**Jefferson County Fire and EMS**

**Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**

**Feb. 11th, 2025**

**Meeting called to Order:** 5:30 PM

**Pledge of Allegiance lead by:** Led by

**Roll Call:**

**Fire:** Board President Kim Stout, Vice President Rob Galyen, Secretary Dusty Miller, Director Chris DuPont,

**Fire Members Absent:** Director Ryan Boyle

**Fire staff:** Chief Blake, DC Skaar, Dc Earnest, DC Lepin, Billing Manager Peckham, Admin Assistant Bowman, Capt. Beebe, FF Bailey, FF Fry, FF Page, Capt. Jaca, FF Gonzalez, Vol. FF Rick Allen, FF Horton, FF Melka, FF Cooley, FF Stinson, FF Codemo, FF Codemo, FF Ronan, FF Garibay, Capt. Glen, FF Bowman, FF Hurley,

**Zoom:** Chase Duran

**Community Members:** Linda Larson, Evan Thomas, Debbi Stinson, John Stinson, Kiva H, Scott Spauling, Gretchen Beebe, Phil Johnston, Attorney Gassner

**Agenda approval/adjustment:** There were no amendments. Vice president Galyen motioned to approve. Director Miller seconded; the motion passed unanimously.

**Presenter:** No presenter.

**Citizens Input:** No input.

**Minute(s) from previous meeting:** Director DuPont moved to approve minutes as typed. VP Galyen seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

**Building Expansion -** Timeline Update: Chief Blake provided an update on the building expansion project. He shared that the contractor is expected to give a timeline update tomorrow at 2:00 pm, with construction already underway and permits secured. Things are moving smoothly, although there was a sewer issue where PVC got stuck in the line, causing a backup and spillage in the station. Crews assisted in cleaning, and contractors dug the sewer line to make the necessary repairs. Chief Blake also noted that an electrical switch-over was scheduled for today, but due to the weather and temperatures, it was decided to postpone it until next week, when the weather would be warmer to ensure smooth operations. Power will be out for part of the day on Monday for the electrical move, and gas will be moved on Wednesday. Chief Blake also mentioned a capital funding request for $1.1 million and that he is seeking a Community Block Grant to assist with the funding.

Director Miller inquired about sleeping arrangements for crews during the building work. Chief Blake reassured that there would be no disruption to sleeping arrangements, though there may be temporary issues with cooking arrangements.

**New Business:**

**Resolution- Adopt Civil Service Commission:** Resolution #2024-2025-04 to adopt the Civil Service Commission was read into the minutes. Director DuPont motioned to accept the resolution, with Director Miller seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Resolution #2024-2025-05 to adopt the Civil Service Rules was then read by title. VP Galyen motioned to approve, and Director DuPont seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**New Business**

**Resolution Adopt Civil Service Rules:** Resolution #2024-2025-06 to move the board meetings to the third Wednesday of the month was read by Director Gassner. Chief Blake suggested implementing the change in April, as he would be on vacation in March. Secretary Miller made a motion to approve the resolution, seconded by Director DuPont. The motion passed unanimously, and the change will take effect in April 2025.

**Finance Update:** Finance Manager Kristal H. provided an update on the financial dashboard. She reported that the third-quarter PERS payment has been released, and the final number will be known by the end of the week. Kristal also discussed the prior year actuals, noting that the bond was still included in the general fund. She is working on disbursing these into separate accounts, and next month’s financial report will show both the general fund and bond fund separately. Director DuPont expressed appreciation for the clarity of the financial dashboard, which helps make the figures easier to understand.

Billing Manager Peckham then presented an update on billing. She broke down the financials into past, present, and combined figures. Peckham explained how the numbers are derived, focusing on billed gross, received fixed amounts, and payments made. As of February 5th, $345k had been collected, and there is still $632k pending claims. She highlighted that as the rates increase, collections will likely decrease as they focus on private pay clients who pay 100%, unlike insurance, which doesn’t always cover the full amount. Chief Blake emphasized the importance of GEMT (Ground Emergency Medical Transportation) funding to help supplement these losses, with the current collection rate averaging 32%-34%. He also commended Jessica and Danielle for their efforts in securing funds from Pacific Source, noting that some claims had to be audited due to missing mileage details. Peckham clarified the report and responded to Director Miller’s inquiry about a specific number (929.27), explaining where it could be found in the report.

Miller raised concerns about why the collection performance was lower than expected compared to July 2023. Chief Blake explained that the merger and changes in rates had disrupted consistency, but once the agency becomes more stable, results should improve. Peckham agreed, explaining that old EMS practices had more predictable billing cycles, but the transition to new rates and processes has created some inconsistencies. Blake added that the merger was more akin to starting a new company, which had led to some financial challenges. President Stout asked if the current year was performing better than before, and Peckham confirmed it was, though there was still room for improvement. Blake noted that while raising rates could help with commercial contracts, it wouldn’t address all issues, particularly with private insurance.

**New Business**

**Discuss Cost Reduction(s):** Chief Blake discussed the cost reduction proposal he was tasked to present: He reviewed the breakdown of time-related expenses, including overtime, comp time, holiday pay, and conflag OT, among other costs. Director Miller inquired about the daily staffing numbers, to which Chief Blake responded that staffing varies. Director Skaar provided details- different shift configurations for the A, B, and C shifts. Blake further explained that part-time staff help with call volume and transfers, but that reducing part-time staff is part of the proposed cost reductions. He noted that for FY 25/26, the district expects a $109k reduction in part-time labor, though this would impact resource reliability. The high reliance on part-time staff is due to most being vested in PERS. Chief Blake also mentioned that 3000 hours were paid in part-time labor, with costs varying depending on certifications like Paramedics vs EMTs.

Blake then presented his planned reductions for the 2025/2026 budget, which would see significant cuts, including the removal of 3 Firefighter EMTs, one Deputy Chief, reductions in part-time staffing, Veba contribution cuts, reducing student positions by three, canceling the EMS QuickBooks subscription, reducing overtime for administrative staff, eliminating the Culver lease, and cutting volunteer incentives. The total reductions for 2025/2026 would amount to $799,011, with an additional $125,900 in 2024/2025, totaling $924,911. Chief Blake also mentioned that he is waiting for a response from the insurance company regarding rates, and wage increases would not be implemented in 2025/2026. He acknowledged that attrition might occur and that he would continue looking for further cost-reduction opportunities.

The discussion then shifted to revenue generation. Blake emphasized the importance of transfers and plans to bring them back to generate an estimated $300k by reducing transfer rates by 20%. He highlighted that while additional revenue could come from transfers, the department would need to manage medics' time effectively, balancing transfers with 911 calls. Blake acknowledged the necessity of reductions, particularly since the department cannot raise prices as a public entity. He suggested looking at avenues such as increasing contract fees, applying for grants, continuing aggressive billing, reducing unneeded assets, exploring operational levies, researching apprenticeship programs, and seeking higher ambulance reimbursements from state and federal agencies. He also proposed considering reclassifying administrative staff to salaried positions.

Blake pointed out that counties receive funds for the opioid crisis, which the department does not see, and emphasized the need for changes. He also proposed introducing an EMS fee to the County, which would require a public vote. He is preparing a presentation for the County to seek approval, with an advisory vote potentially in May.

Director Miller raised concerns about the department’s financial status, noting that while they are projecting a positive $100k at the end of January, by the end of the budget cycle, the department could be $1 million short. Chief Blake confirmed that the fire truck is funded through the bond and cannot be touched. Director DuPont explained that the $1 million shortfall is due to the depletion of reserves to survive the loss of revenue. Miller questioned whether the proposed reductions would address the shortfall, and Kristal confirmed that savings would not be substantial enough for immediate relief.

The Fire Marshall grant was discussed, with Blake stating that although the funds cannot be spent immediately, they would not need to be repaid and could be used for additional staffing. However, cutting these positions would result in no actual cost savings, as the grant is only covering a portion of staffing costs. Blake explained that while the Culver lease isn’t due for five more years, there has been a change in management, and discussions are ongoing about what is mutually beneficial for both parties. Director Miller inquired about the lease, and Blake clarified the terms and costs associated with utilities.

Kristal asked the board whether they would like to maintain reserves, but Miller indicated that breaking even was the goal, with the current financial outlook showing a positive $100k by the end of January, though there would be a $1 million shortfall by the end of the budget cycle. The conversation turned to the potential need for a tax anticipation loan to bridge the gap.

The board discussed the possibility of further cuts, with Blake acknowledging the risks involved and the challenges of maintaining staffing levels while reducing costs. Several members agreed that the department could not continue without making significant changes. Kristal cautioned against making all cuts at once, suggesting a more phased approach.

President Stout emphasized that the department must be more aggressive on the revenue side and asked for direction from the board. Director DuPont indicated that action needed to be taken to avoid closure, and while the department could make it through to next November, additional funding would likely be needed then. Blake confirmed the need for an EMS fee and that a proposal would be prepared for the November ballot.

After further discussion, VP Galyen motioned to accept the planned reductions as presented by Chief Blake for February 11, 2025, with Director DuPont seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**Fire Operations:**

Director Skaar began the session by acknowledging Firefighter Gonzalez, Captain Glen, and Deputy Chief Earnest for their contributions. He noted that funding for certain projects might not materialize until potentially two years from now, though there is hope it will come sooner. Skaar reported on the BLM grant, which is aimed at supporting prevention and staffing efforts. However, he mentioned that the government has recently pulled back on some grants. Skaar continues to secure letters of support for when the grant becomes available again and confirmed that he has applied for the AFG grant. Monthly reports were distributed to all board members for review, with no further questions raised.

**Fire Prevention:**

Deputy Chief Earnest provided an update on fire prevention efforts, noting an increased demand for urban interface assessments due to new construction in the district. Commercial inspections have been challenging, but he is taking advantage of the slower season to address them. Pratum conducted a walk-through inspection, and it was found that people were living in storage units. Earnest mentioned the availability of Title III funding, and Chief Blake added that a crew from Heart of Oregon is currently working on related tasks.

**EMS Report:**

Deputy Chief Lepin reviewed his monthly report, sharing that he will be meeting with the ASA committee next week. He also discussed transfers, mentioning that he has received data from the transfer center about missed transfers, which has been organized into a data sheet. Lepin and Danielle have been collaborating to estimate potential revenue from transfers. He noted that Adventure Medics receives a stipend from St. Charles and has a fatigued window. Lepin is awaiting information on the stipend amount. He also informed the board that Danielle, FF Pollard, and Lepin will meet with OSAA to testify on an unspecified issue. There were no further questions from the board.

**Chief Report:**

Chief Blake provided a brief overview of the department's ongoing activities, but no additional details were discussed in this portion.

**Citizens Input:**

Mark Cooley, a potential layoff candidate, raised several important questions regarding the impact of layoffs. He asked whether individuals being laid off would receive funds for their paramedic classes that were mandatory to be employed by the dept with a contract signed by the Chief. Cooley also inquired about the possibility of a severance package, as many employees would lose their health insurance. He sought clarification on the timeline for layoffs and how the part-time program would be affected. He asked if laid-off employees would be given priority for part-time shifts and how the reduction of part-timers would be handled. Chief Blake acknowledged that these are important details that still need to be worked out and reassured Cooley that the affected individuals would be communicated with directly. He also mentioned that the COIC grant, if it materializes, might provide additional opportunities for the department. Cooley asked if these ideas were realistic and sought the board's opinion on the matter. Director DuPont responded that many of the questions are operational in nature and fall outside the board’s control, but he would appreciate having more concrete numbers to evaluate. Ronan and Melka both asked about the specific timeline for layoffs, with Ronan wondering if a decision would be made before the next board meeting and Melka asking who would be targeted for layoffs. Blake noted that there is still a lot to determine but recommended monthly payments for medic fees, although he could not confirm the feasibility of this at the moment. Captain Glen mentioned that such discussions are better suited for an executive session. Ronan, once again, asked if a decision would be made before the next meeting, and Fry inquired about the number of rounds of layoffs expected.

Community member Evan Thomas voiced his commitment to helping the department avoid a second round of layoffs. He acknowledged the board’s inability to make specific decisions but expressed his willingness to help find solutions. Phil Johnston asked about the timing of board elections, noting that the upcoming elections are scheduled for this year. He also asked if the positions were being contested, and Director Galyen confirmed that neither of the current board members that are up for election were running for re-election. Director DuPont then shared his personal decision to retire, stating that his situation had changed significantly over the years. Director Miller, facing similar challenges, indicated that it would be better for him and the community if he did not seek re-election.

**Additional Comments or Concerns:** FF Kayla Page stated we are reducing labor and increasing workload. She would like a realistic idea of what 1 FTE is and the risk is with over exerting that.

**Adjourn Meeting:** 8:05 pm

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Board President Recording Sec.