

MINUTES

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE BUHL CITY COUNCIL AND THE BUHL RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
MARCH 7, 2022

PRESENT:

Pam McClain	Mayor	Autumn Jones	Treasurer
Michael Higbee	Council President	Neal Gier	Fire District Chairman
Kelly Peterson	Council Member	Glenn Van Patten	Fire District Commissioner
Amanda Hawkins	Council Member	Bob Linderman	Fire District Commissioner
Marla Sisson	Council Member	Andrew Stevens	Fire Chief
Karen Drown	Clerk	Mike Ruffling	District Clerk
		Concerned Citizens	

The meeting was opened at 6:30 p.m. Karen Drown confirmed a quorum for the meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Minutes of January 17, 2022: Michael moved to approve the minutes from January 17, 2022. Neal seconded the motion. Karen noted she did not catch during the meeting who made the motion and seconded the adjourn; no one could remember who made the action. Karen stated the minutes will just read a motion was made to adjourn. There was no further discussion and the motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS

Review and discussion of Ways Forward for Fire Services:

- a) **Financial Research Information:** Autumn reviewed the historical budget amounts that were returned back at the end of each fiscal year. She also reviewed a simulated L2 that, Jame Archibald, with Twin Falls County, had drafted as if annexation were to happen. Mike Ruffling noted annexation is not an option for the district. There had been a question on how the City of Twin Falls levied versus the Twin Falls Rural Fire District. The City of Twin Falls levies on both land and structures whereas the district levies on structures only. She also reviewed the cost of waterlines to the site. She noted the costs do not include the purchasing of right-of-way land or the cost for DEQ required plans. It was questioned if the property has a well and it was noted it does but is not sufficient for the needs for the station.
- b) **Idaho Code Sections:** Karen noted the sections of Idaho Code that were included were ones that had been referenced in the research material. Pam commented she felt it was important for the community to have a say.
- c) **Samples and Details from other Departments:** Karen reviewed the materials that had been provided by other departments. Those included were Filer, City of Twin Falls, City of Marsing, City of Plummer, City of Donnelly, City of Kellogg, City of Gooding, City of Ashton, City of Shoshone, and City of St. Anthony.
- d) **Additional information from board members:** Glenn questioned what is board looking for and what it wanted? He added they want to afford people and the gear for what the district and city need. He presented the proposed contract from the district to the city. He noted Buhl is one of the top departments in the state but we need to provide supplies and manpower needed. He reviewed a proposed budget for the contract. He noted the new station cost of \$3.7 to \$3.9 million, and they would need \$613,000 from the city to keep running in the positive. The District would pick up the \$116,904 shortfall. He questioned how do we take care of the personnel that we have. It was again stated annexation is out of the game. Neal stated they had used Twin Falls as a template but had included EMS/QRU where Twin Falls doesn't provide EMS services.

There was a discussion about response time from the site. There was also a discussion about St. Luke's returning if a new station is built. Andrew stated they will re-evaluate it at that time. Andrew added the plans include sleeping quarters and a place to park an ambulance inside for the paramedic staff if they did come back to Buhl.

Michael Higbee commented the proposed contract price is an 82% increase on budget. This would have the city paying double the mill rate as allowed. He stated this contract is not an option for the city as annexation is not an option for the district. He added this increase is significant and the city would have to

close departments to make this work as it would affect other general fund departments. Andrew stated he is very frugal with the budget and saves money year to year.

There was a further discussion about the water lines to the property. It was noted the design of the project would take about six months and could take up to one year after that before construction would be complete. There was also a discussion about grants. Mike Ruffing stated it would be a lease-to-own option and grants wouldn't be an option. Only a significant grant would change the lease-to-own option.

Discussion on the design and layout of the building was discussed. It was noted the building is expandable for the future. There would be 2 career firefighters, 2 St. Luke's Paramedics and possibly 3 to 4 resident firefighters. It would be similar to the new station in Gooding. There was a question about Station 2. It was explained that is a sub-station used for call volume in the canyon and helped the ISO ratings for district residents.

Amanda questioned the driving force behind the station now. There was a discussion about the difference between the Buhl Fire Department with one station and Twin Falls with multiple stations. Andrew noted the GEMT bill passed the house and is going to the Senate. Amanda commented that you either have the money or you don't but you keep saving. Kelly stated the city does not have the increase to put into this now.

There was a discussion about the QRU Association and the purchases for equipment and supplies they make for the department.

Discussion continued and looking at other options. Andrew stated the state fire association is trying to get the state to relook at the annexation problem within the legislation. Michael stated the city has general fund savings but not just for fire services. He added there is no way to ask the voters of the city if they are ok to pay more for the same fire service. He is not sure why the city has to subsidize the fire district.

There was a question about staffing. Andrew stated typically they need to hire in 3 shifts. He is looking to include a resident program. He has met his personnel cap with full-time staffing and is setting fine for the future now.

Glen questioned how the city could support with the funds available. Kelly added that options needed to be looked at but can't swallow doubling the funding from the city. Andrew stated he could look at options to look at using the current building and cutting the new building design. Kelly stated he is not suggesting reducing the building.

CITIZENS CONCERNS – Dave McClain questioned why not a word had been heard from Neal Gier and why has he pushed the football down the path. And why is Neal Gier adamant about splitting up. Dave added the previous chief created two bosses. And questioned why couldn't this agreement continue. Mike Ruffing stated it has to do with how to legally fund a building. Michael stated we don't have to split to buy a building. Dave concluded that this situation now is toxic.

It was noted the next quarterly meeting is scheduled for April 18, 2022, at 6:30 PM.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Glenn moved to adjourn the meeting; Kelly seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 PM.