

Wasatch County Fire Budget Hearing

Tuesday December 11, 2018

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

Those in Attendance:

Spencer Parks

Mike Petersen

Steve Farrell

Greg McPhie

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

Public

Items of Business to address:

Councilman Farrell re-opened the Wasatch County Fire District board meeting for the public hearing for the budget.

Resolution 18-02 Amending the 2018 Budget.

Councilman Farrell- We are going to start out by the amendment for the 2018 budget and the Fire Chief will go over that with us.

Chief Giles- I have put the budget up here on the screen, this budget has been up on our website since early November. There are a few changes to it, we ended up sending some firefighter to help out on the California fire- we had to make some adjustments for the cost of that. We will be reimbursed for that, however that reimbursement will not come through until about July of 2019. I have the original budget listed as well as the amended, the fire warden is larger than we figured – this is due to the billing going through late last year so we had two billings charged in 2018 (even though one is from 2017). Looking at

the salary and wages, again those were adjusted for the California fire. The wages is not just for the California fire, we also reorganized and went full time down in the Heber/Midway station. Our legal fees were over around \$150,000.00, we did win the lawsuit and it is settled and over with. Winning that case saved the taxpayers millions of dollars, yes- we had to spend a few thousand to get there but it was worth it in the long run. Under equipment and materials, we have had a few break downs, we had a pump go out as well as a motor go out in one of the fire engines. We budgeted for a new pumper that we won't receive until February of 2019. If you look at the contributions to the fund balance \$409,800.00. I will entertain any questions on the amended budget. If you look at it, we were under and some we were over some.

Councilman Farrell- Any questions from the board? Seeing no questions from the board I would like to open this up for public hearing on resolution 18-02, amendment to the 2018 budget, any comments? Seeing none I will come back to the board for action.

Councilman Peterson made a motion to approve resolution 18-02 approving the amended budget for 2018. Councilman Crittenden seconded the motion and the motion passed all in favor.

Resolution 18-03 Adopting the 2019 Budget.

Chief Giles- This is our proposed budget, there were a few increases on our labor end, I am looking at hiring 3 more full time personnel. You can see this is the same number that we looked at on the amended. This is pretty self-explanatory without going through each line item. You can see our legal fees are much lower. We have added to the travel and training, we are trying to send more firemen to outside training. Some of the things we accomplished in 2018- we were able to acquire an aerial apparatus (the ladder pumper) that is paid for. Also, the pumper we will receive in February is paid for, the service district has no debt. We have sent 2 firefighters to investigator school already and we have 14 going to officer 1 training starting in January. We reorganized as of June, we now have a BC over each A, B, C shift and captains below that. We made a lot of changes during the reorganization and that is part of the reason the wages column has changed.

Councilman Goode- Also the needs assessment was in there correct?

Chief Giles- Yes, we had a needs assessment done by a company that gave us a great road map of where to head in the next 0-5 years.

Councilman Goode- It was the needs assessment and the advisory board working together to implement the suggestions made.

Chief Giles- The advisory board has been on a little more than a year and they have been a great asset to the department and the council.

Councilman Crittenden- Why the increase in the equipment supply I notice it increased from 2017 to now.

Chief Giles- We have a new engine that we are going to have to equip with supplies such as hose and nozzles. The ladder that was previously bought was almost \$100,000.00 to equip. Our air packs alone are \$50,00.00.

Councilman Peterson- You mentioned that you are looking to hire 2-3 more full time employees. How many Full Time and Part Time do we have now?

Chief Giles- Including the secretary, marshall and warden there are 24 and we are looking at putting 3 more on. With the size of the department and the call volume it is getting hard to fill and cover shifts. Through the guidance of the advisory board we are actually looking at hiring some PT employees from other districts to cover shifts.

Councilman Farrell- I would like to open this up to public comments on the 2019 budget.

Merry Duggin- I live in Daniels, I am a board member of the Wasatch Tax Payers association. I am also the chair for the Wasatch County Fire Advisory Board. We have been in operation for about a year and a half and the difference we are seeing in the department is profound. The needs assessment that we recently received will allow us in 2019 to formulate a strategic plan for the fire district. We took a very close look at this budget for 2019 and this definitely supports the direction the advisory board and the needs assessment thinks the department needs to go. The advisory board recommended a tax increase that was approved in 2017 and went into effect this year. The money is already in the budget and it has implemented some of the improvements we want to make. The advisory board is completely in support of this budget. We are getting a lot of great questions at the public hearings. I want the public and the council to be assured that the advisory board is keeping a close watch on what is happening in the fire district. We have great people currently working for the district, but we need more training, we need more equipment, we need more people. I hope you will support this budget.

Dr Murdock- Heber City. I was involved with EMS for about 33 years. I keep asking if we are combining EMS and fire and I was told that there were no ongoing discussions. I have looked at the fire website and the ESCI report and it definitely shows combining EMS and Fire, so that is apparently the proposal. I don't see that showing on the budget, so why are we including EMS revenues when this is a fire budget and not an EMS budget? They are not combined officially, so why are all of the revenues from EMS going into the fire district?

Chief Giles- To answer your question on the revenue that is generated from the county that is titled EMS, the fire district is running about 70 percent of the EMS calls and the county keeps all of the revenue that we generate. If we are splitting hairs, the fire district is generating some revenue for the general fund or the EMS fund. Fire is actually at \$407,000.00 and the revenue as presented in the ESCI report is just under 1 million. If the fire district is generating roughly 65-70 percent of that we are probably generating about \$250,00.00 that is actually being generated for the EMS fund.

Dr. Murdock- I would like to follow up. If we were discussing the actual proposal about the fire /ems merger, I would love to have some input on that. I would take over the ambulance for free, I wouldn't charge anything to run it. When I was with the ambulance for 22+ years, we ran it at no cost to the county. They did provide some funds to purchase an ambulance every 4 years, so we have to acknowledge that. Now that it has turned into this full-time program. The fire-based services are running ems, look at the cost expenditures, most runs are EMS, so fire is not going to fires, it is going to ems calls. I really hate to see fire and ems combine, it looks like we are supposed to do it across the county and that is not what is happening. A lot are disbanding because medicine is here, and fire is here, and they are not the same thing. From a cost standpoint there has never been a time that you combine fire and ems and the cost has gone down. If you look at the cost that you see here and what

they propose in the ESCI report with combination of fire and ems, the costs will go up. They don't show the appropriate numbers, they combined fire and ems and make it look like we are saving money but that's not reality. The reality is that ems is providing a significant number of funds that they could use to fund themselves. If you took the budget that they bring in, they would be happy campers to take that money. I don't like to see ems budget being included into the fire budget. If it is because we are increasing the FT people responding and if you think that helps things (the crew is doing a great job) the response times are not better, in fact they are worse than when I was in ems services. Look at what will happen now, if you have a fire who will go to the fire and who will go to the ems calls? Mandatory law will be required to increase the personnel to respond to the calls. You have to have the FT people go to the fire and then who will take the ems calls and transfers? So, of course they are increasing the full-time staff. If we took ems out of the equation and focused on fire these costs would be tremendously lower.

Councilman Farrell- Any other comments? Seeing none I will close the public hearing on resolution 18-03 approving the 2019 budget and come back to the council for action.

Councilman Peterson- I would like to address one thing with Dr Murdock. Last month we did the ESCI presentation, did you get a chance to review that? That is recorded correct?

Chief Giles- Yes, it has been on our website all month. ESCI is the firm that we hired to do the study between fire and ems

Councilman Peterson- That was a pretty lengthy discussion, they talked about the benefits and disadvantages of combining and it might not save money but cost more to combine. To follow up on that isn't that decision going to be made early next year?

Chief Giles- I don't know when it will be made, we are looking to the advisory board to study it and bring ideas and recommendations to the county council.

Councilman Peterson- Dr Murdock I would encourage you to come to those discussions and give your input then as well. I appreciate what you have said tonight.

Councilman Farrell- Is there a motion on resolution 18-03?

A motion was made by Councilman McPhie to approve resolution 18-03 adopting the 2019 budget. The motion was seconded by Councilman Goode and the motion passed all in favor.

Resolution 18-04 Setting the Date and Time for the 2019 Fire Board of Directors Meetings.

Councilman Farrell- The meeting schedule is set to 4:00Pm on the second Tuesday of every month.

A motion was made by Councilman Parks to approve resolution 18-04 setting the date and time for the 2019 fire board of director's meetings for the second Tuesday of the month at 4PM. The motion was seconded by Councilman McPhie and the motion passed all in favor.

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