



Sedona Fire District

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REGULAR BOARD MEETING & BUDGET WORKSHOP
Station #1 – 2860 Southwest Drive – Sedona – Multipurpose Room
Tuesday, May 20, 2025 / 3:00 PM

~ M I N U T E S ~

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

- 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.
- B.** Roll call of Board Members

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, May 20, 2025. 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 (via Zoom); Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell; Division Chief Jordan Baker; friends and family of SFD members of new Firefighters and Employee Award recipients; and Tricia Greer – Acting Recorder to the Fire Board.

Ms. McNeal led the Pledge of Allegiance and requested a moment of silence to honor the ten firefighters and four law enforcement officers who died nationwide in the line of duty last month.

II. EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION – YEARS OF SERVICE & BADGE PINNING

A. Badge Pinning – New SFD Firefighters: Chief Mezulis stated a welcome to the new firefighters.

Braden Flannery was pinned by his wife, Taylor, who is a Firefighter with the Tonto National Forest. He grew up in Texas and Southern California and is the oldest of four siblings. Firefighter Flannery moved to Arizona in 2010 and attended Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University.

Lennon Gregory was pinned by his wife, Chelsea and daughter, Aspen. He was raised in Sedona and has a passion for nature, hiking, and served as a wilderness guide in Colorado; Firefighter Gregory previously worked for Copper Canyon Fire and attended Yavapai College.

Trent Mears was pinned by his mother, Gretchen. He is from the Los Angeles area and began with LA County Fire Department's Explorer program at 18 years old. Firefighter Mears holds a Bachelor's degree in Fitness Wellness from NAU and interned with Summit Fire to design its fitness programs. He received his certifications through Oxnard College Regional Fire Academy.

Jeffrey Miner was pinned by his father, Jim, who was a long-serving SFD volunteer and ladder company captain. Firefighter Miner was born and raised in Sedona. He attended Southwestern Oregon Community College for Fire Science and earned his paramedic certification from Arizona Academy of Emergency Services. He started his fire career at Ponderosa Fire, served at Summit Fire for 8 years, and previously was a SFD Reserve.

Division Chief of Training Jordan Baker stated he had the responsibility to coordinate the New Hire Academy, which was totally restructured two years ago. These four new Firefighters worked 150 hours over the three-week academy with outstanding support from the SFD instructor cadre in all disciplines at SFD. This class of firefighters stood out for their team work to succeed. Each year, a member of the academy is honored with the top award for the highest written and individual scores; this year's award was given to Firefighter Braden Flannery. Ms. McNeal congratulated the four new firefighters and commended them on their enthusiasm and positivity after three weeks

of hard work in the academy. She thanked them for their sacrifices and stated they are deeply appreciated.

B. Presentation of 2024 SFD Annual Employee Awards.

Chief Mezulis presented the 2024 employee awards, as follows:

Firefighter/Engineer of the Year – Engineer Millan Zorita: provided consistent leadership during major transitions at Station B3; mentored new firefighters and developed future engineers; built a cohesive crew and structured training program; and scored highest on the Engineer exam.

Officer of the Year – Division Chief Jordan Baker: rebuilt the Training Division with structured crew and battalion training; upgraded Verde Valley Training Center for live burns; elevated district-wide operational readiness and professional development.

Admin/Support Employee of the Year – Mechanic Michael Sheehan: provided dependable on-call fleet support beyond normal hours; kept apparatus operational and response-ready; and is known for professionalism, patience, and a strong team spirit.

Customer Service Award – Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell: leads CRR with consistency and takes on multiple roles; quickly addresses public concerns and access issues; maintains strong communication with staff and community.

Outstanding Citizen or Community Organization – L3690 Honor Guard. This award recognizes citizens or local organizations that exhibit outstanding achievement, community service, and partnership. The Local 3690 Honor Guard serves at community events, commemorations, and at memorial services for fallen firefighters and law enforcement members.

Unit Citation – Technical Rescue Team (TRT) Instructor Cadre – Cooper Carr, Brent Johnson, Lars Romig. As instructors, they have: standardized TRT procedures and equipment; created and trained SFD's hoist rescue team with DPS; enhanced technical rescue capabilities district-wide; and the cadre's dedication and expertise have significantly elevated SFD's technical rescue program. Chief Mezulis added that SFD is unique among fire districts in that all our operational members are trained in Technical Rescue.

Citation of Valor – Firefighter Mark Essary is recognized for: extraordinary bravery and selfless actions under life-threatening conditions during the Sunset Mobile Home Park fire; entered a structure under defensive fire conditions using Vent-Enter-Search techniques to locate and extricate a victim; demonstrated sound judgment by balancing risk versus reward while operating within the chain of command; a deep commitment to training, duty, and public service, exemplifying the highest standards of the fire service; and although the victim did not survive, Essary's courageous efforts gave her the best chance at life.

Assistant Chief Jayson Coil acknowledged other outstanding SFD employees were nominated for the awards and each met the high standard of good competence, benevolence, and integrity.

Ms. McNeal surprised Fire Chief Ed Mezulis with the Community Service Award. He has demonstrated outstanding performance and dedication and is actively involved in Sedona, as well as surrounding communities. She said his dedication and commitment are unmatched. Chief Mezulis is heavily involved in many aspects of Verde Valley agencies including serving on school boards, community projects, 4H and FFA clubs. Ms. McNeal then called for a 10-minute recess at 3:30 PM to congratulate our new firefighters and employee award winners. The meeting reconvened at 3:45 PM.

III. BUDGET WORKSHOP

A. Discussion of possible staff direction regarding the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

B. Discussion/Possible Action: Approval of the proposed Sedona Fire District Fiscal Year 2026 Budget.

Finance Director Gabe Buldra from JVG joined the meeting via Zoom for the budget workshop. Mr. Buldra noted SFD is reaching the culmination of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget process. He noted the Board and staff had met numerous times to compile and analyze the proposed budget. He reiterated that if the Board approves the budget

for tentative adoption and posting today, we would not be able to increase the amount. Mr. Buldra reviewed the Capital Plan for next year including \$655,000 for debt service for Stations 4 and 5. There is also \$3.3 Million in station cash expenditures to be applied towards Station 4 construction outside of financing as well as smaller projects at Station 3 and Station 4 annex. Under Apparatus, staff is proposing \$1.6 Million for a Type 1 engine, ambulance rechassis, and a water tender. For Equipment projects, the largest one is in Telecom radio system upgrades, as well as battery upgrades for towers, and new radio locations. The Logistics equipment section includes a cardiac monitor, extrication set, and hose replacements. \$1.5 million is proposed from general fund to fund capital projected at half a million in interest earnings to help fund the \$8.2 million in capital fund expenditures next year in conjunction with our projected beginning cash balance of \$10.6 million within the capital plan.

Mr. Buldra asked if the Board had questions; there were none. Ms. Cooperman stated we have had lengthy discussions about the budget and went over the Capital Plan in detail. Mr. Buldra pointed out the budget projections for next year with 5.8% in assessed value and the final tax rate of \$2.75, about a 5-cent increase (down a penny from our last meeting two weeks ago). The final proposed budget is \$26,051,330 and Mr. Buldra hopes we see another year of strong AV in excess of 5%; there is plenty of capacity in this budget for today and looking into the future. He opened the meeting to questions from the Board.

Ms. McNeal said she noticed a small downward change in real estate revenues; Mr. Buldra replied we are looking at a 5% growth off the prior year with a drop in the tax rate. There were no other questions. ***Ms. McNeal called for a motion to approve the proposed Sedona Fire District Fiscal Year 2026 budget for posting; Ms. Cooperman so moved and Board Member Lance Waldrop provided a second; Ms. Cooperman stated her appreciation that the budget was kept under 7% (6.59%) budget increase given the inflation the district has faced over the last year; the motion was then unanimously approved.*** Ms. McNeal congratulated everyone on a job well done. Board Member Diana Christensen stated her appreciation for all the budget workshops which helped her understand the process.

IV. REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

A. Public Forum:

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

No member of the public requested to speak.

B. Consent Agenda – Discussion/Possible Actions:

- 1. Revised – March 18, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes (Tabled at April 15, 2025 Meeting)**
- 2. April 15, 2025 Regular Meeting and Public Budget Workshop Minutes**

As the Board received their Board packets later than normal, Chair McNeal decided to table the Consent Agenda until next month, which will allow Board Members more time to review the Minutes.

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

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

Mr. Buldra then went over the April Financial Report (slides attached). He noted the tax and revenue was down; he sees this happening across the State as the larger mortgage companies paid late, but it should be corrected next month. The non-levy revenue was slightly under for the month by \$14,787. Ambulance revenues continue over-budget as well as investment earnings, and wildland deployment revenues. On the Expense side, personnel at \$1.4 Million was under budget by \$25,000. Buildings and land were under budget by \$7,800. Vehicles and Equipment was over by \$26,920 with a purchase of turnout gear, but it is not over for the year. Year to date total revenue is at \$22,116,000, which is under budget by \$345,000 and what is driving that is our variance on property tax collection. Non-levy revenue is very strong with ambulance revenues, wildland deployments earlier in the year, as well as interest earnings. Expenses are under budget by \$639,000 year-to-date. We are under budget on all major expense categories. At this point, we have expended 79% of our budget with 21% remaining for May and June. As there were no further questions, ***Ms. McNeal moved to approve the April 2025 Finance Report, Ms. Cooperman seconded and the motion was unanimously passed.***

D. Staff Items:

- 1. April 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 stated significant events included three hiring and assessment center processes since the last Board meeting; all of those utilized - for the first time - a behavioral rating system which standardizes the scores using consensus of reviewers; this is considered a best practice and will be reassessed in a few months after personnel are onboard. The district feels these processes were worth the effort and has confidence in the results.

Chief Coil updated the Board on the current Greer Fire and noted the mandatory evacuations for Eager have been lifted. As an inch of rain was received in the SFD area in May, we are in a “wait and see” mode for wildland fires. SFD is ready as all operational personnel have received wildland refresher classes provided by Battalion Chief Todd Miranda. At the Federal level, there is some uncertainty about having people in place to respond which could impact agencies depending on how many wildland fires are ongoing across the country. Ms. McNeal asked if the Greer Fire would cause SFD problems if we are the 4th, 5th, or 6th fire in the near future; Chief Coil responded fires have no boundaries and we all work together; for now, he does not see a problem and trusts the leaders of Department of Forestry and Fire Management to make the best choices.

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

- i. Inspection Activities**
- ii. Fire Investigations**
- iii. Notable Events**

Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell stated consultations are down, but they continue to talk to residents about FireWise including at public events. Plan reviews are increasing. He updated the Board about recent events including the City’s Spring Fling in the beginning of April. The Wildfire Preparedness clean-ups were held over two weekends; he said 211 drop-offs came into the Village of Oak Creek location. West Sedona was slower due to the City of Sedona picking up brush clean-up curbside. He reported the Keep Your Pet Safe around fire event at Sunset Mobile Home Park; 15 pet alarms were installed; 7 smoke alarms were replaced; and 7 smoke detector batteries were changed; he thanked Ms. McNeal, Mr. Springett, and Chief Mezulis for helping out and appreciated the staff of Sunset Park for their help. There were two fires in April – one was a truck brake fire and the other was a pool heater that overheated. Two infant car seats were installed. Burn permits will end on May 31st for the season; SFD and Coconino Forest have no current fire restrictions; SFD follows Coconino National Forest and Yavapai County’s fire restriction advisories.

c. Operational Support – Division Chief Buzz Lechowski

- i. EMS Activities and Updates**
- ii. Fleet Activities and Updates**
- iii. Other program updates**

As Chief Lechowski was unable to attend, Chief Mezulis reported he is creating a framework for interfacility transports; SFD is working to use our resources more efficiently and getting patients out of Sedona Medical Center quicker. Additionally, Chief Lechowski has been gathering costs for accurate budget numbers; Chief Mezulis said it has been harder to get estimates because of the projected tariffs starting July 1st. We are training on the intubation cameras which were approved two months ago, and the crews will be using them soon. Under Fleet, the shop truck should arrive in a week and there is no update on the IT vehicles. Mechanic Sheehan is working on the new apparatus. Also, as part of the annual benefit, SFD performed a comprehensive review of its mental health package provided for our employees and families.

d. Training and Preparedness – Division Chief Jordan Baker

- i. Training Report**

ii. Wellness

Division Chief Jordan Baker reported:

- Four six-month evaluations were completed for current probationary firefighters hired last October – each member must score 70% on written and practical assessments and 3 of the 4 broke scoring records. All performance metrics and feedback were documented; Chief Baker has talked to all pertinent captains about the assessments.
- The New Hire Academy is complete; this is for the four firefighters receiving their badges today. Each met the required competencies and transitioned to 6-month shift assignments. Engineer position Task Book evaluations are this week for one individual; he finished the written test and Friday will be put through the practical assessments. This is a new more complex process as part of the entire training division revamp from two years ago. Chief Baker made sure all task books are NFPA compliant and meet OSHA standards. We are anticipating implementation of the new Captain position task books for July 2025.
- Blue Card command training is implemented on a quarterly basis for all operational employees with the next one scheduled for June. SFD sent one employee to the NFPA live fire training – this makes 7 live fire instructors making sure SFD meets and exceeds NFPA 1403 standards.
- There are currently several employees in Associates and Bachelor degree programs in preparation for 2026 engineer testing and 2027 battalion chief assessment centers. Chief Mezulis said in 2007, labor and management worked together to align job descriptions and promotional testing documentation using National Fire Academy-recommended levels. Chief Baker said SFD has high standards and sees the benefits of those.
- He attends monthly meetings of the Verde Valley Regional Training officer group to assess and update live fire training; SFD will be conducting live fire scenarios in a multi-agency setting.
- Policy development/reviews are ongoing; Captain Ralph Kurtz oversees it with other assigned staff members.
- Annual functional movement screening for all staff members will be held soon through our Wellness Committee in coordination with Solve Global physical therapists – the goal is to decrease on the job injuries.
- The on-duty Battalion Chief truck now has a single-use fire suppression blanket for electric vehicle fires; it can safely be used for electric vehicles and other car fires. The blanket quickly deploys and reduces temperatures from 1200 to 1400 F to less than 300 degrees in minutes; this helps protect interface areas of dry brush along roadways; Chief Baker said the cost was about \$1,300; he researched options, but felt this was the safest product for now. Board Member Waldrop thanked staff for their due diligence on this project as the market is being overwhelmed with similar products. Ms. McNeal offered her congratulations on Chief Baker's training functions and improvements.

e. Fire Chief Report – Fire Chief Ed Mezulis

i. Call Volume & Response Review

- a. Incident Summary and Year-to-Date Comparison**
- b. Response Times**
- c. Thank you letter regarding West Fork rescue.**

ii. Purchase Orders over \$10K

Chief Mezulis reported:

- The Uptown parking property was released by the City of Sedona; there is now interest by a private citizen to potentially purchase the property; if this occurs, an offer, utilizing SFD's policy, would come to the Board. SFD is integrating with the City on its Forest Road development process, which could substantially affect Station 4's current building and parking lot. This is to ensure SFD's property is used to best effect and offers an opportunity to offset Station 4 construction costs by a potential public surplus of property.
- He added to Chief Coil's report of the recent administrative candidate assessment centers and the amount of work staff put into those processes. Chief Mezulis said the processes revealed some opportunities for positively restructuring the administrative division.
- Local 3690 President (SFD Captain Rodrigo Sanchez) is participating in a leadership panel with the Professional Firefighters of Arizona alongside the Chief of Phoenix Fire and other leaders regarding Meet and Confer due to the statewide recognition of the success of SFD's process.
- Ambulance and response times are consistent with prior months.
- SFD employees recently attended the ESO software conference; we hope this helps with changes to the apparatus utilization data to reduce road time.
- Under Rescue and EMS, 87% of call volume is medical. Year over year, we are trending a little down in

amount of calls, but are now entering a busy season. There were 22 backcountry rescues last month; crews are continuing to improve our responses utilizing technology to pinpoint location of patients. Staff is currently evaluating opportunities to spread out responses over the stations to better balance the load.

- SFD received a thank you letter from a patient who was helped by Captain Mike Pace and crew.
- He received a call from a resident commending Captain Sanchez's crew at Station 1 for their help; the resident and his wife appreciated the care and compassion shown by the crew at several calls for medical emergencies.

E. Discussion/Possible Action: Board Agenda Communication for possible approval of the Gen Tech Telecom Generator project purchase in the amount of \$318,463.40 not-to-exceed \$350,000.

Chief Mezulis said we are in the midst of a Telecom upgrade and identified the need to improve power to our radio sites; the sites are powered through APS and backed up with generators – some of which are 20 to 30 years old; Scott Schwisow has worked on this project for several months with Telecommunications Manager Bob Motz to update the system; this purchase order is with GenTech, which is the DPS state-contract vendor. Gray's Propane will remotely monitor the generator's propane levels, which will remove the need to manually check each one. The equipment will be consistent throughout the district for ease of maintaining and repairing. This proposal wires all remote sites to current code. The quote for generators and related costs for installation sits at \$318,463.40, with the bulk being the generators which are 12 to 18 weeks out from delivery; after receipt, associated installation costs will occur; the reason for a not-to-exceed of \$350,000 is any problems will require additional costs; Chief Mezulis does not anticipate the project costing anywhere near \$350,000. An additional benefit is these are the same set as DPS uses and most of our remote sites are co-located with DPS. Mr. Waldrop stated he appreciates the economies of scale and partnership with parallel agencies in this purchase, and from his experience, he likes how maintenance can build kits for the equipment and work anywhere; he said this is best practice.

Ms. McNeal said she spoke to Attorney Bill Whittington regarding this purchase and additional necessary legal language. Chief Mezulis said Mr. Whittington recommended an addendum to the motion for purchases over \$100,000. Ms. McNeal said with recent administrative changes, this was inadvertently overlooked and believes the language provided will cover the need. *Ms. McNeal then entertained a motion of approval for the GenTech telecom generator project purchase in the amount of \$38,463.40 not to exceed \$350,000 with the small contract addendum provided by Mr. Whittington. Ms. Cooperman so moved; Mr. Waldrop provided a second; the motion was unanimously approved.*

F. Discussion/Possible Action: Approval of 2025 EMS Week Proclamation.

Chief Mezulis noted May 18th to the 24th is National EMS Week; he requested Board Chair McNeal read aloud the Board's proclamation; she noted it is the 51st anniversary of this commemoration to honor the EMS profession.

G. Board Member Updates and Ideas for Future Meetings.

1. Report of Activities -- Keep Your Pet Fire Safe Week, May 5-12, 2025.

Ms. McNeal stated the final results for the Pet Fire Safe Week are not yet in as rescue retrievers are still being installed in homes. She thanked staff and our partners for their work on this important event. She gave "kudos" to Chief Baker and Matt Spinelli for an outstanding public relations campaign and noted a good response on social media. There were no other comments or updates from the Board.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was then adjourned at 5:05 PM.

Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk

:tg