

===== PMVFD Board Meeting 6 June 2015 =====

PALOMAR MOUNTAIN VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Minutes of the monthly meeting of The Board of Directors Saturday, June 6, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 8:09 A.M. by President Leininger. Board members present: Burt Johnson, Suzann Leininger, Keith Ronchetti, and Mike Pique. Dave Robarts absent. Also present were CALFIRE Chief Williamson, PMFD Captain Tilch, CALFIRE Captains Johnson and Silva, Retired PMFD Chief Kellogg, CERT director Alan Serry, and about 20 residents.

All stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public comment - Rosemary Johnston said she learned about today's meeting only accidentally. Suzann Leininger responded that the palomar-fire.org web site is still being set up and suggestions for better publicity are appreciated.

The minutes of the 05/02/2015 board meeting were distributed. Burt Johnson moved to accept the minutes as presented, Keith Ronchetti seconded. The minutes were approved.

Financial Report: Keith Ronchetti reported he has closed the EMS account and moved those funds into the main savings account. (The report has been included as part of these minutes.) Our current balance is \$65,802.58; the training grant still has some funds we are spending out, and the CSA account has some funds. Burt moved to accept, Suzann seconded and the report was approved.

Chief's Report: Chief Kellogg retired last month; Chief Williamson presented her first report as overseer of operations (included as part of these minutes). The gel engine has lived out its usefulness and is going to Valley Center CERT. The old Suburban has gone to La Jolla reservation fire department. A grant has been approved for the Palomar Divide fuel break: above Oak Grove, tying in to an existing USFS break. A grant for community chipping has been approved.

Chief Williamson reported extensively on the 28 May quarterly Zone meeting. The county has revised the volunteer reserve policy manual, which details training, grooming, qualifications, and positions, going into effect 1 July. No more local (such as Palomar Mountain) patches to be allowed as they are considered ``confusing to the public". The

stipend (max) increases from \$115 to \$145 per day; stipends will be paid monthly. There will be no more "Captain" rank at Palomar: highest will be "Engineer", who will still have authority to organize and command calls under the CFA incident command. The CFA will better enforce the 3-shifts-per-month attendance rule for volunteer reserves with a "three notices and you're out" policy.

Chief Williamson said Palomar "hasn't ever gone dark" and keeping it staffed is her #1 priority. She therefore asked the Scheduling office to move to the Deer Springs (career) station #13, to oversee the Northern Zone (De Luz and Palomar).

Rosemary Johnston asked if a person at Palomar could do that scheduling. Yes, but with Chief Kellogg retired, she felt it could slip through the cracks. Through CFA, if Palomar is unstaffed, Chief Williamson has authority to move a crew up here from a long list.

Palomar is a "priority cover" station; the Zone meeting reviewed the Standards of Coverage policy document. Chief Williamson represented Palomar. Suppose there was a big incident with many crews heading out of the county; De Luz would cover Palomar since De Luz has a nearby career station whereas Palomar is an isolated "sky island". Sue Hanson asked if the De Luz crews would have any Palomar navigation training. Chief Williamson said that in six months, all front-line vehicles would be equipped with an Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) so dispatchers will be able to respond to calls knowing what vehicles and resources are actually where. We will be sure the map books that Palomar vehicles carry are with De Luz, but we know they don't fully replace local knowledge.

Three new "Type 6" vehicles are in county service now, one here at Palomar, although not yet fully operational (needs gel tank installed). These are basically pickup trucks whose driving qualifications are easier than for the big engines, and they can do both medical response and light firefighting.

Over the next two years, Palomar is set to receive a new Type 1 engine (big): first Ocotillo Wells, then Mount Laguna, then Palomar.

Palomar has two water tenders; one of them will always stay here.

The CFA now has a 22.7 million dollar permanent budget over three years. CFA Chief Mecham and Herman Reddick also got a one-time 4 million dollar allocation, some of which will support training between CFA and CALFIRE units.

A draft "Standard of Coverage" (which stations are covered first) will go out in writing to the Board.

For several years, the Palomar crews have been living in the Community Center building. The Board has wanted a real station. Chief Meham said his top three priorities for new stations are San Pasqual, Mount Laguna, and Palomar. Likely, our apparatus bay would stay; other details to be discussed with the Board. There would need to be a lot of preparation, such as archeology, but Ranchita, Boulevard, Sunshine Summit, and De Luz got new stations. It's significant that we're on that short list.

Gordon Madison rose to "offer a dissenting voice." He said he was impressed by new toys, but that we built this place and he sees it as being absorbed. The wall plaques honoring the founders and supporters have come down. An immense amount of love and labor went into this department, to be lost to a faceless government agency that will make us take off our patches: a heart torn out of our community. The volunteer spirit is very dear to me, starting 30 years ago with countless hours of dedication.

Suzann said this was very much understood.

Cliff Kellogg said the plaques are on display in the Admin building, and noted that seven members of his family have served on the department. He thinks we no longer need a volunteer department in the sense that "the pager goes off and you jump in your car and hurry to the station". We now have 30 EMTs on staff, we used to have 2. The mountain demographics have changed radically and there are not as many able-bodied full-timers ready to put on turnout gear and jump on a truck.

Sue Hanson said she was blindsided by the Board's decision not to have a barbecue this year - it was a major event on the mountain and important to its sense of community. There was not even a call put out "we need help this year".

Chief Williamson said the barbecue was a Board, not CFA, function and noted that in southern California, few firefighters are from the local community that they serve.

Rosemary Johnston commented that seeing crews with Palomar patches going out to help others engendered a lot of community pride, "not confusion but camaraderie". Chief Williamson said it was discussed at the Zone meeting, but because all of the volunteers are under CFA, the CFA is accountable for them, not (say) the Palomar Mountain Fire Board.

Suzann said she lives in Escondido, near the Safari Park. In fires, she saw a lot of non-San Diego county engines. She hopes San Diego county can move toward career coverage, so we don't get the reputation of not being able to protect ourselves.

Heather Beer said she'd been volunteering as an office administrator with the department since 2004. At this point, she sees no future as a volunteer. What is the Board going to do regarding the 50-year lease? If we give everything to the CFA, they have control over us. What about the people who worked 40 years by themselves taking calls and doing it all? What about the community member who doesn't see a familiar face come to the house in a medical emergency? Or doesn't know where their house is if her husband gets sick? This fire station property has seven generations of ties. We should be able to have a barbecue if we want to, and keep awarding service pins to our own firefighters. Like each other or not, we've always helped each other. I want to help - mapping, dispatching: I know this mountain real well. I don't want to see us lose 40 years of blood, money, even death - just to get some new vehicles.

Cliff Kellogg again pointed to mountain demographics - and that, technically, anyone can sign up for the CFA volunteer program. But the stringent requirements, training, and schedule rule out almost anyone who has a full-time job. Now that the station is staffed around the clock, our response is vastly faster than paging people to drive in ever was.

Gordon Madison said, "But our heritage and soul is lost".

Burt Johnson pointed out the Board has articulated Gordon's spirit for the past two years. Our property stays here, we can have barbecues if we want, and we are working to make sure we can use the station for community events. Suzann said the decision to skip the 2015 barbecue was a consequence of the 2014 barbecue requiring an immense amount of work by Linda Fortney yet raising, at most, a couple of thousand dollars. And that, as of January 2015, no one had offered to do the job again. Sue Hanson said she had offered, but that word didn't get through. Suzann admitted the Board's communications had been poor. And yes, we can do one in 2016 if we want, or try something different. Alan Serry said the Community Center Board was looking at doing a 2015 Labor Day weekend 'picnic', perhaps at the State Park.

Chief Williamson stresses that activities like the church meeting and the PMPO pancake breakfast are welcome to continue, just please email her so the crews are informed.

Brett Hauser remarked, in support of the Board skipping a 2015 barbecue, that the 2014 one was a whole lot of work for the fire crews since the community didn't really step up to help. He wasn't surprised that the Board couldn't put it together for 2015. He said it was time to reinvent this and rethink it to be more manageable. Gordon Madison closed with the view that the number of people who'll help is very proportional to how the Fire Department is seen as part of the community.

CERT Report: Alan Serry said CERT has 20 active members, about 8-12 of which show up for each 2nd Saturday training. CERT did a 2 May event with the glider club, learning about emergency radio communications. Alan has applied for a grant to buy an enclosed 6x12-foot trailer to hold medical supplies, radios, and a small generator. He reminded people they can order reflective house number signs through CERT. The 30 May urban-wildland interface class he attended was very worthwhile and he will offer a summary of the material next Saturday.

Suzann Leininger summarized the key points of the proposed 50-year lease of the property to the county, and the optional 'add on' sub-lease under which the county would return operational control to the Board, subject to continuing renewal of the Board's operating contract with the county. Burt Johnson said the county currently funds the department about \$200,000 per year, including payment of stipends to the firefighters. Keith Ronchetti explained that the lease protects the county that we'll keep using this land for a fire department, making them willing to invest in a new building and other permanent improvements. Mike Pique read out the key parts of the sublease, whereby the county returns day-to-day control of the property to the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department, under an operating contract like the one we've signed for many years. Retired Chief Kellogg said all the other fire departments who've signed the lease have also signed the sub-lease. He also suggested that the sooner we sign the lease, the sooner our turn for a new building could come up.

Sue Hanson asked where we'd get the same budget if we sign the sublease. Chief Kellogg said the contract budget, now about \$105,000, would be reduced by the county's automatically paying many bills that now come through our budget. Rick Palmer said he's worried that as the CFA more and more runs the operation, they take care of us, the community passion drains. He says it's vital to keep the community involved. Suzann suggests a department historian - Heather Beer says she has some photos and documents. Keith Ronchetti says the CFA heard our insistence on keeping the property open to community events. Gordon Madison asked if the house would stay - it's a great nexus for

the community; could become a library and "outreach" center. Getting the house back for the community would be better than having a room in a big facility, which is not so conducive or inviting to residents and guests. He'd like to see a Community Center that the Fire Department was welcome to use for events, not the other way around. Cliff Kellogg said Earl Walls had sketched a 20x30-foot extension to the house, but we could not afford to do that on \$2000-\$3000 a year in donations. One current idea is to add crew quarters over the equipment bay, as an alternative to tearing down the house and putting up a new building with a large meeting/training/emergency shelter room.

Glenn Borland asked if we could still modify the lease and sub-lease. Keith Ronchetti said yes, the Board was having ongoing meetings with the CFA. Alan Serry said he's attended all of the Board meetings for some time, thinks it's very important that the station really is staffed around the clock. Feels the Board really has done a lot of homework. Our community has changed a lot, even just in the past 5-8 years since the Poomacha Fire. He's for the lease/sub-lease.

Suzanne brought up apparatus (vehicles) ownership. The CFA proposes we turn the vehicles over to them, they take on all the maintenance. Burt says the fleet is very expensive to keep up-to-date. Captain Tilch says the life expectancy of a Type 1 engine (like our Big Red) is about 100,000 miles, 10 to 15 years max. But they become functionally obsolete sooner. Cliff Kellogg said former Chief Karl Bauer got us our engines through county grants. They are now 12 and 14 years old. So ``we got them for free", the deal is we give them to the county, they at some point retire them and replace them with new ones. Michael Walsh said the Board and department have a fiduciary interest in them and should investigate their likely salvage value before giving them over.

The department's Skid Steer costs us about \$600 each time we use it to clear snow. It will be put up for sale.

Adjournment: 10:50 A.M. 6/6/2015

The next Board meeting is scheduled for 8 AM, Saturday 27 June (moved a week early to avoid July 4 holiday).

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