

WILLIAMS RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Special Board Meeting Minutes

March 29, 2024

Called to order: 14:35pm

Roll Call:

Board Members Present

Position 1 – Heather Glass

Position 2 – Brian Barton

Position 3 – Claudia Pratt

Position 4 – Bill Ertel

Position 5 – David Applegate

Williams Staff Present

Interim Chief Nicco Holt

Lieutenant Oskar Sundell

District Fire Marshal Jon Scaroni

Firefighter Devin Brennan

Community Members Present:

Wilma Hyde – Williams Community Resident

Announcements:

None.

SDAO Engagement

- A motion was made by Heather Glass to engage with the SDAO to look for a fire chief. The motion was seconded by Brian Barton.


Discussion: Board Secretary David Applegate stated he felt the SDAO engagement charges were exorbitant. Board Member Bill Ertel felt the charges were a really good deal based on the money spent being well worth it for avoiding any pitfalls. Board Chair Heather Glass stated that the amount is a not to exceed amount proposed. Board Member Claudia Pratt agreed that the charges could be up to the ‘not to exceed’ amount.

Board Member Claudia Pratt had questions:

1. How would the Board confirm the salary and benefit package? Board Chair Heather Glass stated that could be discussed at the workshop before the next board meeting. She handed out a package. Board Member Claudia Pratt stated that the Board needed to decide on the vacation benefits and holiday pay. Board Chair Heather Glass agreed.
2. Is the development of the timeline flexible? Board Chair Heather Glass stated that, yes, the timeline is flexible.

Board Member Bill Ertel discussed pros and cons to a 'Candidate Meet and Greet'. Advantage is public meets candidates; disadvantage is that there has to be some way to get feedback and quantify that feedback from that event. He states there are pitfalls to the meet and greet aspect and the Board should be aware of that.

3. What is the population of Williams right now. Board Member Claudia Pratt wants an actual amount not the zip code of 97544. Board Member Bill Ertel stated that the SDAO has people that can get those items worked out as they run advice and legal counsel and have people that can do graphs and items of such.

-  Heather Glass – Aye
-  Brian Barton – Aye
-  Claudia Pratt – Aye
-  Bill Ertel – Aye
-  David Applegate – Aye

➤ Motion passes unanimously

Interim Chief Discussion

Board Chair Heather Glass stated that in discussion with the SDAO that the process will take 6 months. Board Member Claudia Pratt stated confusion as she doesn't understand since the department has an interim chief. Board Chair Heather Glass clarified that given it takes 6 months to find a permanent fire chief, the idea is to contract with Applegate Fire District as interim chief and temporary executive. Board Chair Heather Glass went on to clarify that the Board was hasty to put Nicco Holt into that position and the Board did a terribly job at executing that transition and should have had a contract in place and currently, there is no contract still. Board Chair Heather Glass also stated that Nicco Holt had mentioned that he didn't really want the job, only wants to be at the department 3 days, pickle ball and bowling are his priorities. She feels that the department should contract with Applegate Fire District as Interim. Board Member Claudia Pratt asked, "Why Applegate? Why not IV or someone else?"

Board Member Bill Ertel stated that the Board was caught off guard with the resignation of the former fire chief. The Board has the ultimate obligation to make sure that there is a working system. It is agreed that Captain Holt's participation is fortunate. It gave the Board over the last 7 weeks time to look at the situation. Board Member Bill Ertel thought about Captain Holt's preference to work 2-3 days per week and his other interests and that he brought experience to the department to step right in to 'keep the lights on'. Board Member Bill Ertel stated that he feels the Board is obligated to ensure the district operations has minimal shortfalls during this period with summer wildfires, staff duty assignments, staff discussion of needing hands on direction, and something needs to be in place so that the right tactical implementations take place in short time frame. Board Member Bill Ertel states that it is good for the Board to explore their options. Board Member Bill Ertel stated that the Applegate Fire Chief has expressed interest in helping. He goes on to state 2 options:

1. Contract with the Applegate Fire Chief to be the Interim Fire Chief, or contract with Applegate Board of Directors who would provide the CEO management services during the interim. Pros and cons both ways

2. Contracting for just the services has the advantage that Williams Fire District is not a PERS employer where Applegate Fire District is.

Board Member Bill Ertel stated that it would be worth consulting with the Applegate Board.

Board Member Claudia Pratt asked what powers does the current Williams Board have for items such as Budget if the department contracts with Applegate Fire and why Applegate and not Rural Metro?

Board Secretary David Applegate answered Board Member Claudia Pratt with reference to the options Board Member Bill Ertel presented. Board Member Claudia Pratt asked how can Chief Wolfard be the Fire Chief at his district and here as well? Lt. Oskar Sundell interjected into the Board conversation that it may be difficult to find a chief during fire season. Firefighter Devin Brennan also interjected with, "Why try to fix something that isn't broken?".

Board Chair Heather Glass asked the acting Interim Chief, Captain Nicco Holt, if he was fine with the position he is in. Interim and Captain Holt answered, "yes and no" stating that some things have gone well and some things have not gone well. He stated that if another interim chief comes in, he is willing to stay on as the training officer. Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt stated he would like to see compensation, clear expectations, and a contract to consider being Interim Chief. He also stated that he sees contracting with Applegate Fire as ineffective and he cannot see how Chief Wolfard can operationally commit to another fire district.

Board Member Claudia Pratt polled the Board of who heard about the idea to contract with Applegate Fire District. Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt interjected with, "That is why there is a meeting now." Board Member Bill Ertel assured that the intent was to share with the whole board and not solely any one or two. Board Chair Heather Glass asserted that the purpose of the meeting was intended to share with the board and that she was specifically instructed by SDAO to have information shared in the meeting instead of through email.

Board Member Bill Ertel confirmed that the meeting today was to share information so that no one board member makes decisions on their own. Board Member Bill Ertel cited where Board Member Claudia Pratt had gathered information on the property behind the station, made recommendations, and brought information. Board Member Bill Ertel clarified that the meeting was to do the same for what Board Chair Heather Glass had shared from SDAO and her information gathering.

Board Member Bill Ertel stated that as a practical matter that sometimes one or two members need to do background research to bring information to the board.

Board Secretary David Applegate stated that the easiest way would be to continue with Nicco Holt, however, Captain Nicco Holt needs to be sat down to understand his duties. Board Member Claudia Pratt says there should be a written job description already and he could follow that. Board Chair Heather Glass stated that there is a job description and there should be a contract and Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt will need clear boundaries and clear direction. Board Chair Heather Glass doesn't think it was fair to Nicco to throw him into the position and she feels it is a viable solution to contract with Applegate Fire District. Board Member Claudia Pratt thinks the Williams Fire District should be able to contract with anyone outside. Interim Chief and Captain Holt agreed that contracting with Applegate Fire District makes the most sense as Applegate Fire District already works closely with the Williams Fire

District vs Rural Metro which is private. Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt stated he has mixed feelings about continuing as Interim Chief. Contracting with Applegate Fire District is the best and only preferred option presented per Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt's opinion versus bringing on anyone from outside. Firefighter Devin Brennan interjected into the board conversation that he supports Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt. Lt. Oskar Sundell stated he agreed with Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt regarding contracting with Applegate Fire District. Williams Community Resident Wilma Hyde asked if the hiring for a permanent fire chief is for full or part time. It was stated that the permanent fire chief hours are not decided yet. Board Member Claudia Pratt asked if anyone could contract from Applegate Fire District. Lt. Oskar Sundell stated that "Applegate Fire is woefully understaffed." Lt. Sundell assured Board Member Claudia Pratt that he or she from Applegate Fire District won't be physically present to perform as interim in the Williams Fire District.

Board member Bill Ertel stated that it is worthwhile to have one or two board members meet with Applegate Fire District to discuss the concept and he reiterates that it is a worthwhile concept to explore. He also recognizes that the staff brings up some valid points as well. Board Member Bill Ertel stated that SDAO has seen concepts like this before to stabilize organizations. He also stated that he attended a Brookings board meeting and everything is contracting where the fixed overhead is spread over a wider span of control. Board Member Claudia Pratt shared her concern that there would be no one physically present to take accountability even if we have competent people. Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt recommended that the board talk to the staff so that they know what to expect if the Fire District contracts for an Interim Chief.

Board Member Bill Ertel addressed the Acting Interim Chief Nicco Holt with how his own staff has come to the Board stating that they have worked 13 days straight, don't have a day off, complaining "I don't know what is going on, what is going to happen, unable to tolerate what is going on anymore..." Board member Bill Ertel has stated that the Board has heard some real concerns and concluded that things are not working right. Lt. Oskar Sundell stated that the department and all crews are working just fine and they are happy. Board member Bill Ertel stated he has confidence in operational response but feels passionate that the board put the right things in place to get through the summer. Board Member Bill Ertel stated his concerns that Lt. Oskar Sundell came to the Board stating that he has worked 13 days straight without days off. Lt. Oskar Sundell attempted to clarify that he did not complain and instead was 'approached' about his work days. Board Chair Heather Glass confirmed that Lt. Oskar Sundell came to her and Board Vice Chair Brian Barton with that particular complaint and expressed Lt. Oskar Sundell's passion about being unable to keep working like that. Lt. Oskar Sundell stated that she was right and it was true that he came to her and Board Vice Chair Brian Barton with his complaint of working 13 days straight. Board Member Claudia Pratt inquired that if the district hired Applegate Fire District how would that change things? It was answered that it would be explored and no answer could be given at this time.

Williams Community Resident Wilma Hyde asked the Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt if he wanted to stay on and would he be here during fire season. He responded that he is not looking forward to fire season, and has mixed feelings depending on the options the fire district is looking at. He has no problem staying the training officer and working 25 hours per week. He states he will be here for the Fire District as much as he can... and Wilma Hyde said, "so that sounds like a 'NO'" and stated that she feels what she is hearing is that Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt doesn't want to be here for the summer.

Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt clarified that he would rather not be in charge of the big events when they happen and that contracting with Applegate is a workable option.

- A motion was made by Bill Ertel to explore working with the Applegate Fire District. The motion was seconded by Heather Glass.

Discussion: Board Member Bill Ertel asked if Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt is the acting fire chief what will happen to the training. Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt stated that if he steps up, he will be doing both jobs.

- Heather Glass – Aye
- Brian Barton – Aye
- Claudia Pratt – Abstain (reason stated: not enough information)
- Bill Ertel – Aye
- David Applegate – Aye

- Motion passes 4 ayes, 1 abstain

Board Vice Chair Brian Barton stated an interest in sitting down with Nicco to hear what has happened and what will happen in terms of the past few weeks and future. Board Member Bill Ertel would like to have a discussion with Interim Chief and Captain Nicco Holt as to his performance to date and where he wants to go.

Board Member Claudia Pratt and Board Chair Heather Glass discussed information sharing and Board Chair Heather Glass stated that the board will convene from now on to share information instead of via email and decisions will be made as a board.

A motion to adjourn was made by Brian Barton was seconded by Heather Glass.

The meeting was adjourned at 15:24pm

Respectfully,

Heather Glass, Board Chair