



# Sedona Fire District

2860 Southwest Drive, Sedona, Arizona 86336  
Telephone (928) 282-6800 FAX (928) 282-6857

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING**  
**Station #1 – 2860 Southwest Drive – Sedona – Multipurpose Room**  
**Tuesday, May 16, 2023 / 4:00 PM**

~ MINUTES ~

**I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Pursuant to notice, a regular meeting of the Sedona Fire District (SFD) was called to order by Chairman Dave Soto at 4:03 PM on Tuesday, May 16, 2023. Executive Assistant, Kim Smathers recorded the minutes. A quorum was present, and the meeting, having been duly convened, was ready to proceed with business.

Board Present: Dave Soto – Chairman; Helen McNeal – Clerk; Gene McCarthy, Scott Springett, Janet Jablow – Members. Others Present: Fire Chief Ed Mezulis; Assistant Chief Jayson Coil Director of Administrative Services Heidi Robinson; Division Chief Dori Booth; Gabe Buldra, JVG; Bill Whittington, Attorney (by Zoom); and Executive Assistant Kim Smathers – Recorder.

**A. Salute to the Flag of the United States of America and Moment of Silence to Honor all American Men and Women in Service to Our Country, Firefighters, and Police Officers.**

Chairman Dave Soto led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chief Ed Mezulis requested a Moment of Silence for the 8 Police Officers and 3 firefighters who passed away since the previous Board Meeting.

**II. BUDGET WORKSHOP**

**A. Budget Workshop:** Gabe Buldra and Chief Mezulis spoke briefly regarding the information packet provided to the Board in hard copy format, including the range for the COLA that was requested.

Mr. Buldra stated that in the past 2 months, the Board has had a deep dive into the budget and would be asked for tentative adoption with a posting and public hearing period, as required.

Mr. Buldra spoke about the Capital plan and stated that this year, rather than the \$1.4 million estimated, SFD would be putting \$2.9 million in the Capital funding. There has been a savings of over \$770K from the debt service by paying off Station 5. Proposed financing for Station 4 & 5 replacements are funded from both the general fund and the Capital Plan. Board Member McCarthy asked what would affect the ultimate costs of those builds and Mr. Buldra replied that interest rates and other economic factors and Mr. Soto asked what would happen to the funds if we did not incur the constructions costs, which Mr. Buldra assured that they would remain or go back into the capital fund. Mr. McCarthy then stated that it appears that the US is headed into a recession and how that might affect the plans and funding. Mr. Buldra stated that it is an economic cycle that was due prior to COVID and that falling assessed values and other economic decreases would affect, but that SFD has planned for the situation with the capital plan funding and savings as a fallback.

Mr. Buldra explained that assessed values have not kept up with the inflation rate in Arizona, and increased pension, health insurance, and inflation affecting things such as station supplies and PPE were drivers.

There was discussion regarding the three proposed COLA increases, the drop incentive and how and what that would look like, with the 40% savings of payroll retirement costs being saved for those in the drop program, along with the 6% incentive to members in the drop that would be put into a supplemental retirement savings plan. The rank-for-rank overtimes were again discussed, with Chief Mezulis anticipating savings on the mandatory overtime by implementing this program and the benefit

of having the ranked members available to coach and counsel the newer personnel. Chief Mezulis made it clear that the Board made the final decision about the suggested COLA number, but that Labor had requested a 7% COLA. There was discussion regarding whether another number limited his bargaining strength with Labor. The drop incentive was also a Labor ask, as this was a previous benefit at SFD. Chairman Soto asked if the drop incentive would continue, then, and need to be renegotiated at every budget cycle or would continue going forward. Chief Mezulis clarified that it would be a change in the benefits package giving SFD more bandwidth to plan and a cost reduction in payroll costs going forward. Board Member Jablow asked how people enter the drop and Chief Mezulis outlined that personnel need to submit their paperwork to Public Safety Personnel Retirement System, and they are offered the drop of no more than 5 years to retire. SFD has been seeing a lot of early retirements in the drop program, which is limiting the seasoned personnel and creating a lot of vacancies. He stated that as many of the current staff began with SFD in the early 2000s, there is a reset point with a lot of new personnel stepping up into positions.

Board Clerk McNeal asked if any other areas of the budget had significantly changed from last month to this proposed budget. Mr. Buldra stated that only personnel costs estimated with the different COLA rates were significantly changed and estimated. Chief Mezulis stated that in the past everything was inflated because they knew it would be cut, but now program managers are bringing tight, real costs and not adding anything on the front end of the ask and that emergencies and unexpected expenses can be made up from the capital fund. Chairman Soto asked how the additional COLA rates would affect the mil rate in the future and Mr. Buldra explained that barring record inflation, things should settle back into a smoother adjustment in the coming years.

Chairman Soto asked about giving direction to the Chief and staff and Chief Mezulis stated that, as requested, he had prepared a low, mid, and high range estimates for the COLAs for the Board to review. Assistant Chief Coil asked Mr. Buldra to explain compounding effect of the costs. Mr. Buldra explained that as the percentages of the raises get higher, the compounding affect long term is seen. AC Coil stated that contrasts with the drop incentive savings. Chairman Soto asked Chief Mezulis about negotiation periods with Labor and how he would approach Labor with an approved COLA less than their ask. Board Member McCarthy asked if there was still room for negotiation, as well. Chief Mezulis stated that he believes that the Labor representatives are professional and would seek to understand the Board decision. AC Coil stated that it has been determined that there is a need for a total compensation study, and it has been put on hold until after July 1.

Chairman Soto asked Mr. Buldra if he was seeing a trend in what other Districts are approving COLA at, and while Mr. Buldra shared that it was a broad spectrum and no real trend, he felt that most average was 5% COLA. At this point, the Chairman asked each of the members if there was any option presented that they felt they would throw out. Board Member Springett proposed that rather than throw one out, they modify one option with a 6.5% COLA. AC Coil shared that it's difficult to determine if the cost is proportionate to the measurable benefits and that cited compensation studies to show fair vs. unfair compensation affects personnel.

*Board Chairman Soto made a motion to accept and tentatively approve the proposed budget in the amount of \$23,842,812.00 with a mil rate of \$2.7030 for the FY2024 cycle, Board Clerk McNeal seconded. There was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.*

### III. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS/STAFF RECOGNITION

**A. Five years of Service Recognition:** Jose Diaz, Sandeep Grewal, and Mark Feeney were all recognized for their 5 years of service to SFD. None were available to be present at the meeting. Chief Mezulis gave a brief review of their history and qualifications and stated that he remembers each of them coming on board and can't believe it's been 5 years, but they are all doing good things.

Chairman Soto expressed congratulations to all on behalf of the Board and stated that he looks forward to seeing each of them make their mark on SFD, if they have not already. He asked if these employees were now vested and Chief Mezulis stated that he would have to research if the 5-year mark is that indicator, but with the new Tiers to the PRPRS system, he did not know.

At 5:02 p.m. the Public Session was adjourned to Executive Session.

#### IV. EXECUTIVE SESSION

##### A. Possible vote to go into Executive Session for legal advice re: citizen code enforcement letter pursuant to ARS §38-431.03 (A)(3).

*Chairman Soto made the motion to go into executive session for legal advice re: citizen code enforcement letter, Board Member McCarthy seconded. There was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.*

#### V. RECONVENE TO PUBLIC SESSION:

##### A. Discussion/Possible Action: Re: Citizen concern relating to code enforcement issues and action based on legal advice pursuant to ARS §38-431.03(A)(3).

Public session reconvened at 5:56 p.m. Chairman Soto directed Chief Mezulis to create a communication to concerned citizen describing the points discussed and legal advice given in the Executive Session.

#### VI. REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

##### A. Public Forum:

***Speakers are limited to three-minute oral presentations but may submit written comments of any length for Board files. Board Members may not discuss items not specifically identified on the agenda. Therefore, pursuant to ARS 38-431.01(H), Board action taken as a result of public comment is limited to directing staff to study the matter, responding to any criticism, or scheduling the matter for further consideration and decision at a later date.***

###### 1. Public Comments

###### 2. Executive Staff Response to Public Comments

There was no one in attendance and no requests to speak.

##### B. Consent Agenda – Discussion/Possible Actions:

*All matters under the Consent Agenda are considered by the Board to be routine (i.e., Minutes and/or signatory authority for bank accounts) and will be enacted by a single motion approving the Consent Agenda. If discussion is desired on any particular consent item, a Board Member may ask that item be removed from the Consent Agenda to be considered separately.*

1. April 18, 2023, Regular Board Meeting Minutes

2. April 26, 2023, Special Meeting Minutes

*Board Chairman Soto made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda, Board Clerk McNeal seconded. There was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.*

##### C. **Financial Report – Gabe Buldra, Finance Director, JVG Associate**

###### 1. **Discussion/Possible Action: Review and Approval of April 2023 Finance Report.**

Mr. Buldra presented a short overview of the status of the FY2023 Budget, showing most areas remain under budget and that SFD is still in line with projections for the current fiscal year. There have been a couple of unforeseen expenses, with communications switches and increased travel and training costs related to Ropes training and Technical Rescue, but overall, SFD is in good shape.

*Board Chairman Soto made a motion to approve the April 2023 Finance Report, Member McCarthy seconded, there was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.*

##### D. **Staff Items:**

1. April 2023 Monthly Fire Chief Report

a. Administration Updates – Director of Administrative Services Heidi Robinson  
News and Events –

Upcoming-May 19, Annual Awards banquet at Blazin' M; AFDA/CAFMA Administration Training Day, May 23. Chief Mezulis gave the Board background on AFDA recognizing that the July conference is more geared toward operations and that this is a chance for District admin personnel across the state to share ideas and coordinate efforts to align. Several of the admin staff from SFD will be attending this event in Prescott Valley next week and the Chief looks forward to new ideas and cross training opportunities to come out of this.

b. Operations Activities – Assistant Chief Jayson Coil

Significant Events: Hike-outs and trail rescues have kept SFD operations personnel busy this past month.

Wildland: There is currently a high-pressure system sitting over the Pacific Northwest, heating things up in that area. There are crews and jumpers across the Alberta region fighting wildfires at this time, jumping into whatever they think they can get a handle on before it joins up with a bigger. Northern Arizona is now listed as below normal chances of large fires through June 1.

GIS: Mr. Spinelli has made a large mistake in creating an evaluation product so awesome that now he and our IT gurus, Josh Clouch and Brian Espiau, are going to be tasked with this kind of review and evaluation on other products and services. The current evaluation is for real-time dashboard software, which will be demonstrated for Division Chiefs on Monday. This will provide Key Performance Indicator and be located at all stations and in the Board room for near live updates. Chief Mezulis stated that it will provide real-time data as well as have trailing items/updates and will change the way that Board reporting happens at the meetings.

Telecom: Currently, Mr. Motz has a crew from another company visiting all the mountain-top sites evaluating the equipment and shortcomings to get a bid that isn't Motorola. This company should be a cost-savings to SFD and increase dependability and reliability at these sites.

Programs & Projects: Chief Coil has, at this point, met with all 42 personnel who participated in the Engineer Assessment Center and provided one-on-one feedback to establish areas to work on and provide them with communication and advise to contribute to their long-term success at SFD.

c. Community Risk Reduction Activities – Division Chief Dori Booth

Chief Booth presented the numbers of inspection activities and stated that both Kirk Riddell and Carla Dufort have provided excellent service to the community while she has been out on sick leave.

The Airport Fuel Farm project is wrapping up and is about ready to go online. Inspector Riddell will be on-site tomorrow with the aviation fuel team.

Twenty-five and a half tons of debris and yard waste were collected at the Community Cleanup events. There was a lot of good feedback from the community on the new location at Posse Grounds and Chief Booth will provide the final numbers at next month's meeting/

Fire Marshal Safety Message was regarding trail rescues and staying safe on the trails by wearing correct footwear and clothing, carrying a charged cell phone, staying on marked trails, being weatherwise, packing enough water and food, and pack-it-in, pack-it-out procedures.

D. Operational Support – Fire Chief Ed Mezulis

Chief Mezulis led with SFD has continued to do tons of training in the past month. The last 3 hires have completed their 6 months of training successfully and the 3 new hires are doing well. There will most likely be a new hire academy in the fall. He reiterated that these are not new positions, they are all backfilling vacancies that have opened in the past few months.

e. Fire Chief Activities – Fire Chief Ed Mezulis

Call Volume and Response Review

a. Incident Summary and Year-to-Date Comparison

b. Response Times

c. Purchase Orders over \$10K

d. Social Media Engagement

Chief Mezulis reviewed all the above very briefly, with explanations of the purchase orders to LN Curtis, Knox Co., AHS Rescue, and Band of Brothers, explaining that some of the purchases were to be done in next fiscal year, but SFD was able to purchase and procure this year for savings to FY24 budget.

**E. Board Member Items:**

1. Discussion:

Gene McCarthy: Really enjoyed his one-on-one with Chief Mezulis. SFD is lucky to have the staff that it does, both operationally and administratively.

Janet Jablow: The usual operations activities, signing checks, etc.

Helen McNeal: Good meetings with Fire Chief, both normal one-on-one and informal stop-ins; usual activities, billpay.com, signing checks, etc. Thanked Chairman Soto & wife for the Cinco de Mayo dinner that was held at his residence.

Scott Springett: Also really enjoyed Cinco de Mayo, answering questions from community members, etc.

Chairman Dave Soto: Spent time preparing for meeting and reviewing letter from concerned citizen; one-on-one with Fire Chief discussing a broad range of topics; attended the Dewey-Humboldt Firewise Expo at Mortimer Farms; and really enjoyed the Cinco de Mayo dinner with the Board.

**V. ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Soto adjourned the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

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Helen McNeal, Clerk of the Board

*SFD Multipurpose Room is accessible to the handicapped. In compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act, those with special needs, such as large print or other reasonable accommodations, may request them by calling 928-282-6800.*

Posted by:

Date:

Time: