

**Regular Meeting of the North Blaine County Fire District in the Council
Chambers – 81 Elkhorn Road, Sun Valley, ID
July 12th, 2023, at 10:00 AM.**

1. Call to Order.

Commissioner Gray called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

2. Public Comment.

Mat Hall, an on-call firefighter for the North Blaine County Fire District and Sun Valley Fire Department, of 769 Paintbrush Lane in Ketchum, would like to say thank you very much for supporting the housing effort for the first responder housing at Greenhorn. Please contact him if we need any help with the project. He is very invested in this project.

He has submitted a proposal for installing a flagpole at Griffin Butte through the Ketchum Sun Valley Volunteer Firefighter Association. It would be lit and dark sky compliant. Nothing is approved by the Association yet, but he would like to get Commissioner approval on this. Hunter Storey and himself would likely be the one to install the flag pole.

It would also be nice if we can update the lettering on the outside of Griffin Butte Station. It was partially taken down when we changed the name, and could probably be updated now. It would probably be good to get done through a sign company, and he is happy to help facilitate this. Commissioner Michael asked Mat about what the BLM lease agreement between the District and the BLM regarding the property and if there is any rules limiting the placement of a flagpole. The Commissioners do not think there are any restrictions regarding this, and the Hulen Meadows HOA does not have say in it either. The Commissioners are amenable to all of these suggestions. If there are no regulations that prohibit these changes, Commissioner Michael supports these plans.

MOTION:

Commissioner Michael moved to approve a flag pole and flag, as well as updated signage, at the Griffin Butte Fire Station; seconded by Commissioner Engelmann. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Michael, Commissioner Engelmann

NAYS: None

Chairman Gray thanked Mat for his input and suggestion of these changes.

3. Approval of the July 2023 Claims*.

Commissioner Michael says that the claims are pretty straightforward this month. We got a couple of new batteries for lawnmowers and weed eaters, and had some window screens repaired.

MOTION:

Commissioner Michael moved to approve the July 2023 claims; seconded by Commissioner Engelmann. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Michael, Commissioner Engelmann

NAYS: None

4. Approval of the June 7, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes*.

MOTION:

Commissioner Engelmann moved to approve the June 7, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes; seconded by Commissioner Michael. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Michael, Commissioner Engelmann

NAYS: None

5. Report: Monthly Update – North Blaine County Fire District Chief, Rich Bauer.

We have been very busy as of late. There was the Benjamin Way structure fire few weeks ago, and we had a great response to the fire with many of our live-ins, Ketchum, and Wood River all responding. There were four engines and three command vehicles. The homeowner of the property came to the station yesterday to thank the staff again. Damage was likely kept to less than \$1 million in damage.

We have assisted Wood River on a couple of wildland fires down south. One at Stanton Crossing, and one in some cottonwoods by the Big Wood River in Bellevue.

Chairman Gray asked about the potential arson fires that occurred in Ketchum in the past weeks. Chief Bauer answered that the SVFD crews responded with mutual aid to both fires, and both were knocked down quickly. The arsonist has not been caught, but there is video footage of him.

There is another meeting with the Ambulance District on July 26th in regards to consolidation.

Commissioner Michael asked about our role with Allen and Co. Chief Bauer answered that the Chiefs and Captain Reid Black do standby working longer days than usual at the Command Post. We do not dedicate apparatus, but the crews are ready to respond and are extra alert.

We have interest from 3 SVFD members to live in the new housing units. Chief Bauer has emailed the current live-ins and SVFD staff, and next week he is sending out an email to all other fire/ems departments in the valley to see who else might be interested.

Chief Bauer would like to thank Nate Galpin, Sarah Driggs, and Tim Hanna for their work on the rural water supply. We are working on marking all water sources in the district as to what type of supply they are. We have 112 cisterns, which are 10,000 gallon static water supplies, 47 dry hydrants, which are hydrants connected to ponds, and 123 private pressurized hydrants, which are regular fire hydrants. Dry hydrants are no longer allowed with new construction due to common complications with them.

Commissioner Michael asked if the District does annual sprinkler inspections? Chief Bauer responded that private fire sprinkler contractors inspect private home sprinklers annually. The District does not perform the inspection, but does receive the report. Homes in the District over 4,000 square feet are required to have a cistern or pressurized hydrant within 1000 ft or be sprinklered. Homes over 8000 sf need both a cistern or hydrant as well as a sprinkler system.

Commissioner Michael asked if when he has spoken to people interested in the housing, have they discussed the rent? Chief Bauer responded that right now they are just talking with interested parties, the rent structure still needs to be looked at. Commissioner Engelmann asked if we plan to review the current rent rates, and Chief Bauer said we are currently not looking at raising the rent of the present units. The Commissioners comment that they would like to be involved in the discussion regarding unit pricing.

6. Report: Monthly Update – Sun Valley Fire Chief, Taan Robrahn.

Good morning Commissioners, we are very happy to have Mat Hall here today, and are very thankful to have him as a member of the Department and District. He is a great asset to the team. Chief Robrahn said that he is also very thankful to Jocelin for all of her work on the budget this month. Commissioner Michael commented that she has worked on budgets with the County, Mountain Rides, and the Fire District, and Jocelin is at the top of the list as far as presenting budgets and explaining our finances. Chairman Gray agrees as well and says that when the Commissioners receive the budget, it is well explained and easy to follow and leaves little room for questions. Jocelin responded with thanks to the City and Trish for all of their guidance; everyone is great to work with, which makes the job much easier.

Continuing his update, Chief Robrahn says that regarding Allen and Co, we do a lot of preparation for this event, and it is a great opportunity to build relationships and train with agencies across the state and even country. We work with Blaine County Sherriff, SVPD, Idaho State Police, Dept of Energy, National Guard Civil Support Team, and others.

We continue to get busier and busier with call responses in our community. Chairman Gray comments that it seems like we add events every year. Chief Robrahn responded yes, we are at about 50 events in the City each summer that we staff with EMTs and engines. These include 4th of July and its concert and fireworks, and all of the summer symphony nights. These events average 2,000 – 8,000 attendants. Chairman Gray asked if the volunteers are filling our needs with staffing these events. Chief Robrahn answered that it *is* getting harder and harder to staff these events. Mat Hall is one of our volunteers that we can always count on to show up when needed. He says that it can be hard because our summers here are short and people want to get out, and many people here have multiple jobs in addition to their family commitments. This housing project is one way we are trying to mitigate these problems.

7. Updates, discussion, and possible action regarding Greenhorn Housing Project*.

Chief Robrahn is going to open up this discussion with Chief Bauer and City Administrator Jim Keating. We are pleased that after many delays our project is now moving forward very quickly. Sun Valley City Council approved a contract for garages to start being assembled by ZipKit and a contract with Merrick to get the foundations going for those garages. The garage shells could be in place by September/October, and at least be used for storage over the winter. They would then probably be finished in the spring.

Chairman Gray comments that he has noticed slowing down of work at the site when he has been driving by; is this due to the contractor schedule? Chief Robrahn explained that yes, they have been working according to contractor schedules, and in some ways that has helped them to get work done faster. Current slowdowns are not expected to put us behind schedule.

Commissioner Michael asked when we expect utilities and power to be ready to put the units online. Chief Robrahn answered that we are still planning on a September/October delivery date for the first four units. Idaho Power, Cox Communications, and Lunceford have been working together to coordinate. Commissioner Michael asked about marketing opportunities and updating donors. Chief Robrahn mentions that the project was in the paper today. He suggests a ribbon cutting and marketing upon arrival of the units. Commissioner Michael says that now could be a good time for a press release considering that Chief Bauer will be sending out information for applications.

Commissioner Engelmann comments that there are people he has spoken with that have not gone through academy are interested in the housing. Maybe we create some sort of outline of how to qualify for the housing. Chief Robrahn answers that with this year's recruitment campaign for new cadets, we can use the housing as incentive for cadets to complete academy. He also says that we are getting recognition for this project outside our Valley. We are getting noticed from HUD, the City of McCall, the State, etc. Everyone is excited about this project. Chairman Gray thinks that this should be a model project for other institutions, such as the School District, hospital, etc. There is other state land that could be leased. Chief Robrahn says that when speaking with consultants for consolidation, they were very impressed.

Commissioner Engelmann asked if anyone has heard public comments about the project? Chief Bauer says that he has gotten very positive feedback from the public. Jim Keating of Sun Valley said that he has had a lot of comments, all of them positive. He has also been asked a lot of questions, but not received any negative feedback. The article in the Mountain Express today was an update on the piece they released 5-6 weeks ago, documenting the budget for the project and all of the agencies involved. He thinks that when the homes hit the foundation in September, we jump on that press opportunity. This is a multi-agency project, and we are really close to getting this done! Chairman Gray says that every few days he has someone come up and talk to him about the project. He has only heard one negative comment total in all of comments made to him.

Commissioner Michael wants to bring up rents. We are currently charging an average of \$450/month per unit, which she believes is at least \$300 under what we should be charging. The lowest cost of other affordable housing in the valley is \$750. She comments that the required call response for our live-ins is 8%, and states we need to have a higher bar. She would like to have a robust discussion with the Chiefs and Jim Keating and discuss all of this, and they can convince her that the current rent rate is appropriate.

One thing Commissioner Engelmann is wary of is making sure we fill the units with staff that respond frequently. We are providing this housing so that we have response to emergencies. Chairman Gray agrees, we want to make sure that we are getting proper benefit from this. Part of the purpose of this housing originally was so that staff could save money living in the housing to eventually be able to buy their own property, which has worked in the past. He comments that we increased the rents sometime recently, and Jocelin adds that it was in May 2022.

Chief Bauer says that we place a lot of responsibility with these live-ins. They are responsible for the

grounds, basic engine maintenance, and leaving their home at all hours for calls. An 8% call response includes 8% of all calls that SVFD and NBCFD respond to. The 8% call response rate was determined by looking at the response rates of all on-call FF with the department. It is imperative to keep our rents as low as we can, and is not the same as other low income housing programs. We will continue to have difficulty recruiting and retaining on call FF, but this housing gives is key in fighting that. Right now the average income of people moving out of the valley is \$80,000, and the average income for a family moving in is \$300,000. These new families moving in are not going to become our new on call staff.

Commissioner Michael comments that \$450/month for rent needs to be discussed further. Chief Bauer says that the big push for us nationally is community risk reduction. This housing *is* community risk response. Only a few of our calls require a multiple engine response, and that is when it is absolutely key to have all of our responders at the station.

Chairman Gray understands what Chief Bauer is saying. He is nervous because we are still fundraising for the current project, and we need to be able to maintain the budget and pay down our debts. He would be happy to raise as much money as we need to keep rents stable. He comments that cost of living in general here is high, it is not just the rent. Commissioner Engelmann adds that we need to make sure that we are clear that we have expectations of these residents, they have to participate. He is all for keeping rents as low as we can, but we need to see the response because of it, and make sure they are keeping up with their maintenance chores. Chief Bauer said that he has met with all of our current residents in the last month, and we are implementing 6-month performance reviews beginning in November. This is new and will help to hold staff accountable. He visits each of the stations at least once a week to make sure that they are looking good, and he is happy with how they all look. The Greenhorn Station looks great compared to before Sun Valley partnered with the District. There is true pride and ownership there now.

Commissioner Michael would like to schedule a time to talk with the chiefs and Jim to discuss options and recommendations for rents. Sometime before our September meeting. Jim agrees that the timing of this meeting is important, as it will be important to have numbers as the units come online. We should talk about the rent for the current units, as well as the new units, and have an established rent system.

With regards to fundraising, Chairman Gray thinks that we can do a good push for fundraising at the end of the year with the new units. Commissioner Michael says that we should use our donor list from Spur to send letters from the District to all current donors when the buildings come online. She would be interested in hiring a company for this. Chairman Gray thinks we should send out invites for the ribbon cutting.

8. Discussion and possible action regarding Fiscal Year 2024 Budget*.

Chief Bauer says that like Chief Robrahn noted previously, we have seen a 22% increase in call volume in the past year, and 82% in the past five years. We are getting busier and busier, and provide mutual aid and auto aid to all of our partners.

Jocelin says that we have reviewed our draft budget a couple times now at past meetings, and there are only a couple changes in this latest draft. The biggest change is that we have increased the salaries and wages lines by 4%, matching what the City of Sun Valley is proposing for their staff. As mentioned last

month, Jocelin has recently started working an additional four hours per week, and those additional hours have been included in the suggested salary line.

We suggest lowering our contingency line from \$30K to \$20K. In the past this line was \$20K, and we increased it this year at the suggestion of Sun Valley mayor Peter Hendricks. Since we have not really used the line, we are suggesting lowering it back to its previous amount, to try and balance our budget a little more.

In previous meetings Jocelin had predicted we were going to be very under budget for this fiscal year. She had forgotten to include our annual lease payment for Engine 3 in the predictions, and with that now included she expects the District to be right on target with our total budgeted expenditures for the year.

Chief Bauer underestimated what the cost of paving Greenhorn Station next year. The paving bid from 2019 was \$55K, and the new full estimate from Benchmark is \$250K. The Chiefs are suggesting that we put a \$100K placeholder in that spot. The thought was to do this paving at the same time they do the new paving at Greenhorn. If we do it at the same time, the quote is \$214K. With the new housing paving, they are already repaving the existing asphalt in front of the current housing units. This quote is only for the pavement between the stations where we store the apparatus. Commissioner Engelmann is surprised by this quote, and comments that we should go to bid for this. Chief Robrahn agrees that we should probably go out to bid for this, and setting aside this money allows us to maybe do something. This is not something that *has* to be worked on immediately. Maybe prices change over the course of the winter.

Chairman Gray thinks it is good to put the \$100K for that line, but is concerned. He is looking at this budget of \$836K, and predicted income revenue of \$693,787. He assumes that the extra funds would come from our savings, and asks what those savings are right now. Chief Bauer answers that we have \$973K in our LGIP accounts. Chairman Gray does not want to be diminishing these reserves by \$100K - \$250K per year, and Chief Bauer says that is why they are not suggesting fully funding the paving bid at this time. We decided to do the paving when management of the District changed hands, and he thinks we can justify that and the appropriations lease payment, which is about \$70K, coming from our reserves. Commissioner Michael comments that without the payment of the appropriations lease, our current proposed budget would only be approximately \$73K higher than our revenues. Jocelin says that with the if we keep the budget as is currently presented and exceed our revenues by approximately \$142K, that will leave our reserves at about \$830K. If we were to set aside and use the \$250K, that would leave the reserves at \$667K. Commissioner Michael stated that it is not necessary to keep 100% of a year's operating budget in the reserves (which we have); most local agencies have a reserve of 25-30%, so our reserves are in good shape. Chairman Gray says that this board has been fiscally responsible the entire time he has been on the board, and thinks it would be tragic if we had to go out and pass a bond after all of our fundraising and the housing project. Commissioner Michael also notes that the plan check fees in our revenue forecast have been decreased, which is being seen around the County. She notes that she does think that this is a solid budget. Chief Bauer thanks the Commissioner for their comments on the budget, saying we have spent a lot of time working on it. He also adds that we are a little different than a City or the County, we are a Special District and have different needs in how we spend money.

Commissioner Engelmann comments on how much interest we are making on our LGIP accounts due to higher interest rates. He says that most of the numbers in our budget are pretty fixed or good guesses, and comments that the \$100K is not something that would *have* to be spent. We could still put off paying a few more years, and seal to extend the lifetime. A budget is an outline, a balance of income in revenue. Chairman Gray sees the budget as a roadmap for how we intend to spend our money, and does think it is a great budget, even if he has some concern about using the reserves.

Jocelin will be posting our proposed budget in the newspaper in advance of next month's budget hearing, so if there are any expected changes from this current proposal that would further increase the budget, she would need to know now. Commissioner Michael said that we are going to revisit the potential rent revenues, but the Commissioners did not suggest any changes.

9. Discussion: Old Business.

None.

10. Public Comment.

None.

11. Adjournment*.

MOTION

Commissioner Michael moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Commissioner Engelmann.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Michael, Commissioner Engelmann.

NAYS: None.

Chairman Gray declared the meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.



Jed Gray, Chairman



Sarah Micheal, Treasurer

