

ROCKVILLE/SPRINGDALE FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
WORK MEETING
P.O. Box 159
Springdale, UT 84767
July 16, 2014
Rockville Community Center

1. **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL** – Chair Michael Plyler called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the following members of the Rockville/Springdale Fire Protection District Board present: Luci Francis and Barry Rhodes. John Callahan arrived at 6:40 pm. Elaine Harris recording.
2. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA** – Barry Rhodes called to order that Items d and e should be actually Item 4 and Item 5, as they are not a part of the public hearing. Barry Rhodes moved the agenda be approved. Luci Francis seconded the motion and a roll call vote indicated all those present voted in favor of the motion.
3. **DISCUSSION RELATIVE TO THE FOLLOWING IN PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC HEARING**
 - a. **Review and discussion of 2015 budget projections** – Barry’s review of the projections presented by Luci resulted in no additional information. The projections indicated that the Standby Fee needs to raise \$458,192, and the last projection was \$453,447. This was based on the hourly \$8.50 average per hour wage.

Luci stated there were many opportunities to create scenarios based on what the Board chooses to do regarding wages and drug testing. The drug testing is based on the proposal Chief Christian brought to one of our meetings; Luci basically used his figures and includes initial testing for all current employees as well as follow up testing. The second year will be less because we will only be testing new employees and follow up testing.

Luci had spoken with Chief Christian about most of the expenditure items. There are still some items that need to be inventoried.

- b. **Review and discussion of draft Standby Fee Schedule** – Michael proposed for new residential construction: Since we have a base rate of \$140 for residential then plus the .0009 of taxable value, and the \$140 base rate is based on the concept that everyone contributes to the minimum cost of running the fire department and EMS. He proposed the rate for new construction would be: When a building permit is pulled, charge the \$140 base rate, prorated by quarter. When the residence hits the Washington County tax rolls, the formula would be applied.

The current spreadsheet was based on the current taxable value information available from Washington County as of last October.

The total projected revenue from the motels is \$142,000. Including the other commercial, it appears as though the goal of the majority of the burden is being placed on the commercial properties. An approximate 70/30 split is the goal.

Many categories were created due to existing uses, or possible future uses.

For the public hearing, everyone will have a copy of the categories and be able to see where they fit in the schedule. A copy of the spreadsheet will be at the public hearing so if

someone was to specifically ask what the projected fee for their property was, it can be looked up for them after the meeting.

John Callahan stated there is some criticism due to the fact that there isn't more information available relative to how the residential fees are in comparison to the commercial. This should be explained prior to opening the floor for comments at the public hearing. Residences with home occupations will have the increase in their home plus a flat fee for the class of their business. As a comparison, they would be unable to rent commercial space for the cost of doing business in their home.

Some may ask about already paying their property taxes. There is a difference between the property tax and our service fee for emergency services. We are projecting property tax revenue in the amount of \$47,565. That doesn't even pay for ¼ of the EMS wages.

Barry said the biggest change that has taken place with the new rate structure for home occupations is that the fees are based on hazard. If a home business is created to make fireworks, that is definitely going to have a higher classification than someone just making soap. One will definitely take more resources in case of a fire. If there are two businesses in the home, there is only fee charged for the business with the higher risk. The same is for commercial; if the building has a restaurant and a gift shop, the entire square footage is rated at the restaurant rate because it presents the higher risk. John felt this is something the public needs to know.

People who have not had the fee before, or are getting the new fee, are going to respond that our expenses have gone up this much and now we are paying this much – what more in the way of services are they getting now? The response is: What they are presently getting, is something they have had all along for free for many years, due to volunteers. Now 90% plus of this increase is going to wages.

Luci feels the public is going to want answers to a lot of questions. The public hearing is to hear questions and comments from the public, but it appears the public doesn't know what to ask or what comments to make.

Discussion took place about the possibility of putting the Standby Fee formula chart available prior to the meeting. This will be handed out at the meeting. Someone should be able to apply the formula for their category and pretty much determine what their fee is going to be.

Michael will be explaining the formulas prior to the meeting. The public should participate in the process. If they don't like what is being proposed, they should be able to offer another solution. Shirley Ballard, from the audience, did not feel that was the case. She felt the Board was comprised of elected officials and it is their responsibility to take care of the community's needs. The Board owes the property owners an answer as to why they need to collect the money, how they are going to collect it and how they are going to spend it.

Shirley felt it was not fair to not allow the public to ask questions in the hearing. The questions, and the Board's answers, should be a matter of public record.

Michael will be doing a presentation prior to the public hearing, which has been noticed for two weeks, the Clerk has had one person ask for any information. The number is on all the postings for anyone that desired to request information.

Louise Excell asked if anyone asked for the Standby Fee formula chart in advance, would they be able to acquire it. The answer was yes.

The reason the projected budget figures have not been available to the public is because the 2015 budget is still a working document. It is being developed at this time to justify the increase in the Standby Fee but will not be approved until December.

Shirley Ballard felt we were getting budget figures from a Chief who does not live here, he is not paying our taxes, he is not seeing our burden, he is not seeing our anguish that we don't have somebody that we know that is going to respond to our house when we have a fire or an ambulance call. He doesn't see that. And when he is finished with his shift up here, he goes home and leaves someone else in charge. Barry responded that was our advantage; we are getting an unbiased opinion of what we have and what we need.

Shirley stated it didn't make her feel a bit better and does not make the citizens of this valley feel better. Michael asked if Shirley felt the people in St. George know the individual firefighters that would respond to their house. Shirley responded, yes, they do. We are in the position we are in because the Board has discouraged volunteerism; discouraged it by bringing paid employees in from out of town (Hurricane and Colorado City) and she knows why we have done it, but it is very difficult that now that we have a Chief that does not live here, when he makes out a schedule, he schedules the guys that go to him as their buddy, he works with them in other departments and says okay you get these shifts.

Shirley responded to Barry's questions as to where she was getting this information and she responded from some of the employees that used to work for the ambulance service; it happened to them. No one is watching what is happening in that department.

Michael stated if we ran the department on volunteers, we wouldn't have a department. Our costs for running the department are pretty much set.

Shirley felt our costs were based on a Chief's input who has no interest in this community. Michael responded that they are going up because we are paying people to stand by when her son and Joe Barker and a bunch of people did it for free. We are beyond that. There is no one left to do it at a reduced rate or even for free.

John Callahan stated we are not getting all the figures from the Chief, hours have been spent by board members making phone calls and getting information from other agencies.

Michael compared the needs of a larger community (Las Vegas) and the needs of our communities and the broad difference in how many people they have to spread out the costs. He also gave the example of the gateway community of Gatlinburg, TN.

When asked why Michael didn't pick a nearby gateway community, Michael responded that the nearby communities of Kanab and Panguitch don't have nearly the amount of hotel rooms that Springdale has, which is the point of the argument. Every night in Springdale, on average, there are 2.7 visitors for every resident. We have to protect the residents and the

visitors, that's the point. Just as Gatlinburg only has to protect 16% more people than we do, they have three times, in fire stations, the capabilities that we have, they have a ladder truck because they have buildings that are two stories and above, they have a snorkel. They have many things a prudent fire department would have based on the hazards that exist.

Clerk Harris commented that she has not worked on the budget issue as closely as the committee assigned to that task because she was on the other committee, but when she looked at the budget, she saw that what has been done is to take items that were basically bundled and they have been broken out and justified what that bundling was. We have had many requirements that we have never had to meet before. There is nothing on here that isn't needed or been projected as a possible need, an example being a refrigerator that is 20 years old and making a lot of noise. As we know, as well as Jeff and Ryan, projections don't always happen, but you have to prepare and other things can come along that you didn't expect. The Board has attempted to do this budget as close as possible. The only thing that was really added is the wages and to have a full-time chief. There is no fluff. The Chief didn't put anything in the budget, the committee did, upon consultation with the Chief on what could possibly be needed.

Shirley questioned if the on-call personnel have any duties/maintenance while at the firehouse and not on a call. Michael responded we have never paid for cleaning at the firehouse and whatever duties there are, are delegated by the Chief.

Luci asked Shirley what would help convince her that the District is acting with prudence and in frugality the money she is giving. Shirley responded she didn't think anything would convince her of that, but she would feel better if the Board knew how she felt about it and she wasn't just speaking for herself, she was speaking for a lot of people that don't have what it takes to get up and tell the Board how they feel. She want the public to have as many facts as the Board can give them so that they can be convinced this is what is needed to run the department.

Michael reviewed the fact that our 2013 budget, which had been approved in December of 2012, was impacted by the fact that Chief Ryan Ballard resigned in October. That forced the Board to hire staff on-call at night to cover the time that Ryan was doing for free. That had to come out of our reserves. This new cost is being utilized again in 2014 and still having to come from reserves.

Prior to the Public Hearing, Chair Plyler will be explaining the events that have led up to the need for an increase in the Standby Fees. If the public feels the Board has a fiduciary responsibility, then they should understand that we can't increase the fees minimally, and then ten months into the budget we find we need to raise it again. The Board is attempting to provide the best service possible with the least amount of increase necessary.

Luci addressed the claims of mismanagement. The Fire Protection District has an annual audit and these audit statements are on line; people can access the link to the State Auditor's Office through the Town of Springdale's website. Shirley stated many have done that, but their concern is with the information that is not available, which is detailed wages.

It is understood that the ambulance cannot support itself. Chair Plyler stated that the audit does not go into budget specifics, but certainly if there was heinous mismanagement that would be stated.

Chair Plyler gave Shirley the guarantee that this is a bare-bones budget. There have been many hours spent on both the budget and the modifications to the Standby Fee Schedule. The Board feels the fees are much more fair than in the past and it much more reflects the burden of services on the group that demands them, which is the visitors.

Discussion took place about the possibly of putting the draft formula chart on line and having scaled-down copies of the budget available at the public hearing.

The quarterly/annual billing cycle will provide a savings over a straight annual billing. There is a total of approximately 970 accounts. There would be approximately 770 accounts that would receive an annual billing if we take anyone that owes \$400 or less and do them as an annual billing; that cuts the number of quarterly billings down to 200. If the figure is \$300 or less, there will be 300 quarterly billings. It would cost approximately \$700 more per year to have the cutoff at \$300 instead of \$400.

The original idea around the quarterly billing was due to those that are on a fixed income. They should have the option to spread it among quarterly payments. With that option, Barry would go for the \$400 or less as an annual billing. We also have the clause in our billing ordinance for the consideration of hardship.

Since we are now considering a percentage of the taxable value as a part of the residential fee, the people who are going to be billed the higher residential rate are those that are in the high value category. That has to be taken into consideration.

4. DISCUSSION CONCERNING A CHANGE IN CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS

RELEVANT TO THEIR PURPOSE – Due to recent events, it was proposed that we handle the public's availability of how to reach the District and District personnel by phone differently. The Chair proposed changing the Chief's cell number (if we are able, due to our contract for the cell service), put an answering machine in the fire station and that will be the number on the website for burn permits and/or Fire Marshal inspections. Permits would be available for three days, the applicant picks the day in that time period when wind conditions would allow safe burning. The machine would be checked daily for messages and the Fire Marshal would arrange for the permit. This will be an agenda item for the next meeting.

5. DISCUSSION OF AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF JULY 23, 2014 –

The Chair felt the process for hiring a chief should begin, especially if it is going to be expected they relocate to this area. The Clerk will send the Board the current job description as well as the position advertisement that was utilized the last time we sought a chief. It has been discussed in the past to contract out the Fire Marshal for plan review. There needs to be a committee to draft the job description and the position announcement. John will work on the position announcement and the clerk will e-mail the last one utilized to everyone.

During the next meeting, there is a need to elect a Chair and Vice-Chair.

Our agreement for enforcement with Springdale needs to be reviewed.

The District services both the Rockville and Springdale municipalities, but they currently have different burn policies. From the District's point of view, it would be helpful if the policies were consistent. Barry felt that the District sets the burn policy for the District; the municipality can make

it more restrictive, but we don't enforce theirs, only ours. The Chair will get in touch with the State Fire Marshal for clarification of enforcement. Then we can set up a meeting with Springdale.

There will also need to be agenda items for authorization to sign checks at the bank.

The Board needs to discuss the input from the Public Hearing. John also felt we need to address the major increases in the proposed 2015 budget for the public and give examples of the concept of fairness. It would help to have a flip chart or power point.

John felt it was important for the public to know what the Board has to do to be in compliance with any requirements of the International Fire Code.

6. **ADJOURN** – Barry Rhodes moved the meeting be adjourned. Luci Francis seconded the motion. A roll call vote indicated all those present voted in favor of the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Minutes typed by:

Elaine M. Harris
District Clerk

APPROVED:

Michael Plyler, Chairman