



Sedona Fire District

2860 Southwest Drive, Sedona, Arizona 86336
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REGULAR BOARD MEETING
Station #1 – 2860 Southwest Drive – Sedona – Multipurpose Room
Tuesday, April 15, 2025 / 3:00 PM

~ M I N U T E S ~

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Pursuant to notice, a regular meeting of the Sedona Fire District (SFD) was called to order by Chair Helen McNeal at 3:00 PM on Tuesday, April 15, 2025. Acting Recorder to the Fire Board, Tricia Greer, recorded the Minutes. A quorum was present and the meeting, having been duly convened, proceeded with business.

Board Present: Helen McNeal – Chair; Corrie Cooperman – Clerk; Diana Christensen; Scott Springett; and Lance Waldrop – Members. Others Present: Fire Chief Ed Mezulis; Assistant Chief Jayson Coil; JVG Finance Director Gabe Buldra; Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell; Representatives from Local 3690 and ASEA; Attorney Bill Whittington; and Tricia Greer – Recorder.

A. Salute to the Flag of the United States of America and Moment of Silence to Honor all American Men and Women in Service to Our Country, Firefighters, and Police Officers.

Board Chair Helen McNeal led the Pledge of Allegiance and Fire Chief Ed Mezulis reported on the three Law Enforcement Officers and four Firefighters lost in line of duty deaths since our last meeting.

B. Roll Call of Board Members.

Recorder Greer called the Roll. All Board Members were present.

II. EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION – YEARS OF SERVICE & BADGE PINNING

A. Years of Service

1. Kirk Riddell, 35 years of service

Fire Chief Ed Mezulis stated his pride in recognizing SFD employees for their hard work, dedication and to honor years of service and promotions. He then introduced Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell and his wife, Debbie, and congratulated him on 35 years of service at SFD.

B. Badge Pinning

1. Cooper Carr, Promotion to Captain/EMT

Newly promoted Captain Carr received his badge and was pinned by his wife, Courtney.

2. Jonathan King, promotion to Captain/Medic

Newly promoted Captain King received his badge and was pinned by his mother, Mindy.

3. David Yingling, promotion to Captain/Medic

Newly promoted Captain Yingling received his badge and was pinned by his wife, Kelly.

4. Jeff Hamm, promotion to Engineer/Medic

Newly promoted Engineer Hamm received his badge and was pinned by his wife, Elizabeth.

5. Jeremy Lilly, promotion to Engineer/Medic

Newly promoted Engineer Lilly received his badge and was pinned by his son, Dallan.

6. Kirk Riddell, promoted to Deputy Fire Marshal

Newly promoted Deputy Fire Marshal Riddell received his badge and was pinned by his wife, Debbie.

III. BUDGET WORKSHOP

A. Discussion of possible staff direction regarding the 2026 Budget.

Chief Mezulis introduced the representatives for the two employee groups – Greg Eberlein for Local 3690 and Kris Ahern and Matt Spinelli for the Administration/Support Employees Association; they can answer questions regarding this year's Meet and Confer process. Chief Mezulis announced staff, in conjunction with the labor groups, is working to update policies and procedures to improve working conditions. Staff will speak to the aggregate amounts included in the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget, but not to specific "asks" of the employees, as they need to be codified in the new Memorandums of Understanding for approval by the Fire Board next month. SFD is defining priorities, as well as maintaining wages and working conditions, in line with retention efforts of similar agencies.

JVG Finance Director Gabe Buldra stated today is the initial workshop to present the aggregate budget; staff's role is to provide the final budget for the Fire Board's tentative adoption at the May 20th Board meeting with the 20-day posting starting then; after that, the budget cannot be increased without re-posting to the public. Final adoption of the budget will be requested at the June Board meeting.

Mr. Buldra presented the proposed FY2026 Budget with division revisions and adjustments. There were several questions from Board members which Chief Mezulis and Mr. Buldra answered and clarified. Staff noticed inflation is affecting the "bottom line". Mr. Buldra presented specific budget slides which are attached to these Minutes.

Tax Levy Revenues				
		2025 Approved	2025 Projected	2026 Draft
Real Estate		20,410,436	20,410,436	22,772,287
Fire District Assistance Tax		390,000	390,000	412,701
		20,800,436	20,800,436	23,184,988
Non Tax Levy Revenues				
Communication Rents		200,000	233,772	200,000
Ambulance Services		2,300,000	2,380,227	2,300,000
Non District Fires		400,000	604,071	400,000
Other Income		739,645	1,718,523	593,500
		24,440,081	25,737,030	26,678,488
Expenses				
Personnel Wages		11,831,097	11,134,972	12,281,718
Personnel Taxes & Benefits		7,307,230	7,393,936	8,129,446
Buildings & Land		475,750	469,109	459,550
Vehicles & Equipment		812,635	712,020	933,300
Communications & IT Services		1,114,066	931,057	1,226,103
Meetings, Travel & Training		498,291	321,937	562,886
Managerial Costs		881,608	825,989	1,010,177
Debt Service		-	-	615,000.00
Grant Expense		50,000.00	-	-
		22,970,677	21,789,022	25,218,179
Other Financing (Uses) Sources				
Funding to Capital Reserves		1,400,000	3,948,008	1,400,000
Funding to(from) Reserves		69,405	-	60,309
		1,469,405	3,948,008	1,460,309
		24,440,081	25,737,030	26,678,488

Mr. Buldra noted a big “add” to the proposed budget is for station construction with reserve funding for capital outlay, as well as new trucks, radio systems, and tower upgrades. There is a possibility of seeing reduced costs in radio infrastructure in partnership with the City of Sedona.

Ms. Cooperman asked if the proposed mil levy rate of \$2.84 could decrease; Chief Mezulis responded affirmatively, as these are the “raw” numbers. Ms. Cooperman noted the increase of 9.51% since last year; she stated we are all aware of inflation, but that was a “big increase”. Mr. Buldra stated if the station construction reserve was taken out, the increase would be at 6.6% as it is almost a third of the increase. Chief Mezulis anticipates a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process beginning soon, meetings with potential contractors in August, and preliminary station drawings in October to be followed with financing in December or January. He also noted the large increase in the per square footage costs to build fire stations and said the total is expected to be \$12 Million, although \$10 Million is currently budgeted; SFD will have a more accurate cost after the RFQ process. Ms. McNeal stated SFD has held the mil levy flat for two years and now needs to adjust. There were no further questions from the Board for Mr. Buldra and staff.

The labor representatives stated they are collaboratively working with Chief Mezulis on a two year contract, which over two budget cycles, will provide value to our members and citizens. Chief Mezulis thanked the representatives for the collaborative process and open dialogue. He stated they are professionals and appreciated their input with a goal to be cost effective and serve the district efficiently. Ms. McNeal said it sounds like a good process and thanked all for participating.

B. Schedule time for May 13 Budget Workshop.

Chief Mezulis asked the Board to select a time for the Budget Workshop. After a brief discussion, the Board consensus was to begin at 1:00 PM on May 13th.

IV. REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

A. Public Forum

1. **Public Comments**
2. **Executive Staff Response to Public Comments**

No members of the public requested to speak.

B. Consent Agenda – Discussion/Possible Actions:

1. **March 18, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes**

As the Board did not receive the full set of Minutes in the Board packet, Chair McNeal tabled approval of the Minutes until the next meeting.

C. Financial Report and Updates –Director of Finance Gabe Buldra

1. **Discussion/Possible Action: Review and approval of March 2025 Finance Report**

Mr. Buldra presented the March 2025 Finance Report. His slides with financials are included with the Minutes. There were no questions from the Board.

D. Staff Items:

1. **March 2025 Monthly Staff Report**
 - a. **Operations Activities – Assistant Chief Jayson Coil**
 - i. **Significant Events**
 - a. **All-Hazard**
 - b. **Emerging Issues**
 - ii. **Human Resources**
 - a. **Staffing**
 - b. **Promotions**
 - c. **Significant Issues**
 - iii. **Administration**
 - a. **News**

b. Upcoming Events

Chief Coil pointed out it is Wildland Fire Season and he is attending related meetings. National and state issues could have an impact on SFD in the coming months. The problems with staffing at the Federal government have worsened and those will be compounded by the fact that the State of California is adding 2,500 Firefighters – some of which will come from the National level as their jobs are compromised in the current volatile climate. This will reduce our ability to count on those resources. The wildfire problem is not well understood in Washington, which is not entirely a partisan issue and started a long time ago. He also noted monsoons are predicted to be on time, or even early, this year.

There are some vacancies in Administration and staff is currently evaluating job descriptions for current and future needs, as well as considering resumes and applications. Chief Mezulis said SFD was one of JVG's first financial customers and staff is currently in talks with JVG to come into line with current needs.

b. Community Risk Reduction Activities – Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell

i. Inspection Activities

ii. Fire Investigations

iii. Notable Events

Deputy Fire Marshal Riddell stated CRM has had many FireWise consultations with local residents and businesses and is booked through the end of May. He gave two FireWise presentations at the community library. DFM Riddell is finding the community very receptive to his recommendations. Plan reviews are increasing as building is on-going. The Forest Road extension is near completion and should be operational by the end of the month. The City of Sedona has broken ground on the Uptown parking garage.

Public Education opportunities have been slow, but are starting to pick up. SFD responded to six fires in the last month, but nothing too extensive. He and Fire Inspector Brian Russell attended the Wildland Fire Academy in Prescott last week – they both received Wildland Fire Investigator designations. Inspector Russell has also received his FireWise instructor certification. Fire Inspector Russell also recently attended a Drone Certification class, and he can now be used on hikeouts and for fires. Chief Coil said even though drones can be bought by the public, our public safety employees must receive a higher certification and more restrictions in operations.

SFD is holding its 22nd Annual Wildfire Preparedness for area residents on April 26th and 27th in the Village of Oak Creek and on May 3rd and 4th in West Sedona; citizens can bring their yard clean-up cuttings and brush for disposal. Ms. Christensen asked if DFM Riddell had contacted VOCA regarding the Wildfire Preparedness event; he had not, but is happy to do so. Board Member Waldrop noted the large increase in short-term rentals in his neighborhood of Doodle Bug and Lake Drive which has led to unmaintained properties and decline in defensible spaces; DFM Riddell suggested the City of Sedona will do code enforcement within the city limits and Yavapai County outside the city limits.

c. Operational Support – Division Chief Lechowski

i. EMS Activities and Updates

ii. Fleet Activities and Updates

iii. Other program updates

As Chief Lechowski is out of the office today, Chief Mezulis reported that our new Mechanic, Rhys Tarver, is quickly becoming a great asset for the district and providing Mechanic Michael Sheehan the opportunity for more management-related activities. SFD recently sold some retired apparatus for \$6,000. Mechanic Sheehan saved the district funds by driving to receive the re-chassied ambulance. Geographical Information Systems Analyst Matt Spinelli is working with Active 911 and the Cottonwood Dispatch Center on the ISpy program to more effectively use the product.

In IT, Telecom Manager Bob Motz continues to identify infrastructure needs. He is finishing up the Station 3 tower contract using his specifications. By the end of summer, SFD should have new power supplies to all our sites. Mr. Motz is also collaborating with the City for new sites and SFD may get a new tower site west of the City.

Thanks to a donation from a citizen, EMS has received new innovation cameras and training will begin on those shortly. Chief Lechowski is continuing to work with the hospital in interfacility transports to improve safety.

Firefighters in the current Paramedic class will soon be ready to work with the crews. Chief Coil updated the Board on a new group called the EarthFire Alliance launching new fire-mapping satellites to provide vastly improved fire information and resolution by the end of 2027; this will improve the accuracy of our knowledge of wildland fire locations and which areas to evacuate.

d. Training and Preparedness – Division Chief Baker

i. Training Report

ii. Wellness

Chief Mezulis reported the four new Firefighter hires have been given station assignments and will become part of staffing this weekend. SFD is replacing ballistic plates – not because they were damaged, but because they have an extraordinarily short shelf life and must be kept up to date. SFD is updating our Captain and Engineer Position TaskBooks and preparing for the Engineer testing. Water Tender training and off-highway vehicle training is coming up. Policies and procedures are being updated. Wellness functional screening will be held soon.

e. Fire Chief Report – Fire Chief Mezulis

i. Call Volume/ Response Review

a. Incident Summary and Year-to-Date Comparison

b. Response Times

Chief Mezulis reported calls for service and response times (slides attached). He is addressing the public and meeting with local groups including the Sedona XYZ business leaders, which is a demographic SFD has not previously encountered. He is also meeting with HOAs regarding FireWise and directing them to become FireWise compliant through the Department of Forestry and Fire Management. He is in discussion with a company for fire sprinkler system improvements throughout the community.

ii. Purchase Orders over \$10K

Chief Mezulis reported the following Purchase Orders over \$10,000: \$37,400 – Glidescope Intubation Equipment (approved); \$60,000 – Sharepoint (approved); \$59,235 – Turnout Gear (approved); \$11,195 – Annual Drug Box Fees; and \$10,823 – Hazardous Gas Monitors.

E. Discussion/Possible Action: BAC for possible approval of purchase of IT Vehicle for new IT position from Sanderson Ford in an amount not to exceed \$57,000.00.

Chief Mezulis explained the need for this vehicle for the Radio Technician and it is an approved capitalized purchase from last year. Ms. Christensen asked why the district was purchasing a Ford 250 opposed to a smaller vehicle; Chief Mezulis explained this vehicle would be used in four-wheel drive situations to carry heavy equipment to IT off-road sites in the next few years. *Chair McNeal entertained a Motion to approve the purchase of an IT vehicle from Sanderson Ford in an amount not to exceed \$57,000; Mr. Waldrop so moved and Ms. Christensen provided a second; the motion was unanimously approved.*

F. Discussion/Possible Action: BAC for possible approval for truss system replacement at Station 3, contracting with Tierra Verde Builders in the amount of \$125,750.00, with unforeseen contingencies and changes in construction costs, not to exceed \$150,000.00.

Chief Mezulis informed the Board this necessary safety replacement was identified during a training session on the tower at Station 3 as roofline “waves” were visible and a crack increasing over the length of the bays; it was determined when the station was built in the late 1990s that four trusses were not tied to each other causing a weakness in the roof. Project Manager Scott Schwisow received bids for an engineer to build plates to bring the roof up to code. There are no existing architectural plans for the building and the original architect company is no longer in business. Mr. Schwisow only received two bids out of nine contractors and the lowest bidder was selected. Tierra Verde Builder’s bid included permitting fees and to help SFD walk through the permitting process. Staff determined funds are available this year instead of delaying this critical replacement until next year. Mr. Waldrop commented he wants to move quickly to mediate this dangerous situation and Ms. Cooperman added that this is definitely essential. *Clerk Corrie Cooperman moved to approve the Station 3 truss system replacement using Tierra Verde Builders in the amount of \$125,750 with unforeseen contingencies and changes in construction costs not to exceed \$150,000; Board Chair McNeal provided a second and the motion unanimously passed.*

G. Keep Your Pet Fire Safe Week, May 5-12, 2025.

Chair McNeal updated the district on the Pet Fire Safety Week and thanked all those who have contributed toward this event especially DFM Kirk Riddell and BC Jordan Baker. She distributed a pet safety handout as part of this program and thanked our partners at the Sedona Humane Society, Sedona Community Center, and Verde Valley Caregivers for their contributions. DFM Riddell will be doing a pet safety walk at Sunset Village on the 11th of May, as well as distributing smoke alarms. The program includes giving out free pet alert stickers at the stations to be used through Active 911 or ISpy to notify Firefighters of pets, and part of the program are smoke detectors that emit lights to make finding pets easier during residential fires. Fire Chief Mezulis added that this will not shift our operational readiness or how SFD currently attacks residential fires. Two press releases regarding this event will be released tomorrow to inform the community, as well as information on social media and the SFD website.

H. Board Member Updates and Ideas for Future Meetings.

Ms. Cooperman attended a potluck with SFD's four new Firefighter recruits and thanked the staff for arranging this opportunity. She said the district can be very proud of its new Firefighters.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair McNeal adjourned the meeting at 5:20 PM.

Corrie Cooperman, Clerk of the Board

:tg