**Jefferson County Fire & EMS**
**Board of Directors Meeting Minutes**
**Date:** April 16, 2025
**Time:** 5:30 PM
**Location:** Station 1701, 765 S. 5th St. Madras, OR 97741

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by the Board President, **Kim Stout**, at 5:35 PM.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director, **Chris Dupont,** at5:36 pm

**III. Roll Call**

**Board Members Present:** Board President Kim Stout, Secretary Dusty Miller, Director Chris Dupont,

Krystal Hughes, Finance Manager

Heather Mehlberg, Bookkeeper

**Board Members Absent:** Director Ryan Boyle, Vice President Rob Galyen and Tim Gassner, Attorney

**Staff Members Present:** Chief Jeff Blake, Deputy Chief Kasey Skaar, Deputy Chief Micheal Lepin, Danielle Peckham, Jeremy Stinson, Jeff Codemo, Kayla Page, Andrew Glen

**Community Members:** Linda Larsen, Gabby Beebe, Mr. and Mrs. Stinson, Stacy Chiddix

**Zoom Attendees:** Conner Bowman, Kirk Hagman

**IV. Agenda Approval/Adjustments**

The agenda was reviewed, and no additional items were proposed.
**Motion:** Chris Dupont motioned to approve the agenda as presented.
**Seconded by:** Dusty Miller.
**Motion Passed Unanimously. 5:36 pm**

**V. Presentations**

There were no presentations at this meeting.

**VI. Citizen Input (Items on or off the Agenda)**

There were no public comments submitted during this portion of the meeting or citizen input.

**VII. Approval of Minutes**

The minutes from the previous meetings were reviewed:

* **March 11th, 2025 Regular Minutes:**
**Motion:** Dusty Miller motioned to approve the minutes of the March 11th, 2025 as presented.
**Seconded by:** Kim Stout.
**Motion Passed Unanimously. 5:39 pm**

**VIII. Old Business**

**Building Expansion – Timeline Update****:**

Infrastructure is in place and prebuilt walls have been installed, which helped recover the three-week delay and brought the project back on schedule. The business section is currently 45% seismically complete, and the second floor and trusses are expected to be finished by next week. Site work is also scheduled for completion next week, after which the crew will return to finalize remaining tasks.

Stacy Chiddix reports that second-story construction is underway and subcontractors are scheduled to be on-site next week. Although 50% of the contingency budget has already been used, the team is actively working to recover costs related to design deficiencies involving the architect and engineering teams. These errors resulted in incorrect bid documents submitted to both contractors and the county, which has led to financial impacts. Major costs include the elevator and changes required during construction. While Griffin’s original bid came in $30K under a competing builder, design changes made after the bid resulted in an additional $37K in costs—putting more pressure on the contingency budget.

Despite this, approximately $57K in savings have been achieved through project deletions and design adjustments. Chief Blake also reported an additional $25K in savings by changing suppliers and products. Blake’s company is purchasing some supplies using the landscape budget to save on irrigation costs, and he emphasized that there is no markup involved in this.

Discussions are underway regarding contractor retention requirements. Stacy is checking on the state prevailing wage requirements under BOLI and has suggested using a retention bond. This would allow contractors and subcontractors to access the 5% retention after 90 days, instead of waiting up to 18 months, which would ease financial pressure on smaller firms. Stacy also recommends not paying final invoices to vendors responsible for errors or deficiencies in their work. These issues are being tracked closely, and the team is pursuing restitution where appropriate.

In terms of cash flow, Chief Blake explained that checks are issued monthly to Griffin and subcontractors, then submitted to Business Oregon. Reimbursement from the seismic program typically takes four to five days but can fluctuate throughout the month.

**Audit Updates:**
Chief Blake met with Chris Mahr in person on Monday, April 14th. The next audit, covering the 2023 fiscal year, is set to begin on April 1, 2025, and is expected to be completed before June 2025. The 2024 audit is already in progress, and a new auditor has been hired. The selected firm, Sensiba, comes highly recommended and has been the most communicative so far. Krystal and Chief Blake are managing the audit process together.

Dusty expressed concern that the organization has not yet received the standard audit questionnaire, which typically includes seven questions designed to identify any potential fraudulent behavior. Krystal will follow up with the auditors to confirm if and when the board will receive this questionnaire. A vote to accept the completed 2022 audit will be postponed until the next meeting and will be added to the agenda.

**Spending Reductions:**
Chief Blake reported ongoing efforts to reduce spending. As part of these cost-saving measures, four personnel were laid off, effective April 11th, 2025. Some of the affected individuals have secured new employment, while others have shifted to part-time status. Preliminary conversations are taking place with Culver regarding lease pricing. Additionally, the student program has been reduced by three participants, and the volunteer incentive program is currently on pause.

Due to uncertainties with federal Medicaid and Medicare funding, grants related to emergency management are being delayed. The department is proceeding with caution and reviewing all practices related to storage, credit card usage, and purchasing. Blake emphasized that they are looking for every opportunity to reduce costs, even in smaller areas. Despite these efforts, call volume continues to increase, which may lead to some unavoidable rising costs. Blake asked if there were any questions, but none were raised.

**Nighttime Transfers:**
Nighttime transfers have resumed, with an average of about one per night, although actual calls vary. DC Lepin noted that there were 35 total transfer requests in March and April, with nine of those occurring during the evening hours. Only three transfers were deferred, using available risk management tools. Staff now submit information through a fillable PDF form to DC Lepin, which has improved reporting efficiency. The busiest window for transfer requests is typically between midnight and 1:00 AM.

Chief Blake expressed appreciation for the staff’s flexibility in handling the increased volume and adapting to changes. Crook County and the department have submitted a request to St. Charles for additional funding to help support staffing for the program. Contracts are currently under legal review. St. Charles has made an offer—$300 per average transfer—but negotiations have not yet begun, though email communications have been initiated.

Blake pointed out that while the additional ambulance is helping, its current utilization rate is around 20%. To justify the need for a second ambulance, that rate would need to be closer to 5–6% in terms of automatic status. He emphasized that transfer unit utilization is a better measurement tool than simply counting calls, as each call varies in time and complexity. The department continues to rely on volunteers to cover callbacks and maintain staffing, and Blake assured the board they are monitoring these trends closely.

Kim asked for clarification on the usage percentage. Blake responded that the ambulance is in use about 25% of the time and acknowledged the difficulty of dropped second calls due to staffing challenges. He is continuing to track this data.

**Capital Funding:**
Chief Blake and Chief Spaulding recently attended a Joint Ways and Means Committee hearing in Warm Springs. Chief Blake testified in support of the district’s capital funding request and spent time afterward speaking directly with lawmakers to further advocate for funding. The goal is to secure state support that will extend the life of the bond and provide resources for much-needed equipment.

This is the third time Chief Blake has testified on this request, and he expects to know more in the final weeks of the current legislative session. Kim mentioned receiving the testimony email, and Chief Blake agreed that the system has become more robust.

**Annual Report:**
Chief Blake presented the annual report, which included a media release, organizational charts, and updates from EMS, Operations, and Fire Prevention. He reviewed all the key points and asked if there were any questions. Chris thanked Chief Blake for the presentation, and Chief Blake gave credit to the entire team for their work. DC Lepin remarked that his section of the report was completed first.

**IX. New Business**

**Finance Update:**
Heather and Krystal thanked everyone for submitting questions related to the audits and confirmed that work is ongoing. The original budget meeting, scheduled for April 29th, was canceled due to scheduling conflicts. Krystal has requested more time to allow for auditor feedback and proposed rescheduling the budget committee meeting to either **May 20th or May 22nd**. A second meeting will be scheduled for early June, with the goal of adopting the final budget during a meeting later that month. It was also confirmed that there will be **no meeting on May 6th**.

The **first official budget committee meeting will be May 22nd and June 3rd**, with the board agreeing on **Tuesday, June 3rd at 5:30 PM**. Krystal has made contact with Pioneer regarding publication deadlines. Dusty confirmed that the final budget adoption is scheduled for June 18th and stressed that the LB-1 notice must be published before then, meaning the budget meeting must be held on a Monday or Tuesday to meet publishing requirements.

Krystal noted that they are transitioning to a monthly financial snapshots, moving away from only reviewing full financials through the agenda. One major update is that the PERS actuarial team revised the contribution rates downward, which is a significant financial benefit compared to the prior year. Fortunately, there was no cost for the revision. The new PERS Tier 1/OPSRP rate is 17.65%, and Krystal will distribute that information. While there was some concern that PERS might not accept the revised proposal, it is now considered unlikely. A follow-up meeting with PERS is scheduled for May 30th, and an update will be provided to the budget committee on June 3rd.

Danielle presented revenue handouts during the meeting. Kim raised a question about loan funding, expressing concern over revenue shortfalls. Heather also asked about this. Krystal reviewed the financial dashboard, noting that payroll is running higher, and debt service is not yet fully reflected in the current budget. She plans to make adjustments in the upcoming budget resolution. Although the district is still saving on materials and services, all expenses are being closely monitored. There are some unreimbursed overtime costs, including thew configuration. for the California and coverage for PLO and other staff leaves, which contributed to overtime payouts.

Heather clarified the month-to-month general fund activity for March 1–31, and Dusty inquired about the related costs. Chief Blake explained that those costs are due to fire responses, which were billed out only after reimbursement was received. In California’s case, reimbursement is still pending, but staff were already paid. For example, Jared’s overtime from the California deployment is still awaiting reimbursement.

Dusty asked about transfers and funding related to staff who were recently laid off. Chief Blake confirmed that grant funds will be used next month to compensate those individuals. Heather discussed the transfer request, and Krystal highlighted items on the Capital Fund page, including expected seismic grant revenues, and noted that the next debt service payment is due in mid-June, requiring an estimated $460,000 from property tax revenues in May.

On the final page of the financial report, there was feedback about modifying the layout to separate grant reserves from bond accounts and to clearly show cash-on-hand as of the end of March. Rick Allen asked about the seismic grant funds, noting they are not bond-related. Chief Blake explained that seismic grant funds replenish the bond account, serving the same capital purpose.

Dusty recommended that the Fire and EMS equipment line item be moved up in priority. He also asked about the original intent behind how certain lines and accounts were categorized. Chief Blake clarified that the current setup was not formally adopted. Kasey added that some equipment items originally came from the EMS side, and suggested that the board consider establishing a dedicated reserve account for equipment, separating it from other funds.

Dusty commented that revenue is on track for billing, but noted it’s still not enough to support the current $4.4 million loan and related debt service. Chief Blake stated that next month’s figures will show a downturn, and that the district is operating without a clear financial average at this time. He emphasized that every dollar matters and highlighted the broader funding challenges for EMS, especially given the significant deficit.

Dusty expressed concern about the overall financial trajectory and asked when the situation began to shift. Krystal responded that while it’s important to understand the past, the focus now must be on how to move forward within a $3.5 million budget. Chris added that prior funds are already spent, and the district is now working with a $4 million expenditure on a $3 million budget, and needs a clear plan to regain balance. Chief Blake agreed, emphasizing the need to focus on solutions. Heather noted that spending reductions will begin to show in May, not in April.

DC Skaar expressed concern that even with the layoff of four staff positions, grant obligations and overtime may still result in higher-than-expected costs. Overtime is expected to increase during the summer months. Chief Blake confirmed that staffing has been adjusted to minimum levels, but that overtime will remain necessary to maintain operations. COIC has offered to provide funding to assist with houselessness response, which could help offset costs.

The conversation concluded with a call for increased revenue and strategic financial planning. Comments were made regarding budget transparency, account consolidation, and future priorities.

Deputy Skaar Arrived at 6:32pm

**PGE – RFP:**
Chief Blake shared that late last week, the RFP (Request for Proposal) contract was sent to both Lake Chinook and Warm Springs. He noted that the RFP process marks a substantial move forward, although the final outcome is still unknown. Once the process is complete and the contract is finalized, Blake will provide an update. The **RFP is due by May 16th**.

**Fire Operations – Deputy Chief Skaar:**
DC Skaar provided an operations update, beginning with the **March 25th call data**, which showed an increase in total call volume compared to the same month last year. There has been approximately a **20%** increase in apparatus utilization as units become busier. Shift structures remain normal, and Captain Glen shared the monthly incident report broken down by time of day. There were 53 transfers last month, and DC Skaar confirmed that those numbers would be included in future reports.

Due to staff reductions, both the Training Captain and Support Services Captain have been reassigned to operational shifts, moving from daytime schedules. A major crew restructuring also occurred. Kasey noted that with several staff members currently on leave, there may be a need to increase minimum staffing to five personnel per shift, which may also require additional call-backs. With the busy season approaching, including events like Circle Track, staffing demands will continue to increase.

DC Skaar also reported a successful high school prevention event, conducted in coordination with OSFM and the new business licensing process. He visited Culver High School last Friday and mentioned that multiple school tours are upcoming. Due to construction, these will take place at Station 1702, and he encouraged scheduling with Mrs. Tams.

Chris asked who would be sent for the school visits, and DC Skaar confirmed it would be a combination of paid staff and volunteers, noting that reimbursement would be received afterward. Volunteer availability may decrease during this period. Dusty asked if the minimum staffing number included students; DC Skaar clarified that it refers to paid staff only.

DC Skaar noted that Mark and Tom would remain on call and continue performing their regular duties. They have not been demoted but will provide support services, which will need to be pre-planned according to shift schedules. Some training and support tasks may be delayed during this time.

**EMS Report – Deputy Chief Lepin:**
Deputy Chief Lepin began by reviewing the recent EMS newsletter. He mentioned that video CMACs, which were long overdue, have now been ordered with $33,000 in funding from an opioid reimbursement grant. He also discussed ventilator training with Dr. Welle, noting the long training days involved.

EMS modernization is moving into phase two, with a goal to gain approval through OSAA, regional ATABs, and others. This effort seeks to create an EMS mobilization system similar to fire conflagration, especially for events like solar eclipses. The state has been divided into regions with varying needs, and a 10-year study has already been conducted. COVID-19 highlighted systemic issues, and work is ongoing to find sustainable solutions.

In areas like Wheeler County, EMS faces significant challenges. Towns like Fossil, Spray, and Mitchell have no hospitals. Fossil lacks a crew; Spray depends on volunteers who triage and drive themselves, while Mitchell is staffed entirely by retired volunteers.

There are ongoing challenges with doctors overseeing PAs. However, the community paramedic program in Grant County has been a major success, especially if St. Charles continues supporting training efforts. Volunteer engagement is still critical.

DC Lepin also discussed the balanced billing legislation, which recently passed its first committee with a majority vote. The bill would cap statewide commercial insurance charges at a fixed rate and require agencies to accept public ASA fee schedules. Adjustments will need to be made publicly. Medicare reimbursement rates are currently 325%, and Lepin affirmed that the agency's rates are ethical.

Kim inquired about billing for critical care ventilator usage, and it was clarified that billing is only allowed for BiPAP, not full ventilator use. Andrew mentioned that the ventilators are no longer being serviced but remain a robust and lifesaving tool, with initial setup costs of $33,000. Of that amount, St. Charles covered $15,000, and COIC covered the rest. Danielle confirmed this at 7:33 PM.

**Transfer Station and Matrix:**
The transfer matrix will be shared next month. Dusty created the initial matrix to track performance. Kim questioned about how the difference from SCT (Specialty Care Transport) to CCT (Critical Care Transport) and Lepin said that the goal is to fully implement CCT within five years. Prineville requested transfer services, but Blake stated that the agency cannot take those on at this time.

**Chief’s Report – Chief Blake:**
Chief Blake reported that St. Charles has proposed an availability fee at the Madras campus and confirmed receipt of the $35,000 summer staffing grant. He provided an update on HB3243 (Balanced Billing), which is moving forward in the legislature.

Blake has been conducting meet-and-greet sessions and is working on contract updates, including those with Plateau Travel Plaza and Culver. He noted that a new lease agreement is in the works, representing a better relationship and potential facility upgrades.

He also spoke about the GEMT (Ground Emergency Medical Transportation) workgroup, noting changes to state Medicaid billing and cost reporting. This includes potential updates to the state plan amendment, which would allow fire departments to report and recoup more actual costs. This must be finalized by May 15th, and Chief Blake emphasized that fire agencies are among the few required to report costs. Approximately $3,000 in mitigation funds could result from GEMT reporting.

Finally, Chief Blake mentioned exploring a quick response vehicle option to increase flexibility in emergency response. He asked the board if there were any questions. None were asked.

**X. Citizen Input (Continued)**

* 7:40 pm no input closed

**XI. Additional Comments/Announcements**

* 7:41 pm no comments

**XII. Adjournment 7:40pm**

**Motion:** Kim Stout motioned to adjourn the meeting.
**Seconded by:** N/A
**Motion Passed N/A.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM by Board President **Kim Stout**.

**Signatures:**

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**Board President, Kim Stout**       **Recording Secretary**