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PALOMAR MOUNTAIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Minutes of the monthly meeting of The Board of Directors Saturday, June 25, 2016 (Draft 2016-08-03 1817h)

The meeting was called to order at 9:16 A.M. by President Leininger.

Board members present: Suzann Leininger, Michael Pique, Keith Ronchetti, Glenn Borland, Cliff Kellogg.

Also present were CAL FIRE Unit Chief Tony Mecham, CAL FIRE Division Chief Nick Schuler, San Diego County Fire Authority Group Program Manager Herman Reddick, and about 20 Palomar residents.

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment: Deferred.

Financial Report: Keith Ronchetti reported no major changes. (The report has been included as part of these minutes.) We received the first reimbursement of \$2501.43 from the SRA chipping grant. Current assets are \$110,146.11. The report was approved.

Minutes: The minutes from the 6/04/2016 board meeting were approved as presented by Michael Pique.

Captain's Report: Suzann Leininger read Captain Johnson's written report, (included as part of these minutes). He says our Engine 7719, Patrol, and water tender are in service. Our Utility is at the shop but will be back. We are using up the fuel in the above-ground tank so it can be removed as we are now supplied by the county yard on State Park Road. 53 County reserves are now staffing the Northern Division. We saw 4 calls so far in June. The report was approved.

Staffing Update and Discussion: Chief Mecham announced good news, that we will have career firefighter staffing from CAL FIRE 24/7 starting Monday. They will be supplemented by the County Fire Authority reserves who are serving now. The "reserves program" is a victim of its own success in training firefighters, many of whom are hired away before reaching driver status. When the reserves aren't able to staff Palomar (Station 79), we can't meet community coverage standards because we have no nearby CAL FIRE station, unlike many other county stations. We started last month with a plan to have a CAL FIRE Administrative Captain here part-time, to make optimum use of the reserves. We projected out six months and could see we won't have the drivers, we won't be able to cover the station. We met again with Ron Lane from County Public Safety, and with the County Supervisors' staff, and came up with this 24/7 staffing for a one-year trial. If we end up being able to staff with reserves, we'll go back home. If not, we'll re-evaluate for the following year: a sincere and deep commitment that this station needs priority.

The cost for a year is about a million dollars - way beyond what's covered by the property taxes here. This is in addition to our new Patrol vehicle (\$340,000) and new engine (\$450,000). We are going to get a more suitable engine this year, more maneuverable, about 3 years old, from the south county. We are moving forward with replacing the old trailer offices in back with new modular housing that meets current building and safety codes, and will be where the crews can sleep and live up here.

Question: we have a couple of EMTs and some equipment. If they're sent off the mountain to help on a fire, will we be alone? CAL FIRE is the contractor to the county: paid to serve this county, not Riverside or San Bernardino. We will go to help La Jolla Reservation or Lake Henshaw, but not remote fires. If we do leave for a major incident on, say, Highway 76, CAL FIRE will send up help. We won't be routinely be going to places like Fallbrook.

Question: How many reserves do we need? We want a 3-person engine company. The reserve attendance numbers go up when we have career staffing here, for the better training. Our problem has been having DRIVERS, so our working plan is career plus reserves.

Question: will firefighters here be familiar with Palomar Mountain? Some people will permanently be here this year. They are driving around and learning right now. Mike Good will be the Captain, he has a long history working with CERT and on disaster preparedness. We will work with Suzann Leininger to update the name-to-address cross reference she prepared a few years ago.

Question: we have some long roads; aren't there places an engine can't go? We lay hose down - and the new engine will get down even more roads than the one we have now.

Question: are these all "money" issues? It was to get the career staffing, not to get the reserves. Reserve staffing - what used to be "volunteer" - is a national issue, partly because of training standards dictated by OSHA. Ten years ago, you could have 40 to 60 hours of training and be certified as a volunteer firefighter. Now you need 400 hours at least. This is a problem in every community across the USA - also there's been a huge spike in career retirements; great pressure on reserve programs. That's why we were squeezed into needing this 1-year trial of career help.

Nick Schuler explained how we will get more drivers qualified for the "rescue" - the pickup-truck-sized vehicle. The county has created a new job description for the rescues, patrols, and water tenders that is simpler than for the big engines; will need about 60 hours training instead of 160 hours. This should help in the struggle that all of rural California is making to keep the reserve stations open after the California Supreme Court vacated the reservists' 2-year contract commitments.

Question: if there's a wildland fire on Palomar, how are we notified now that so many of us don't have landline telephones any more? Register ALL your phone numbers with "Alert San Diego", Monitor Twitter or call 211 for information; there's a public information officer on duty 24 hours. Also, your local CERT team and the sheriff will be alerting you. Bill Leininger recommends registering an out-of-area number with the Alert service, such as for a relative or friend, so they will know about any emergency up here. The siren on the roof of the fire station is loud, but can't reliably be heard on the whole mountain.

Chief Mecham noted this was his 36th year in the Fire Service; the first hours of calls in a fire are overwhelming, but the sheriff gets up in force: their initial response is 20 deputies. But ... if you see smoke, LEAVE; don't wait for instructions. A new evacuation preparedness plan brochure is underway. We are looking at committing to grading the Nate Harrison annually, as required. We do routinely check it for abandoned cars, trash dumps, overgrown brush on the sides.

Linda Fortney, former Fire Board President, thanked Chief Mecham, Chief Schuler, and Mr. Reddick for their help and for coming up today to educate & calm us. Chief Mecham complimented the Board for being strong advocates without being inflammatory; just "walked in with the facts" and made it a lot easier for him and Herman Reddick to sit down with the county supervisors and work out a deal.

CERT: No report this month.

Fire Safe Council: The Wildland-Urban Interface training day, Saturday June 18, was successful and enjoyable.

Grants: Kathleen Edwards, managing the SRA Palomar Divide Fuel Break work, says it is on-hold because of the high temperatures, dry weather, and now a Golden Eagle seen in the area. She hopes to resume in September or October.

Board Elections: Three positions will be elected at the September 4 annual meeting. Email nominations to "nominations@palomar-fire.org" or contact Nominations Chair John Lesac.

Adjournment: 10:31 A.M. 6/25/2016

The next meeting is scheduled for 8/06/2016 at 9:00 A.M.

- Michael Pique