



Sedona Fire District

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REGULAR BOARD MEETING & BUDGET HEARING Station #1 – 2860 Southwest Drive – Sedona – Multipurpose Room Tuesday, June 17, 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 and Public Budget Hearing of the Sedona Fire District (SFD) was called to order by Board Chair Helen McNeal at 3:03 PM on Tuesday, June 17, 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:** Assistant Chief Jayson Coil; JVG Finance Director Gabe Buldra; Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell; Division Chief Buzz Lechowski; Josh Clouch – User Support Technician; Bill Whittington – Board Attorney; and Tricia Greer – Acting Recorder. **Absent:** Fire Chief Ed Mezulis

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

II. BUDGET HEARING

- A. Open Public Hearing for the Proposed SFD Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget
- B. Public Comments regarding the Proposed SFD Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget; Staff Response
- C. Discussion/Possible Action: Proposed/Posted Sedona Fire District Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget, Resolution #2025-01, Approval of Sedona Fire District Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget including Pension Funding and Salary Scale

Board Chair Helen McNeal opened the Public Budget Hearing and asked if any member of the public requested to speak; there were none. *Ms. McNeal then moved to approve the proposed Sedona Fire District Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget with Resolution #2025-01 including pension funding and the salary scale; a second was provided by Board Member Lance Waldrop.* Ms. McNeal then opened the discussion. Finance Director Gabe Buldra said the FY 2025/2026 tentative budget was posted for the legally-required 20 days and there were no known public comments. He said the proposed budget is set for \$26,051,330 at a proposed tax rate of \$2.7592 funding our capital reserve at \$1.5 million and includes appropriate staff step increases and other staffing previously discussed at workshops. Ms. Cooperman asked if this figure was the same amount as at the last budget workshop; Mr. Buldra confirmed it and stated if the dollar amount had increased, state law would require re-posting for 20 days. Ms. Cooperman said the Board has gone over details of this budget and had opportunities to ask questions about it. Mr. Waldrop commended the chain-of-command, as well as Mr. Buldra for being proactive and utilizing economies of scale; he hopes staff will continue this practice in the future.

Mr. Buldra then reviewed Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) pension funding policy. He reminded the Board that by approving this budget, they would also approve annual pension funding. He said a 2018 law ensured government agencies' knowledge of public safety pension funding and contribution requirements to maintain funding levels. The SFD actuarial report includes funded ratio, present value benefit, and actuarial assumed liability of a 64.1% increase and an unfunded liability of \$27.7 million. He said some agencies took out loans on the actuarial assumed liability – the concept was that PSPRS charged 7.2% interest and, at that time, it was possible to get a loan at 4%. JVG did not advise agencies either way, but a loan means

using a calculated assumed number and creating real debt; if an agency was unable to pay annual contributions, bond holders would remove assets. Some agencies with loans have continued to see unfunded liabilities increase and are paying more into the pension. SFD will need to pay down this liability more aggressively in the future, after there is more stability in the pension system. The goal is to be 100% funded, but this policy states we pay off at the actuarial calculated rate and be fully funded by 2036. He said next year, SFD will pay 49.57% and for new firefighters, 45%. Ms. Cooperman asked what percentage is actually going towards liability; Mr. Buldra replied SFD's normal rate is 15% and the other 35% goes toward unfunded liability.

Ms. McNeal asked for any questions or comments. Ms. Cooperman commended staff for the work and time put into this year's salary scale; she said the scale has been vetted and reviewed by the Board. There were no other comments. ***Ms. McNeal then called for a Board vote on the previously stated motion, which was unanimously approved.*** Ms. McNeal also stated her deep appreciation of the work done by SFD staff and JVG.

III. REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

A. Public Forum:

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

No one submitted a request to speak.

B. Consent Agenda – Discussion/Possible Actions:

- 1. March 18, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes (Tabled at May 20, 2025 Meeting)**
- 2. April 15, 2025 Regular Meeting and Public Budget Workshop Minutes (Tabled at May 20, 2025 Meeting)**
- 3. May 13, 2025 Special Board Meeting Minutes**
- 4. May 20, 2025 Regular Meeting and Public Budget Workshop Minutes**

Ms. McNeal noted four items under Consent Agenda needed approval and the Board has reviewed these Minutes in-depth; ***she then requested a motion to approve the Minutes, as listed; Ms. Cooperman so moved; Board Member Diane Christensen provided a second and the motion was unanimously approved.***

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

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

Finance Director Buldra presented the May 2025 finance report; he said tax levy revenue was slightly lagging at \$2.4 Million. Mr. Buldra reported a small variance of 1% year-to-date; the non-levy revenue was at \$338,000 – overbudget by \$53,000 – by ambulance revenue and interest income. On the expense side, SFD was underbudget across all major categories by \$242,000; the one exception was an overage of \$51,000 under Vehicles and Equipment. At 11 months through the current fiscal year, SFD's total revenue is at \$24.9 Million – \$1.1 Million over budget with non-levy revenues. Tax levy is \$260,000 under expectations (about 1%). SFD is at \$20,326,000 in total expenses – under budget by \$881,000 in all major expenses – 85% was for Personnel, 7% for Operations and about 3% for both Managerial and Communications; year over year, SFD ended the month at \$20 million total cash on hand – an increase of \$262,000 over the prior year; other assets increased from \$25.3 to \$26.7 Million (mostly due to a land purchase made earlier in the year). Total liabilities had a small decrease from \$33.4 Million to \$33.3 Million.

The Board had no questions. ***Ms. McNeal entertained a motion to approve the May 2025 Finance Report; Ms. Cooperman so moved, and Ms. Christensen seconded; the motion was unanimously approved.***

D. Staff Items:

- 1. May 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**

Assistant Chief Coil reported SFD had 44 applicants for the firefighter testing; currently, staff is verifying all listed certifications. Human Resources Manager Keona Freeman is scheduling interviews for August in order to establish a ranking list; Ms. Christensen asked about the list; Chief Coil stated the process would establish a hiring list which, per the approved budget, includes three additional firefighters to be hired for Station 6. Ms. Cooperman asked about the length of the application period; Chief Coil responded at least three months. Ms. McNeal inquired how 44 applicants compared to the numbers received in previous years; Chief Coil said it was a higher amount compared to 30-plus last year and 20-plus from the year before. Ms. McNeal asked if any candidates would be brought forward from last year's list; Chief Coil replied, no, lists expire after one year.

Chief Coil said the start dates for the three new Administrative employees would be in July, and the second round of interviews for two Fire Inspector candidates are scheduled. Chief Coil commented heat-related calls are on the rise; Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell and Captain Cooper Carr recently gave media presentations to reinforce the risks of hiking in 100+ degrees without being prepared.

Chief Coil remarked on the uncertainty in the wildland fire community regarding the 2025 Wildland Fire Executive Order of June 13, 2025, along with the budget proposals for the Department of the Interior and the creation of a new National Wildland Firefighting service across large swaths of the Federal government. The Executive Order imposes aggressive timelines for making changes; there is a good deal of ambiguity, tension, and questions from the National Wildfire Committee and Western Fire Chiefs Wildfire Committee. Ms. Christensen asked if whoever wrote the proposed plan was well-versed in wildland fire operations and safety; Chief Coil responded on the revised version, yes, as the administration received input from fire professionals. The Order may create a "very big lift" in tasks and budget challenges for non-operational support staff and Forest Rangers losing the ability to utilize personnel during non-fire seasons. He further stated fire agencies are in a "wait and see" period regarding the proposals.

Chief Coil reported significant fire activity in the northwestern United States recently, and, locally, the energy release component (availability of fuels and likeliness of fuels to burn) below the Mogollan Rim is at the 97th percentile – an almost-historic maximum; above the rim, is at the 90th percentile. The area will be hot and dry over the next seven days with critical fire conditions, which means aggressive fires are possible.

- b. **Community Risk Reduction Activities – Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell**
 - i. **Inspection Activities**
 - ii. **Fire Investigations**
 - iii. **Notable Events**

Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell reported the Community Risk Reduction (CRR) division maintains a status quo of activities in inspections, Firewise consultations, and plan reviews. CRR has two candidates for Fire Inspector moving forward in the hiring process on June 26th. Starting tomorrow and probably through the summer, the district will be in Stage 2 fire restrictions with the Coconino Forest; this means campfires, charcoal grills, welding, other gas-fired equipment, and fireworks are all prohibited (with some equipment allowed prior to 9:00 AM and after 8:00 PM). Ms. Cooperman noted she had received a Constant Contact e-mail providing the details of the fire restrictions. DFM Riddell also informed the Board that Arizona Water Company is replacing water mains on NavaHopi and upgrading to 8" pipes from 4"; this will help that subdivision.

DFM Riddell reported one fire occurred in May in the Village of Oak Creek on a home's deck caused by improper usage of extension cords for hardwiring tree lighting. The smoke detectors in the house (which was a rental) were not operational and the homeowner replaced them immediately.

DFM Riddell was interviewed by Arizona Family News about heat-related injuries and being prepared – adding that some Arizona State Parks are shutting down trails during the heat of the day.

a. Operational Support – Division Chief Buzz Lechowski

iv. EMS Activities and Updates

v. Fleet Activities and Updates

vi. Other program updates

Division Chief Buzz Lechowski reported he and a SFD Engineer attended a free, five-day behavioral health course called “Struggle Well” based on post-traumatic growth. Chief Lechowski stated it was a great class and would be beneficial for all SFD responders dealing with the aftermath of traumatic events including learning about resiliency and wellness practices; staff is planning to co-host the class with the Sedona Police Department, which would require rotating shifts through the course.

Chief Lechowski reported there are three Firefighters currently finishing Paramedic (CEP) programs (one of those has recently graduated and he is now working with the hospital to become a practicing Paramedic). Additionally, there are three more personnel interviewing to enter CEP programs at Granite Mountain Training and Coconino Community College. Chief Lechowski stated the Paramedic course work is challenging and very intensive. SFD continues to have an upwards trend in numbers of paramedics and SFD attempts to have two Firefighter-CEPs at each station on every shift as a baseline.

Chief Lechowski reported in-service training on the new video laryngoscopes, which are now on every ambulance and engine; this is a first-line industry standard. He reported the day after training, a patient in full code was intubated using the new technology.

Staff is still working with the Regional Dispatch Center on response plans. Also, SFD is six weeks into the new interfacility transfer communication model with the hospital; after eight weeks, the model will be evaluated for effectiveness. Staff will soon be meeting with the base station medical director to minimize risks to responders on Phoenix and Flagstaff transports.

Chief Lechowski stated SFD is beginning to participate in the Narcon (naloxone medication which quickly reverses the effects of opioid overdose) Leave Behind program with the State of Arizona providing free kits for households suspected of drug overdoses; this has resulted in a 21% decrease of incidents within that sphere at the state level; Ms. Christensen commented on a similar lifesaving program in the San Francisco area when she worked in animal control. SFD is awaiting signature approval for the program from our Medical Director – other Verde Valley agencies are currently participating and many lives have been saved by the program. SFD encountered two overdoses in one week in our district.

Ms. McNeal asked about Fleet; Chief Lechowski said the new vehicles ordered are scheduled to arrive shortly. Our radio technicians are working on radio installations in vehicles, and Chief Coil reported at this time of year, air conditioning units are requiring lots of repairs.

b. Training and Preparedness – Division Chief Jordan Baker

vii. Training Report

viii. Wellness

Division Chief Jordan Baker was unable to attend today’s meeting; Assistant Chief Coil reported training delivery and wellness initiatives are ongoing and aligned with strategic focus areas.

e. Fire Chief Report – Fire Chief Ed Mezulis

i. Call Volume & Response Review

a. Incident Summary and Year-to-Date Comparison

b. Response Times

ii. Purchase Orders over \$10K

On behalf of Fire Chief Ed Mezulis, Assistant Chief Coil presented the Fire Chief report. Incident response has a slight decrease in fire/rescue responses for year to date; there were 16 backcountry rescues; he said all incident numbers represent the 90th percentile at 13 minute or less response time. Ms. Cooperman commented it is helpful to have a comparison of year over year and month over month comparisons of statistics. Ms. McNeal commented

she wants to see the percentages of different types of calls per station; Chief Coil commented we had that slide in past meetings and it is instructive for first due areas and planning training. Station 1 calls represent many interfacility transports; Station 3 runs significant numbers of calls in their own first due area. Chief Coil will request that information for future meetings. He also suggested a future meeting agenda item for response statistics (perhaps to be presented by Captain Jon King and GIS Analyst Matt Spinelli).

E. Board Member Updates and Ideas for Future Meetings.

Ms. McNeal reiterated the Board’s request to deep dive into statistics and call numbers at a future meeting. She then gave a reminder that the next Fire Board meeting was rescheduled for July 8th as the regular meeting date conflicted with the Arizona Fire District Association conference. Assistant Chief Coil added it would be unlikely to have all financial report information that early in the month.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chair McNeal adjourned the meeting at 4:08 PM.

Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk

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