

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District
25 January 2021
0900

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call – Present: Johnson, Webber, Dorney, Archibald. Unknown if Aversa was attending by phone at this time.

Call to the Public – there was no call to the public; Chairman Johnson read a letter that had been received from Dennis Conner, it is attached.

Minutes – Approval of the minutes – listed separately

- Nov 23, 2020 – Summarized version had been sent to each Board member for review; motion to accept the summarized version was made by Archibald, seconded by Dorney, motion carried unanimously.
- Dec 28, 2020 – Motion to approve as presented by Dorney, seconded by Archibald, motion carried unanimously
- Jan 4, 2021 – Motion to approve by Dorney, second by Archibald, motion carried unanimously
- Jan 8, 2021 – motion to approve by Archibald, second by Dorney, motion carried unanimously.

Chief's Report – Dec 532 calls, A 18, B 13, C 21. Busiest zones were 1 & 5, year total is 635 calls: 257 fire related, 378 EMS Calls with transports of 362. Apparatus and personnel wise, we're doing good. Acting Ops Chief Meredith gave a report on personnel items. Since the last meeting we've had one recruit begin the process, three complete the process. In terms of departures, we had one recruit drop out of our process because he was hired full-time by another department, and another drop out due to life changes. Meredith gave short bios on each of the three new members.

Financial Report – Financial reports were presented and reviewed by Rutter, motion to accept finances as presented was made by Webber, seconded by Dorney, motion carried unanimously.

Action Items:

Board Survey – Dorney requested to table this to a further meeting; tabled.

Replacement of Fire Chief – Johnson proposed having an interim chief or creating an IGA with Palominas to have Buonaccorsi continue as Acting Chief. Archibald stated that the position should be posted for applications. Archibald requested that Acting Chief Buonaccorsi & the Board meet, discuss a plan, and provide feedback at Board morning next month. Dorney asked that a timeframe be part of the plan. Johnson requested a list of requirements for the Chief position. Johnson advised by Acting Chief Buonaccorsi and Admin Goodwin that requirements are in the policy manual and in the current contract.

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Archibald asked how many people had submitted applications for the Board position. Acting Chief Buonaccorsi stated there are currently 6 to review.

Bank Accounts and Signers: Johnson had been added to the National Bank account, but not yet added to Chase or Hughes. Johnson stated that Acting Chief Buonaccorsi needs to be added to the accounts since we need two signatures on the checks per Board direction. Motion made by Archibald to add Acting Chief Buonaccorsi to all 3 accounts. Motion seconded by Webber; motion carried unanimously. Webber would arrange a schedule with the banks.

PSPRS Local Board – Archibald stated she wanted to have her replacement on the PSPRS Local Board prior to her departure in February. Motion was made by Archibald to appoint Annette Dorney to the Local Board once Archibald resigns her SEFD Board position. Motion seconded by Webber; motion carried Johnson/Webber/Archibald Aye; Dorney abstained.

Executive session for Financial Audit – The Audit is not completed, no Executive Session held.

Discussion and possible action regarding results of Financial Audit – tabled

Executive session for Legal Advice on Toxic Work Environment- Motion made by Archibald to enter executive session to consult with Attorney Aversa, second by Dorney; motion carried unanimously. Open Session ended 10:04 am.

Back in regular session at 11:36 am. Johnson advised that all discussions in Executive Sessions are to be kept confidential. Attorney Aversa on the phone at this time.

Johnson stated that the Board had received and discussed the Investigator's Report regarding Toxic Work Environment complaints; Johnson read some of the bullet points recommended by Attorney Aversa. In summary:

- In response to some concerns brought forward in the summer of 2020, the Board engaged an independent investigator. Various SEFD members, as well as non-members, raised concerns in late fall of 2020 and had the opportunity to speak with the investigator and be interviewed. The investigation is now final and the Board and Acting Chief Buonaccorsi are in receipt of the investigator's report.
- The investigation included allegations of retaliation against SEFD members for their involvement or perceived involvement in the matter that occurred on Nov. 9, 2018, the Belt incident. There was no evidence of retaliation of the members that were interviewed.
- The investigation included allegations of workplace conduct and violation of SEFD policies. The investigation revealed conduct which violated SEFD Policies. Acting Chief Buonaccorsi appointed to his position with all the powers and authority of the SEFD's Fire Chief is addressing any disciplinary action for SEFD members arising from the investigation.

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- Conduct by Chief De Wolf does not warrant additional discussion as the Board has terminated his employment contract as of January 5, 2021 for other reasons.
- No more discussion or action is needed regarding this investigation. Chief Buonaccorsi is taking care of the action on an operational level, not on a Board level, however the continuing examination by the auditors for the amount of unauthorized compensation paid to Chief De Wolf remains an open issue and we have not received that report yet.

Archibald asked Acting Chief Buonaccorsi to state any actions he has taken regarding the Medical Chief Position that was held by Laura Sink who is currently on paid leave. Acting Chief Buonaccorsi has eliminated the Medical Chief's position since those duties have been given to the Acting Operations Chief. The Acting Operations Chief is able to handle both positions.

Attorney Aversa advised that Acting Chief not provide any information regarding disciplinary actions that are in process. Attorney Aversa asked the Chair if he was going to respond to two main persons involved in the investigation. Webber made a motion to have Chair Johnson provide a written response to those individuals, Kathe Prentice and Mark Bennett, on the results of the investigation. Seconded by Dorney; motion carried unanimously. Attorney Aversa stated a request to the Chair but it was not audible, so Johnson relayed the message that there is a pending of a waiver and a release of claim from Laura Sink and that she recommends the Board make a motion to have Acting Chief Buonaccorsi negotiate that waiver. Webber made a motion to have Acting Chief Jon Buonaccorsi negotiate on behalf of the District for relief and waiver of claims with Laura Sink. Seconded by Archibald; motion carried unanimously.

Attorney Aversa asked if the Board wants the final settlement with Laura Sink to be returned to the Board for final approval or does the Board want to delegate that authority to Acting chief Buonaccorsi to authorize. Archibald made a motion to have the Chair represent the Board once the settlement is completed by Acting Chief Buonaccorsi. Seconded by Dorney; motion carried unanimously. Chair Johnson advised Attorney Aversa, that the Acting Chief would negotiate with Attorney Aversa and Laura Sink, and the Chair would review and approve the settlement on behalf of the Board.

Archibald and Webber advised the attendees that there is public information that will be forthcoming for anyone who requests public documents regarding the results of this investigation. The documents are being prepared by Attorney Aversa, and can include redactions.

Adjournment – Motion by Dorney, second by Archibald; motion carried unanimously.

*Minutes approved 2/1/2021 by Reba Webber,
Board Clerk*