

**Regular Meeting of the North Blaine County Fire District in the Council
Chambers – 81 Elkhorn Road, Sun Valley, ID
June 12nd, 2024, at 10:00 AM.**

1. Call to Order.

Chairman Gray called the meeting to order at 10 a.m.

2. Public Comment.

None.

3. Approval of the June 2024 Claims*.

MOTION:

Commissioner Michael moved to approve the June 12th 2024 claims; seconded by Commissioner Engelmann. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Michael, Commissioner Engelmann

NAYS: None

4. Approval of the May 2nd 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes*.

MOTION:

Commissioner Engelmann moved to approve the May 2nd, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes; seconded by Commissioner Sarah Michael. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Engelmann, Commissioner Michael

NAYS: None

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

Chief Bauer just completed his second round of 6 month reviews with all of the resident firefighter live-ins, and they all went well. He will do evaluations every 6 months, generally in May and November. We are going to schedule a live-in meeting soon, to make sure everyone is on the same page and take steps to make the team as strong as possible. We have no vacancies at Greenhorn now with the exception of the 100 units that are being updated. Jocelin has been putting a lot of time and work into renovating these units. Chairman Gray comments that since we are at 100% occupancy now and landscaping is underway, will we still be planning an open house, and how will that work? The Chiefs think that once the 100 units are renovated and the landscaping is completed, it could be a good time for an open house. We would ask for a resident to allow us to open their unit for the open house. Chief Bauer says that it is exciting to drive by there everyday and see all of the cars parked there.

Commissioner Engelmann asked what the mix of people living at Greenhorn is. Chief Bauer answered that we have Nadav Cohen, who is primarily with Ketchum Fire, Zack Traylor who is with Wood River Fire and Rescue, Mark Westerdoll who is a retired captain from Boise Fire, and a mix of full time and on-call Sun Valley staff. He adds that a few of these live-ins are also Sun Valley Suns

on our local hockey team.

Chief Bauer does not have much of an update in regards to consolidation or ambulance district talks. Chairman Gray says that he has not been hearing many updates either. The last meeting he attended was mainly reviewing operational costs and budgets. At this same meeting, Ketchum Fire made it clear they intend to find a way to consolidate with Smiley Creek and West Magic Fire Districts. Chairman Gray feels he has made it clear that the North Blaine County Fire District does not have interest in joining in this, and is very happy with its partnership with the City of Sun Valley.

Commissioner Michael comments that she read in the paper that the City of Ketchum would have to have their citizens vote in regards to this proposed consolidation. Chairman Gray confirms; this would have to go to a public vote, because the City would be creating a new Fire District, which would then create a new tax. Commissioner Michael asks how this would work, as there is a law that makes it difficult to merge fire departments and districts. Jim Keating of Sun Valley says that yes, there is House Bill 389 that makes mergers very difficult. Ketchum is first trying to change into a Fire District rather than a City Department, and then merge with Smiley Creek, West Magic, and Wood River. Right now, House Bill 389 only allows a budget of merging fire districts to increase by 8% total budget of the higher budgeted entity. It does not allow two total budget to be joined together. This bill has been discussed but not modified or repealed by the state legislature.

Commissioner Gray comments that to make this proposed consolidation happen, these are some very large hurdles to get past. Chairman Gray thinks this would be a very difficult ask to the public, as Ketchum would be asking for increased tax revenue while not providing increased service, and Commissioner Engelmann agrees. Commissioner Michael says that she has long been in favor of fire consolidation, and if there is an opportunity for that she would support said path. Chairman Gray says that he feels that path is a long ways off, and having worked with Ketchum in the past, feels that we are serving the District much better partnered with Sun Valley. He is more inclined to watch how this turns out and continue from there. Commissioner Michael says that she is probably in the minority, but would like to continue to be part of this consolidation conversation. Commissioner Engelmann says he is not against consolidation at all, but given the hurdles of the laws, budgets, and politics, there are a lot of difficulties in this process. He is interested to see if they can find a successful way forward. Chairman Gray says that if this were to work, for the City of Sun Valley to join, they would also have to become a Fire District and put it to the public for a vote. NBCFD would not have to do this, but there is still the complication of levy rates and budgets.

Chief Bauer says that to clarify on his original update, he was referring to the consolidation study in reference to the Blaine County Ambulance and the company that they hired. The District and City have been fully a part of this effort.

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

Chief Robrahn says that calls have slowed down a little, and we have been very focused on training. We recently had three of our members in a swift water rescue class. All of our full time team members have also all been involved in training on an incident management program called Blue Card. This training will teach us all to be using the same language on an incident, which is very important. We know some other fire staff in the county are also doing this training, and we are

hopeful other departments will do this as well. We will be testing on this training next week, and have already been seeing the benefits of it.

Regarding our FY 2025 budget request with the Ambulance District, we presented them with a collaborative proposal between the City and the Fire District to increase our funding from them, to fund one more full time position on the department. Our goal with this is to increase our staffing so that we are maintaining our staffing requirements, and start responding to more calls in the southern portion of the NBCFD. Ideally we would like to get to the point where we are responding and improving our level of service to the mid-valley corridor, which would involve updating aid agreements with Wood River Fire & Rescue. If we can hire an additional staff member, we would have a more standard 3 person shift, perhaps keeping two staff at Elkhorn Station and one at Greenhorn.

In the City, we have been working diligently towards having an ALS (advanced life support) license, and are on our way towards having a paramedic on every shift. Katelyn Berman is our newest paramedic and Sarah Driggs is well on her way. Julie Youngblood will be starting paramedic school soon. Taking these steps is how we envision hopefully turning Greenhorn into a staffed station. July 18th is when the Ambulance District will begin to review the budget requests. Chief Robrahn feels that we have a good proposal in place and we are taking positive steps forward to continue to better serve our entire District.

Chief Robrahn explains that NBCFD engines are currently equipped as BLS (basic life support). Part of the proposal submitted to the Ambulance District includes capital equipment to outfit a NBCFD engine with supplies such as a heart monitor and a LUCAS device, which does automated chest compressions. He wants to also mention about the importance of our EMTs, as all of our Greenhorn live-ins are required to become EMTs. Chief Robrahn says that now that we have so many residents at Greenhorn, there is most likely always going to be someone at home, but it is still not a guaranteed response, which is what is required by an ALS license. This is why we would want to staff it with a full time member. If we have guaranteed staff at Greenhorn that respond to a call in the District, then there is still staff at Elkhorn should there be another call at the same time.

Chairman Gray asks if the crew was able to train at 226 Red Devil, a home he was able to procure for training before demolition and rebuild. Chief Robrahn said yes, thank you for helping to set that up, several of our members were able to train there.

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

Chief Robrahn comments that we were initially hoping for 50% occupancy of the units in the first 6 months of project completion. The reality is that at the end of this month we will be at 100% occupancy of the units, and that is just really great to see. It shows the need for this housing and how important it was that we did this project. It has been great to hear from Chiefs from across Idaho and even the Country asking how we were able to accomplish this.

Chairman Gray comments that he noticed there is some work being done on the berm at Greenhorn. For the landscaping, the City has signed contracts with Webb landscaping and they have begun working on the berm. Jim Keating explains that Webb and Jonathon Lunceford have started with grading and working on the berm. We have worked with them both to help us stay on or

under budget, which includes giving them until end of October to finish their work. Jonathon Lunceford has been bringing us free dirt from wherever he can. The berms will continue to be built up bigger than they are now, according to plan and County code. Once the berms are completed, irrigation will be put in, and then the berms will be fine graded. Chairman Gray comments that putting down the asphalt made a great difference in how the property looks. Jim wants to really thank the Chiefs for all of their community outreach and getting these units filled; there are people now living in these units, which was the whole goal of the project of course. Commissioner Engelmann adds that it will be good to have cash flow from the units, and he is glad we have a mix of people living there from departments across the valley. Commissioner Michael asked if there are families living there, and Chief Robrahn answered that we do have one family with a child there.

Commissioner Michael says that we got an email from Spur asking what the District's plan is for future fundraising regarding this project. She comments that next fiscal year we are expecting an approximately \$96K deficit due to project costs. She thinks that we should continue fundraising efforts so that we can pay down our lease faster, and mitigate drawing down our reserves. She would like to keep a healthy reserve at \$1 million. Chairman Gray says that he agrees he wants us to keep a healthy reserve, but we would need to be strategic in how to continue fundraising efforts. We have reached out to some very generous donors, and for our efforts have raised \$1,146,298.72, which is an outstanding accomplishment. Perhaps with our Open House we can plan for a final fundraising push, as we do not want any of our large donors to be insulted by us asking for more money. Perhaps we meet with Spur and Jim and the Chiefs and create a plan, and Commissioner Michael says that is a good place to start. Chairman Gray would suggest they have this meeting over the summer to plan for a fall push. Jim Keating agrees with both Commissioners, there is a delicate way to do this. We can show previous donors what they have been instrumental in helping us build, and potentially do a final ask. We can show people who have not yet donated what we have built, and ask them for support now to help us pay down our lease. Commissioner Engelmann says that if we do this closer to the end of the year, tenants will have lived there for awhile, and perhaps we use them for testimonials in fundraising. Chairman Gray thinks that is a great idea.

Commissioner Michael wants to highlight that the District has been pivotal in raising funds for the project, including Grants from the Wood River Women's Foundation, and the ARPA Grant we received from the Blaine County Commissioners. We have a 10 year appropriations lease we are paying off, and for the District to make this payment we are drawing into our reserves each year, and she does not want to draw them down so far that we do not have healthy reserves. This is why she brings up continuing to work on our fundraising. The Commissioners agree to schedule a meeting with Spur.

8. Discussion and possible action regarding Fiscal Year 2025 Budget*.

Chief Bauer thanks Jocelin for her work in reformatting our budget to have past, current, and projected revenues, as well as cash flows, onto our budget document. Chief started with explaining our projected revenues for the next fiscal year. Our majority of revenue will still come from property taxes, and we are planning on the standard 3% increase plus some predicted new construction roles. We currently estimate \$518,899 in property tax revenue next year. Jocelin explains that we are not quite making our sales tax income predictions this year, and so next year we are predicting a more conservative number of \$28,000. Our rent and utilities prediction of \$101,700 for next year is

based on having 14 of our 16 live-in units being occupied, including our two Greenhorn 100 units we will be done renovating by then. There has been some talk from the Fed regarding lowering interest rates next year, so we have lowered our expectations on that income to \$42,000 for next year. We have had a lot of inspections this year, but do not expect as many next year, and anticipate our plan check revenues staying mostly flat. With these numbers, we expect an approximately 5.4% increase in the revenues from FY 2024 to FY 2025.

Moving onto the salaries and wages, we have moved the administration and part time wages line into the general salaries and wages line. For next meeting we may add money back into the merit increase/adjustment line. Commissioner Engelmann asks, if we are making a proposal from the Ambulance District for funding, is that reflected in this budget? Chief Bauer says that would be included in the City of Sun Valley Budget. Chairman Gray asks, if the Ambulance District does approve funding an additional position on the department, would that save the District money in our salaries and wages? Jim Keating says that if it was granted, it would add value and additional staffing to the District without increased cost. Chief Bauer adds that if the Commissioners look at the total salaries and fringe benefits costs from FY 24 to FY 25, they are only moving up very incrementally. For the remainder of our line items, we have not changed any of the operational items from last meeting. We will be paying Blaine County Dispatch more next year, but it is still within our budgeted number, so that will not change.

Our ICRMP premium is increasing substantially, from \$7,633 this year to \$9,923 next year. We are still waiting on a final quote from them for our portion of insuring the new housing. They sent a letter with why our premium is increasing so significantly, which mainly cited that their costs have increased exponentially, and they have had to pass on those costs. Jim Keating explains that ICRMP has sent out two quotes to all of the entities they represent. All entities received a first letter with their estimated increase, and then a second later with a new estimate of a higher increase. Government entity leaders in the valley have shared their premiums with each other, and everyone is seeing increases from 23% to 35%, so NBCFD is not alone in their significant increase. Jim says that he is part of meetings with other city officials regarding these increases. There are not many alternatives to ICRMP at this time, but he is looking into other potential options in the future. Commissioner Michael says that she has generally been a strong supporter of ICRMP due to the trainings and HR programs they have. The biggest vulnerability local governments have is their employees, including fire staff and law enforcement. Insurance companies have begun moving out of many states where they are losing money, and Idaho could become one of those states. This is a large scale problem. She thanks Jim for his work on this. Chairman Gray and Commissioner Engelmann add their agreement to Commissioner Michael's comments on the general state of the insurance market.

Moving onto the bottom of the budget, we can see that with this current document, we will be in a deficit of \$96K next year, leaving our cash position at \$872K in the bank at the end of the year. That deficit will be primarily due to our appropriations lease, dedicated funds for finishing the Greenhorn project, and our annual loan payment for Engine 3. Chairman Gray clarifies that of that \$96K deficit, if \$50K is for finishing the housing project, and that is only a one time cost. We will still have a good and healthy reserve.

Commissioner Michael compliments the staff on the work they have put into this budget. She has been involved in local government budgeting for over two decades, and having cash balances on the budget is very meaningful, and she appreciates all of the work that has been put into it. Chairman Gray also gives his thanks; he thinks the budget is very understandable and well thought out.

9. Discussion: Old Business.

None.

10. Public Comment.

None.

11. Adjournment*.

MOTION

Commissioner Engelmann moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Commissioner Michael. A roll call vote was taken.

AYES: Chairman Gray, Commissioner Engelmann, Commissioner Michael

NAYS: None.

Chairman Gray declared the meeting adjourned at 11:12 a.m.



Jed Gray, Chairman



Earl Engelmann, Secretary