

**ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT**  
Minutes of the Ross Valley Fire Board Meeting of April 14, 2021

1.      **6:30 pm      Call to order. Announce action in closed session, if any.**

**Board Present:** Hellman, Kuhl, Greene, Shortall, Finn, Goddard, Burdo, Brekhus

**Board absent:**

**Staff present:** Weber, Martinelli, Yeager

**Town Managers Present:** Toy, Chinn, Donery.

**Agenda – April 14, 2021.**

2.      **Open time for Public Expression: The public is welcome to address the Board at this time on matters not on the agenda. Please be advised that pursuant to Government Code Section 54954.2, the Board is not permitted to take action on any matter not on the agenda unless it determines that an emergency exists and that the need to take action arose following posting of the agenda.**

None

3.      **Board requests for future agenda items, questions, and comments to staff, staff miscellaneous items.**

Dir. Goddard requested a report that contains information regarding how neighbors can deal with neighbors not compliant with fire regulations and clearance of defensible space.

Dir. Greene requested a discussion regarding the changes happening in Ross. He would like to know the financial and decision-making impact if Ross exits the JPA. Further, he added that it would be beneficial to have enough information now, so it can be an item of public discussion.

4.      **Chief Report – Verbal Update by Fire Chief Weber**

**Disaster Coordinator & Defensible Space Lead Positions Update:** Both jobs were posted, and the Defensible Space Lead position has been fulfilled by Kathleen Cutter, who managed the chipper program for SafeMARIN. As a reminder, the Dspace program assists the Corte Madera, Ross Valley, and County area. For the Disaster Coordinator, only one application has been submitted; therefore, the position will be re-posted with some changes to the job classification.

Dir. Greene asked if the job title or anything else is causing the small number of applicants. Chief Weber responded that the position has low pay, and we were hoping to attract a retired or mildly retired candidate. However, getting the word out can help to get more people to apply.

Dir. Hellman asked if the position was the same as the Board in February, and Chief Weber responded that it was but made some minor changes such as removing certifications to make it more appealing.

Dir. Brekhus mentioned that she had received the revised job classification and was trying to figure out who she can share it with, but since the position is for an entry-level, but also has some supervising, and then looked at the pay. Chief Weber added that anyone that has run other programs would be successful in this position; however, the pay is a challenge for the bay area market.

Dir. Goddard asked that we do all we can to get a well-qualified candidate because although the Fairfax residents are heavily involved with NRGs, coordination is needed. Not having a Disaster Coordinator is a detriment to all the community efforts. Chief Weber responded that the budget comes from MWPA funding to the Towns, but if we do not have more candidate engagement, we will go back to the Town Managers for further review.

**Fire Service Equity Initiative:** Chief Weber reported that the entire Marin Fire Service and the County's Office of Equity are working on this project. The recent fires, climate changes, and the community investment on wildfire prevention measures with MWPA have opened the door for a more diverse workforce in the fire service. This initiative will help break cycles of systematic poverty in communities of color and women by collaborating with the College of Marin and MWPA to combine the work with fire prevention, defensible space, fuel reduction, technology. Further, this program will provide jobs and education pathways through the College of Marine and Marin County Office of Education if they work on a GED. This initiative has a lot of support; just last week, the County's Board of Supervisors approved an agreement to fund the startup of this project is expected to go live in January 2022.

Dir. Greene asked how this project would be funded. Chief Weber responded that the funding would be the earned wages, and there is a high philanthropic interest and funding from the State.

**Misc.:** Chief Weber also shared the sad news about the passing of Chief Bob Beedle, who was the first Fire Chief of the RVFD in 1982. Chief Beedle passed away on April 8, 2021. To honor him, the flags at the fire stations are flying at half-staff; and later in June, there will be a celebration of life.

Chief Weber mentioned the Annual Shared Services review. For this year's review, a survey was created and the Board will receive it. The results will be shared at a future Board Meeting.

**Ross Update:** Chief Weber reported that the Management team, along with Dir. Finn representing Sleepy Hollow have been meeting regularly to discuss the impacts and possible solutions. The staff will notify the RVFD Board once we have more information to start policy-level discussions.

Dir. Greene stated that he is concerned with making a big decision without information and enough processing time. He would like to know what the issues and challenges are. Moreover, the Board could benefit from knowing what is being discussed, even if there are no answers yet. And he will

continue to ask for updates until more information is provided to the Board. Chief Weber agreed with him and stated that a report would be provided at the next Board meeting.

Dir. Goddard asked for an update on the SAFER Grant. Chief Weber responded that the application was submitted but will not hear anything until after 60 to 90 days. But we will bring it to the Board for discussion in time. We just finished the 5-year projected budget, and all this is connected, so we will bring a report if not at a regular meeting, schedule a special meeting.

- 5. Consent Agenda: Items on the consent agenda may be removed and discussed separately. Discussion may take place at the end of the agenda. Otherwise, all items may be approved with one action.**

M/S Burdo/Kuhl – roll call vote, all ayes for a-d

- 5e. Approve minutes of the March 10th, 2021 Special Board meeting**

Dir. Greene requested to correct a paragraph that did not make grammatical sense. He also thanked the staff for adding the footers to the staff reports.

- 5f. Authorize First Amendment to Dispatch Professional Service Agreement with Marin County Sheriff's Office**

Dir. Greene requested from staff to give a summary of the cost associated with the Dispatch Agreement. Chief Weber responded that the Sheriff's office has provided dispatch services for most of the County's fire agencies for a long time. The Sheriff's office has been subsidizing fire dispatch for around \$500k. When the Sheriff's office provided the cost increase, we asked for justification, and they provided it, and at this point, we do not have any other options. Further, Greene asked if the Managers and staff have concluded that the cost was fair. Chief Weber responded that the Managers have not seen any supporting documentation, but he can share it with them; it includes their salaries and benefits and overtime cost.

Dir. Hellman asked for some clarification on the cost breakdown. Chief Weber explained that the Sheriff's office sent a pdf to all the agencies, and then the agencies sent it back with questions but did not have specific numbers to share. Greene suggested to Hellman that she send an email to the staff to give them more time to get the correct numbers. Hellman responded that she just wanted clarification on the numbers for transparency so that the public knows what RVFD is paying for the overall cost. Mgr. Chinn added that the overall cost for fire is 9.24%. Hellman requested to add a column that has the distribution share is added.

M/S Kuhl/Burdo to move items e and f - roll call vote, all ayes

**6. Receive Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS) – ISO-PPC Letter**

Chief Weber explained that Insurance Service Office (ISO) is an analytical company that rates fire agencies. ISO sells the information to insurance companies; the insurance companies use that information to determine whether to insure a property or not. The ratings go from 1 -10, 10 being the worst. This year RVFD was able to keep the #2 rating, but since the report has not been sent yet, we do not know what improvements need to be done to maintain the 2.

Dr. Greene asked if the rating affected the fire insurance premiums and that if the report is easy to understand since the letter contains a lot of jargon that most people find hard to understand. Chief Weber responded that ISO is one of the factors insurance companies use to determine cost; however, he does not know how much impact the rating has. The report's verbiage will probably have a lot of jargon, but we have not received it yet. Chief Weber will share it with the Board once the Department gets it. Further, Greene asked about the improvements that can be done to obtain a higher rating. Chief Weber responded that what is currently being done is working. The community's work and investment are essential, but a lot has to do with the water system, staffing, number of engine companies available, geographical distance, etc.

Dir. Brekhus mentioned that when she was dealing with her insurance cancelations, she talked about the approved bond and that seemed to impressed the insurance company, so that should be considered as positive.

**7. Receive Fire Prevention Report on Neighboring Jurisdictions Additions to Municipal Code to Mitigate the Effects of Wildfire**

Fire Marshal Scott Alber explained that while all agencies follow the same codes, some agencies have different guidelines, which is the case for the defensible space code. San Rafael's codes read the same, but they specifically ban bamboo and juniper and recently added three more plants. Moreover, he mentioned that having the 30ft zone not allowing fireproof vegetation gives the Fire Prevention staff a broader discretion and flexibility to work with the homeowner to remove fire-prone plants. Fire Marshal Alber does not recommend implementing a specific plant list because that can lead to confusion. Therefore, he recommends we do not implement a plant list.

Dir. Greene expressed his concern about calling out fire prone plants without first identifying them, because it does not give the homeowner notice of its okay to have and what is not. Fire Marshal Alber mentioned that there many resources such as a fire prone plants list that homeowners can use as reference. With our defensible space program, the goal is to educate the community. FIRESafe Marin is a great resource as well.

Dir. Hellman added that it is important to direct the public to FIRESafe Marin or any other available resources to get information regarding fire prone plants. Chief Weber added that the codes give the Fire Prevention Bureau the ability to enforce them, but educating the public is key. And the goal is first to educate the public, and if affordability is an issue, there are resources that can be used. Hellman mentioned that she could see how having a list can make it difficult to update the list continuously.

Dir. Shortall thanked Fire Marshal Alber for the presentation; it cleared some confusion. Shortall complimented the Defensible Space program; before this MWPA funded program, the fire department did not have the personnel to do these in-depth inspections. The codes provide the defensible space inspectors with tools to educate the public on what vegetation improvements should be done to their property.

Dir. Brekhus added that having that flexibility is very helpful.

Dir. Goddard also complimented the Defensible Space program. She mentioned that the inspectors explain regulation so well that it is so easy to understand and follow. Goddard agrees that it is good to educate the public, but there will be a time, where the codes will have to be enforced.

In closing, Fire Marshal Alber recommended not to codify a fire prone plant list.

Dir. Greene adjourned the meeting in honor of Chief Beedle, the first RVFD Fire Chief.

The next meeting is scheduled for May 12<sup>th</sup>, via zoom video conferencing.

Respectfully submitted,

s/Mariana Gonzalez  
Administrative Assistant