public – How come the travel budget is so much higher for 2019

Chief Ernie Giles- explained that for the last few years we have been trying to do our training in house. However, with the reorganization he would like to start ramping up the training program.

Councilman Steve Farrell- I think that you need to recognize that we have cut this budget for the last 3-4 years as close as we could to make it work.

Chief Ernie Giles- I need to set the hearing for December 11th at 6pm

Councilman Crittenden made a motion to set the budget hearing for the 2018 amended budget, set the 2019 budget and set the 2019 meeting schedule for December 11th at 6pm. Councilman Petersen seconded it the motion passed all in favor.

Councilman Steve Farrell asked the Chief to finish his update on the California Fire

Chief Ernie Giles- We sent the guys to the California fire and they had a breakdown issue in cedar city on one of the county engines. They are currently there doing orientation, truck inspection etc.. before they

are actually allowed on the fire. They should start on the fire line tomorrow. Task force one has already been deployed.

Councilman Steve Farrell- What are their works hours, is it 24 hours on and 24 hours off? Are they mopping up hotspots? Are they on the fire line?

Chief- They actually will work a 12 hour shift and then have 12 off. They will be trying to keep the fire from jumping to the other side of Malibu Canyon and keep it contained so it doesn't get up into the homes, but with 70mph winds it will be tough. Last year's group was awesome.

Fire Marshal Report

Fire Marshall Clint nothing to present today, unless there are questions.

Councilman Crittenden- On the affordable housing board -they want to know about the 20k check that was paid for a project. They would like to see a breakdown of the fees.

Chief Ernie Giles- .00075 charged on square footage

Councilman Crittenden – Have your people look into it.

Chief Ernie Giles- We will get it before Monday.

Fire Warden Report

Fire Warden Troy Morgan is in California

ESCI Presentation

Chief- About a year ago we decided to have a needs assessment done. The advisory board came up with ESCI to hire, we haven't had a needs assessment in 12 years and they should be done about every 5 years. The Impact fee study portion will be done by Lewis and Young- they figure 2-3 months and they should have that completed. It was quite an endeavor to do, and it was a lot of work. The ESCI report has been on our web for 45 days or so. We have made a few changes in the report that we thought were wrong. The needs assessment gives us a road map to get where we need to be. John was the lead man on the project and I will go ahead and turn it over to him.

John Stouffer- This is an organizational assessment. It was a real pleasure working with this group, the fire department, ems county employees, it is a good group of people here. Our job is not to tell you what you think you want to hear but to tell you what is best for the community. I won't get into every detail of this report, I will touch on the main elements. Feel free to ask questions if I can't answer write your question please write it down and get me your contact information and I will be happy to follow up. First thing I want to point out is this fire department is not a Cadillac department, this department is bare minimum. I see some departments where they have a lot of unnecessary toys, you don't see any of that here. This is a 115-page report with about 90 figures. Community and organizational overview- a

critical issue is staffing. Our report is based on the information that we had at the time, there have been a few changes since then. Administrative support staff- definitely not overkill, usually there is more support staff. It is usually about 15 percent and Wasatch is at 8 percent. Emergency staffing employees-Wasatch county is well below average in volunteers as well as career firefighters. Want to point out that the comparison studies are with other similar places/departments. We are not comparing Wasatch to Los Angeles.

Councilman Danny Goode- There are 8 more onboard now

Chief Ernie Giles- Yes and we have added 3 more to our 2019 budget.

John- staffing on EMS has actually dropped. Staffing for EMS is augmented by the firefighters. There have been some changes to the numbers on the EMS billing.

Councilman Crittenden- are these new numbers then because these don't match what is in the charts.

John- Yes, our QA department missed some things and it is on us. Numbers are misleading because there are transports billed in 2017 that may not have been collected until 2018. The actual collection rate is 52 percent.

EMS Director Clair Provost- John can I make a point to the public that doesn't understand collection- Medicaid and Medicare will only pay a certain amount and then you mix in bad debt and that makes things worse. You can bill whatever you want but the federal government and state won't necessarily pay it.

Manager Mike Davis- So you are taking the EMS budget and adding it to the Fire Budget?

John- if you merge 2 organizations into one and maintain current staffing this is what you will get budget wise and expense wise. We can add 7-8 percent to ems revenue now that we know the better collection rates.

Manager Mike Davis- On the EMS we collect so much and I assume that is the recurring revenue.

Councilman Steve Farrell- How do you determine the increase in the revenue?

John- it is based on historical increases and apply an average increase. One of the biggest challenges was to get complete incident data. Fire data came from state Fire Marshall office and the EMS data came from the bureau of EMS. State agencies collect a limited amount of data. So, it doesn't give you the whole picture. We tried to get CAD data from the sheriff's department, but they refused to give us any data.

Public - From Jordanelle to the east side of the basin (Hideout, deer vista etc..) How long is the response time?

John- 12 minutes of travel

Councilman Goode- Ernie do those response times look accurate to you?

Chief Ernie Giles- Hideout and Tuhaye are further, we also have reciprocal agreements for those areas. It also depends on the time of the day, during the day it is slower. At nighttime response times are faster.

Public - This is assuming someone is in the Jordanelle station and they are not already elsewhere.

John- The true national definition of response time is from the time the 911 call is received to when the unit arrives. Alarm handling time is from when dispatch picks up the phone to when they call out the response unit. The actual response times are not shown very accurately because the data set didn't show which calls were emergency calls vs non-emergency calls. We usually only base our numbers on emergent calls.

EMS Director Clair Provost – The public probably thinks that 18 minutes response what is with that?

Fire Advisory Board Member- I want to make sure that everyone understands, John had mentioned that there was missing call data. The Sheriff office did not release the data about the call times, it is critical as a community that we demand that kind of documentation be released. I want that documentation, so we can use it to improve.

Fire Advisory Board Member- We need the rest of the council in here to hear this.

John- I don't want to hammer the sheriff department

Fire Advisory Board Member- That information is critical to the fire department, EMS and the community.

John- dispatch told me they are not secretaries and said the fire department can come and get their own data. Then I spoke with her boss and he said they could get the data, after a month had gone by the sheriff department told ESCI that they just didn't have time to do it. We recommend a comprehensive system that links to their CAD system.

Councilman Goode-We have not heard of this, did anyone else know about this. If the Council had known this was happening, we could have reacted.

Public- We paid for this report as taxpayers.

Manager Mike Davis- We should ask the sheriff, he is not here to defend himself. I was there, and I heard the call and it didn't happen that way.

John- The sheriff has limited staff and not enough time. The fact that we didn't have CAD data didn't skew our analysis. An example of the data problems, we did an analysis on response times in Heber and they were horrible, but we realized that wasn't right. Peoples address was "Heber city" even though they don't live in city limits.

Fire Advisory Board Member- CAD data feeds the record management system where you get incident reports, that is what we need to build the fire department budget. Management needs to address this.

John- I don't know what their resources are in terms of staff, it would be nice if the sheriff department could do medical priority dispatching, but it is a complicated situation. There was only one negative person, the sergeant in charge was very nice but ended up saying that they just don't have the time.

Fire Advisory Board Member- We need to link the system, so we all have access to the reports– it shouldn't be an issue of time on the sheriff's end.

Councilman Steve Farrell- I would imagine we have a record of every call and dispatch we just need to get the information.

John- Here are turnout times for EMS, this is from the time the call came to EMS to the time the ambulance left. These times are long because their people are paid on call. Also, this is a large county with a lot of rural roads and you are just not going to get very low response times. 2 minutes is a reasonable standard for FT paid firefighters, but not for volunteers. ISO rating is a fire protection class rating system and impacts your insurance (1 is best and 10 is worst). In 2015 it was 06/6x the 6 class applies to communities within 5 miles of a fire station and 1,000 feet of a water supply the x class is for properties within five road miles of a station that are not within 1,000 feet of water supply. This impacts insurance. If I built a house in Wasatch County, I would probably do a sprinkler system to benefit insurance cost.

Fire Marshall Clint Neerings- It depends on your insurance provider, if they will recognize the sprinkler system. The multi-family and commercial is ruled by international fire code.

Public- We don't require them correct

Clint- The fire district is over commercial and multi-family.

John- We recommend a minimum staffing of 5 people at Jordanelle and Heber, a BC in charge of all EMS issues (as well as the POC ems providers), a division chief, training BC, fire marshal, inspector and fire warden. In the support services division have a BC responsible for training and safety a captain assigned to conduct training, a logistics office. Alternative for adding personnel- hire 4 firefighter paramedics initially, have at least one actual paramedic at each crew and assign them as the 4th position on an engine crew. We strongly believe that a merger of fire and EMS is the way to go. We have recommended to others that a merger is a bad idea, however in the case of Wasatch County we think it is a good idea. The fire district and EMS should continue to use POC employees as long as they are still active. When possible, the POC should do non-critical transports, the FT staff should do the critical transports. Here is estimated first year costs to add 19 more people, it shows about 1.9 million more. We estimate additional one-time cost for additional start up (uniforms, etc...) There are other options to an immediate legal merger, because there are a lot of things to work out if you merge ems into fire. You can do a formal collaboration, each continues to be separate and maintain their current status. You can start with administrative collaboration and personnel management, functional collaboration where you can join training etc. EMS and Fire are pretty much there now in terms of an operational collaboration. Essentially you are living together before you get married.

Councilman Goode- Can you go back a few slides to the one showing the loss if a merger took place.

John- To do what we are recommending you will need another 1.7million. The merger is not to save money, it is to improve the quality and efficiency of service.

Fire Advisory Board Member- The biggest cost is the additional personnel correct?

Councilman Goode- Most of the cost is the projected personnel that we don't have on staff yet.

John- We also got the collection rate data last week, we found out the collection rate is a lot better than we had thought.

Councilman Goode- Mike I want to ask you a question, do you think from the presentation that this is all the numbers? I think it is rather rosy.

Manager Mike Davis- I could not tell of the bat because you have 2 things going on, the cost of reorganization and the cost of merging are all in one pot.

John- it is not cut and dry because they operate as an integrated service as it is so it's hard to break that cost out.

Manager Mike Davis- We pay the fire district about 45k per year to use those firefighters.

John- Trying to break the costs between EMS and Fire out has been a challenge for fire service for years

Councilman Goode- On the future projections is the assumption made that the county makes no financial contribution once the merger is done?

John- No assumption of the county paying, that is a political decision. ESCI came up with our improvement goals, short term, mid-term and long-term improvement goals. A concern was career firefighters were working as firefighters coming in on their days off as volunteers, we suggest talking to an attorney about FLSA issues. Suggest engaging in strategic planning, mission statement, values etc... Identify the priorities of the county citizens, could conduct community surveys and find out what the community wants. Find out what they want and what they are willing to pay for. Internal communications, it is suggested that more structured and regular staff meetings are held. Consider publishing quarterly newsletter. Shift BC's and captains should have regular meetings with FT and POC volunteers. Upper management (by our model) should have at least 2 meetings yearly with FT and POC personnel. Work with Wasatch county to develop structured and formal hiring processes and promotional processes. WCFD should also develop formal job descriptions. Suggest dropping mandatory requirement for new and current ems to obtain firefighter certification. POC firefighters that don't function in an ems roll should be allowed to drop the advanced EMT licensure. As demand for service increases- monitor impacts on safety as a result of sleep deprivation, 48 hours shifts can be problematic. Capital facilities planning- growing population will result in new demand and new call density locations have a long-range capital facilities plan. Patient billing -they charge a rate of 9.7 percent and we think that is high we typically see 5-7 percent of amount collected.

EMS Director Clair Provost- We have started researching other billing companies and we may switch or try to get lower rates.

John -Do an outside audit every year on billing collections agencies. As things grow, salary and benefits costs increase, you may want to consider increasing your plan review fees. See how your fees compare to other similar departments. We suggest you transition to electronic training and the training reports should be shown publicly and throughout the organization. It is suggested that you take greater advantage of UVU's services – they don't charge for their services, the county has under-utilizes them. Update standard operating guidelines. ESCI thinks the council, the building department and the fire department need to meet and re-evaluate. There are different priorities for the building department and the fire district, you need to look at other communities of similar size and see what they do to work together. The county should reconsider residential sprinkler requirements for new construction... about 90 percent of homes that have sprinklers the fire is suppressed. The county should consider reasonable residential sprinkler requirements.

Public- This is regarding places on the east side of Jordanelle with longer response times. The county commissioners stopped requiring fire sprinklers in March of 2017 for homes that are attached (plex's). Wouldn't sprinklers go a long way in suppressing those fires until the fire department can get there?

Manager Mike Davis- said they are required

Public – They are required for stacked but not attached buildings

Fire Marshall Clint Neerings- They are not currently required for attached buildings

John- You have about 10 minutes before you have flashover so if you live way out in the boonies and your house catches on fire, it is more than likely going to be gone. If they don't get there within 10 minutes and flashover occurs, you're going to have a mess.

Public -I am asking the county commissioner if they would give power to fire department to be in on the planning, to be involved and require sprinklers. It would make a difference. The cost is on the consumer. The cost of putting sprinklers in is minimal, if one of those houses catch on fire then the other 5 will go.

Councilman Steve Farrell- We will take this information under consideration and with the help of the advisory board we will come up with something that will work. Every community model is different, there is no consistency.

Advisory Board Member- There is huge trade off between the deployment of sprinkler systems (paid by homeowner and then they will get lower insurance rates) and fire station (paid by taxpayers). Over time you get not as rampantly rising fire department costs (taxes) because you don't have to have firefighters spend so much time fighting fires because the sprinkler systems are putting out the fires faster.

Councilman Goode- It was a complex issue, it wasn't unanimous, and we will look at it again.

John- Moving on, we suggest installing alarms in all of the stations and an inventory control system. Establish an equipment reserve fund. Property valuations and tax revenues need to be continued to be monitored annually. Tax revenues are the largest source of revenue for the district and it is suggested to thoughtfully adjust their tax rates. Take advantage of grant opportunities, if you can hire more people look into applying for the SAFR grant- will provide funds to hire new people. Long term strategies: the county council has many responsibilities besides the fire department. The council has done a great job of overseeing the fire district, but it is an A typical model. Most fire districts are overseen by an independent board of elected officials. We believe you should start looking into having the fire district overseen by an elected board of commissioners (5-7 members) instead of the county council. The citizen advisory board is an excellent idea and we suggest you keep utilizing them. As far as the fire stations are concerned, we suggest adding sufficient sleeping quarters to Heber station. Has that changed chief?

Chief Ernie Giles- no

John- Heber station-need to replace and possibly relocate the fire station. The new station should include a training center, this can be done incrementally. Timberlakes and Wallsburg stations are basically storage facilities or garages. You need to consider upgrading those stations. Regularly monitor service demand to determine staffing needs.

These large monolithic stations are becoming more rare because they are so expensive you can build a mixed use facility with commercial space and residential apartments (this type of forestation will produce income). Suggest that the fire district look at some unique configuration that will lower costs and bring in revenue. The conclusion- We know that these recommendations entail substantial costs. These can be done incrementally. Adding more personnel needs to be a priority as well as merger of fire and ems. This is a growing county and the current fire department is at the very bare minimum. As the county grows it needs to be prepared with proper fire and medical services. Nothing that we are suggesting is fluff – these are necessary recommendations. We strongly believe that if you follow these recommendations the result will be a more efficient, more cost effective and a higher quality fire protection and ems.

Councilman Goode- Can you go back 2 slides, it says a merger of ems and fire should be a priority and to begin with administrative and functional collaboration. How is that different then what we have today?

John – Right now you have an operational collaboration, you don't have an administrative and functional collaboration. You would need to combine administrative functions, the fire chief oversees everything, combine training and a whole list of things. You operate as if you are one organization until you can work out the legal parts. If we eventually merge Clair be moved to BC of EMS but he is still getting paid by county.

Councilman Peterson- You said a merger worked for some communities but not others why would it work for ours and not the other ones?

John- Other communities it may not work based on a bunch of other issues, but it would work for Wasatch County.

Councilman Peterson- throughout Utah and other places what is the most common, merged or not?

John- I see both all the time, it is fairly equal. Just did one in Summit County Colorado, they will be merging.

Advisory Board Member- A lot of times when it doesn't work, it is because they don't want to merge. Wasatch county wants to merge and they already work together very well.

John- If labor doesn't want a merger it won't work.

Public- It doesn't necessary save money to merge why should we do it?

John- Efficiency. Better service would come from a merger.

Councilman Steve Farrell- How would it be more efficient?

John- all operations under one organization and they would be acting as a unit. All employees would be trained at the same level, can do quality management. There are a lot of things that a merger would make more efficient.

Public- Would it make it more efficient because you may have a paramedic on an engine that can get there faster than the ambulance?

John – Not necessarily, there is a growing body of evidence that if you have basic life support first responders who are oriented to work with paramedics, you tend to get the best outcomes. Putting too

many paramedics on the scene can actually make things worse. Medics cannot maintain their skills because there are too many paramedics on scene.

Public- What justification is there for merger?

John- Pure plain efficiency. You would have 2 ambulances at Jordanelle and Heber staffed 24/7 with a minimum of one true paramedic at each (it wasn't this way when we started our report). You also have combined training and you will have enough people to do quality management.

Councilman Steve Farrell- Why are you saying to merge but then let ems drop their fire one certification? I believe that would segregate it into two groups and work against the merger.

John- Go through all POC fire and EMS, those that rarely participate- get rid of. Those that like doing it and are active keep them. Eliminate unnecessary requirements, the volunteers are being required to have fire training it is a lot of training. You have people that want to volunteer on the ambulance and are willing to help out but may not have the time to maintain their firefighter certifications. We are saying reduce some unnecessary requirements.

Councilman Steve Farrell-I can see your point on the volunteers, but the FT employees should have both?

John-Absolutely. FT staff needs to maintain firefighter and their emt, it is just the on-call people that should be able to drop the other training.

Councilman Steve Farrell- This gives us a very good starting point. With the help of our advisory board and the chief we need to map out a good direction to go.

Councilman Goode- It sounds like they have already implemented some of these things.

Councilman Steve Farrell- The advisory board has gone through this with a fine-tooth comb and has some good recommendations. We will need to sit down with them and go over it together. Thank you for all of your hard work and the information you have provided.

A motion was made by Councilman Goode to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Councilman Peterson and the motion passed all in favor.