

BENTON COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT #1 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday October 1, 2024 – 6:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioner Carpenter called the regular meeting of the Board of Fire Commissioners of Benton County Fire District No. 1 to order in-person and via video-conference at 6:00 p.m. at 1811A S. Ely St. Kennewick, Washington. In attendance at this meeting in-person were Commissioner Carpenter, Commissioner Jenkins, Chief/District Secretary LoParco, Deputy Chief Nicholls, and Executive Director Ewing. Commissioner Phillips attended via video-conference.

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA

There were no additions to the agenda.

CORRESPONDENCE

The correspondence received and sent was reviewed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Jenkins made a motion to approve the regular minutes of September 17, 2024. Commissioner Carpenter seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Fund Transaction Details

Presented to the Board were 2024 transactions #1954 to #1985. The transactions totaled \$43,112.91. General Fund \$41,268.40, Bond Funds \$550.00, and Custodial Funds \$1,294.51. Commissioner Jenkins made a motion to approve the vouchers. Commissioner Carpenter seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously. The voucher registers are attached to these minutes and constitute a part thereof.

REPORTS

Commissioner Carpenter reported:

- He attended the Southeastern Washington Fire Commissioners Association (SEWFCA) meeting in Dayton. Attendance from Columbia County was limited, and no applications were received for the SEWFCA grant this year.

Chief Executive Officer Click reported:

- The specifications for the purchase of two Type I apparatus have been completed, and he is awaiting pricing from the sales representative at Hughes Fire Equipment. If the purchase proceeds, delivery is anticipated between August and September 2025.
- He attended the BCES Board meeting, where discussions focused on reallocating funds to address identified needs, including 12 staff vacancies and the microwave project. The 800 MHz transition plan is progressing but will cost \$7 million more than expected. However, the District's 2025 assessment is projected to decrease. Chief Carlyle from Benton County Fire District #4 will assume the role of Primary Representative for the area's Fire Districts.

Fire Chief LoParco reported:

- He attended the Lineage Logistics presentation, where he met with State Senators, County Commissioners, and various government agencies to discuss future planning and coordination in the event of a similar incident. The key takeaway was the need for faster communication between local government agencies and Senators. It was a productive networking opportunity, and the plan is to hold additional meetings to explore ways to free up funds to support the community.

Deputy Chief Nicholls reported:

- He has spent a significant time preparing for the captain's promotion testing process.
- He and Training Officer Bibe met with Kennewick Fire Chiefs and Training Officer to review the Fire Training Center (FTC) draft budget for 2025.
- The Ironman event on the 22nd ran smoothly, with no transport needs despite minor traffic congestion. It was successful and the Ironman event is already on the schedule to take place in the Tri-Cities in 2025 and 2026. He will be sitting in on the scheduled after-action review tomorrow.
- We do not have anyone out on mobilization assignments. The engine and staff that were on assignment in California returned Sunday.
- There was a minor MVA where the ambulance side mirror struck another vehicle's side mirror at an intersection. The incident is still under investigation, and we expect to receive a Tort Claim soon.
- He attended a regional stakeholder meeting where there was discussion regarding new WEMSYS data collection requirements and the No Surprise Balance Billing Protection Act.
- It was brought to the attention of the local chiefs that AMR is significantly increasing regional Basic Life Support (BLS) capacity by placing eight ambulances into service. Chief Michael from Kennewick Fire is following up with AMR for further clarification on the reasons behind this increase and to ensure that it aligns with the Region 8 Trauma Council's approved emergency ambulance response plan.

Training

Captain Bibe reported:

- He met with the chiefs to review the 2025 FTC Budget and submitted the final budget to Executive Director Ewing today.
- The FTC Burn Prop Conversion project is complete. He and Deputy Chief Nicholls received owner training today on the burn prop to ensure proper use and maintenance. This burn prop meets the intent and will work well for future training.
- We have some upcoming training sessions scheduled, a majority in late November.

Labor

Union Vice President Bibe reported:

- He and Chief LoParco discussed how the union can assist in disseminating information to citizens about the upcoming levy. The union is eager to collaborate with the District to ensure that citizens are well-informed.

OLD BUSINESS

Vacant Positions

Chief LoParco, Deputy Chief Nicholls, and Executive Director Ewing met with Archbright to begin the hiring process for the Finance Manager and Logistics positions. Contracts have been signed, and the job descriptions should be ready by October 7 or 8, with advertising starting on October 14.

NEW BUSINESS

Captains Promotional Exam

Deputy Chief Nicholls presented the Captain's Eligibility List from the exam held on September 21. Lieutenant Moore was the only candidate. Commissioner Phillips made a motion to approve the Captain's Eligibility List, and Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

Budget Workshop

Executive Director Ewing informed the Board that, as requested, a meeting room at the Davenport Hotel has been secured for the Budget Workshop during the Washington Fire Commissioners Conference. The room, provided at no cost to the District, is reserved for October 23 in Meeting Room 6, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Ambulance Transport Rate – Balance Billing Protection Act

Deputy Chief Nicholls provided an overview of the Balance Billing Protection Act, which requires the District to submit ambulance transport rates to the Office of Insurance Commissioner (OIC) by October 16. The Act mandates that insurance companies cover 80% of ground ambulance services, reducing financial burdens on patients using out-of-network providers.

Originally, the GEMT Cost Report was proposed to set transport rates. However, consultations with local agencies and the third-party billing company indicated this could lead to significant co-pay increases for patients. It was suggested to discontinue billing for Treat No Transport (TNT) services and to establish a base rate for ambulance transport, regardless of residency or service level, aligning the District's practices with other providers.

Following the discussion, Chief LoParco presented Resolution 2024-16 Modifications to Ambulance Transport Rates to the Board. Commissioner Phillips motioned to approve the resolution, and Commissioner Jenkins seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Marketing Agreement

Chief LoParco presented a Marketing Agreement with Liz Loomis Public Affairs to support the District's recruitment, community education, and communication about tax dollar usage and upcoming ballot measures. He noted the need for this service, given the current administrative workload. Commissioner Carpenter asked about the success rate of Liz Loomis Public Affairs and mentioned that he contacted other agencies that have used their services.

After a brief discussion, Chief LoParco recommended that the Board authorize him to sign the Marketing Agreement with Liz Loomis Public Affairs. Commissioner Phillips made a motion to authorize Chief LoParco to sign the Agreement, and Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion. The motion passed with all in favor.

2021-2023 Financial and Accountability Audit

The District has been notified by the State Auditor's Office that the 2021–2023 Financial and Accountability Audit will begin in mid-October. Executive Director Ewing has submitted the necessary financial documents to expedite the process and has informed the audit team of her impending resignation, offering to assist with the audit as much as possible before her departure.

Professional Services Agreement

A professional agreement for Attorney Services was presented to the Board, outlining the legal services to be provided by Heidi Ellerd from Ellerd, Hultgrenn & Dahlhauser, LLP. These services are essential for supporting the Board and managing the financial overhead of the District, especially in light of recent resignations.

After a brief discussion regarding the necessity of these services, Commissioner Phillips made a motion to authorize Chief LoParco to enter into an agreement for Attorney Services temporarily, providing that the District works towards obtaining adequate staffing levels with experience. Commissioner Jenkins seconded the motion and the motion passed with all in favor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Commissioner Carpenter called a 10-minute executive session at 6:55 p.m. per RCW 42.30.110(1)(g) to discuss the performance of a public employee. The meeting was called back to order at 7:05 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The next Board of Commissioner meeting will be on October 15 at 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to come before the Board the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Approved by:

Submitted by:

Scott E. Carpenter, Board Chair

P. Scott LoParco, District Secretary