



# Sedona Fire District

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**REGULAR BOARD MEETING**  
**Station #1 – 2860 Southwest Drive – Sedona – Multipurpose Room**  
**Tuesday, February 18, 2025 / 3:00 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 Chair Helen McNeal at 3:03 PM on Tuesday, February 18, 2025. 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: Helen McNeal – Chair; Corrie Cooperman – Clerk; Scott Springett, Diana Christense and Lance Waldrop – Members. Others Present: Fire Chief Ed Mezulis; Division Chief Jordan Baker; Interim Fire Marshall Kirk Riddell; Gabe Buldra, JVG; Bill Whittington, Attorney; and Executive Assistant 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.

Chair McNeal led the Pledge of Allegiance and Chief Ed Mezulis requested a Moment of Silence for the four Police Officers and five firefighters who have passed away since the previous Board Meeting. Recorder Smathers called the roll; all board members were present.

## II. BUDGET WORKSHOP

Gabe Buldra, Finance Director, outlined the budget process for the board. He noted that there was a 5.8% increase in property valuation which adds approximately \$1.18 million to the budget for FY26. There were several questions about how what is happening at the federal level will affect SFD. Mr. Buldra stated that he feels that there will be more impact at the state level and more focus on local resources, as the feds seem to be eliminating federal hotshot crews. Chief Mezulis stated that the State level is more concerning, but he also feels that there will impact grant availability.

Mr. Buldra stated that the only foreseeable hit to the budget will be the \$300K in pension costs, Workers Compensation costs look to stay static. Budget worksheets have gone out to the staff and the requests are due in and total number should be estimated in March. Chief Mezulis noted that it is getting harder to rework the capital plan effectively because of the timelines and cost increases for vehicles, especially fire engines, which have increase to almost double in price and double the delivery time of SFDs last two purchased engines.

## III. REGULAR BUSINESS MEETING

### A. Public Forum:

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

*There were no requests from the public to speak.*

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

1. January 21, 2025, Regular and Executive Session minutes

*Clerk Cooperman made the motion to approve the Consent Agenda, as presented and Member Waldrop seconded. There was no further discussion, and the motion was passed unanimously.*

C. Financial Report and Updates – Gabe Buldra, JVG

1. Mr. Buldra briefed the Board about the financial status of Sedona Fire District, Facility/Grounds Mr. Buldra briefed that tax collection continues to lag, so revenue was not as high as anticipated, but it is just a timing issue, and he feels no cause to be concerned at this point. SFD received reimbursement for hurricane response activities from FEMA. At this point in the year, there is 56% of the budget remaining.

*Chair McNeal motioned to approve the January Budget Report, which Member Waldrop seconded. There were no further questions, and the motion passed unanimously.*

D. Staff Items:

1. January 2024 Monthly Staff Report

a. Operations Activities – Assistant Chief Jayson Coil

- i. Significant Events
  - a. All-Hazard
  - b. Emerging Issues
- i. Human Resources
  - c. Significant Issues
- ii. Administration
  - a. Upcoming Events
  - b. News & Activities

Chief Mezulis reported for Chief Coil, who was on vacation leave. Operations continues to push on, not a lot of significant events in January, but still a busy month.

The IT position remains open, with over 100 resumes being evaluated down to approximately 20 candidates to be reviewed.

Chief Coil will be representing SFD in the lawsuit, working with the insurance company to resolve.

There are eight candidates who will be qualified to test for the Captain's Assessment Center being held next week.

Three of the four new hire candidates have completed their pre-employment process and are ready to go on March 31, 2025.

b. Community Risk Reduction Activities –Interim Division Chief Kirk Riddell

- i. Inspection Activities
- ii. Fire Investigations
- iii. Notable Events
- iv. Fire Marshal Safety Message

Acting Fire Marshal Riddell discussed types and monthly numbers of inspections, breaking them out on his slides, and detailing how many inspections and re-inspections are necessary, per item.

FireWise has been a big issue lately, with daily engagement with the community. There will be a Wildland Urban Assessor training in Sedona on March 20, with 30 seats available. The City of Sedona is sending people to be trained and Riddell feels that seats will fill fast.

Marshal Riddell has weekly meetings on Forest Road and parking garage and both are in compliance. He is engaged with the construction process and there is no need to think that there is anything amiss on those projects.

St. Patrick's Day parade is scheduled for March 15, and two long-distance runs are upcoming.

Fire Marshal Riddell's safety message was about winter hiking/running. Making sure to be aware of weather conditions, dressing appropriately, staying well hydrated are the main factors.

Chair McNeal asked about status of the public forum meeting that is being scheduled with the City of Sedona and other stakeholders. Chief Mezulis noted that it will take place the first week of April, but there are a couple of stakeholders who have yet to respond. It will be held at the Performing Arts Center.

- c. EMS, Fleet, Telecom – Division Chief Lechowski
  - i. EMS Activities and Updates
  - ii. Fleet Activities and Updates
  - iii. Other Updates

Division Chief Lechowski was also on vacation leave tonight, so his briefing was handled by Chief Mezulis. The new mechanic is doing a great job and getting up to speed quickly. The Type-6 is in the state and scheduled to be on-site in 2-3 weeks. Member Waldrop asked why SFD went with a gas truck rather than a diesel for a wildland vehicle. Chief Mezulis noted that this is a second mechanic vehicle, for the new mechanic, not a wildland vehicle, and the gas engine performs better for the activities associated.

The IT project manager has been meeting with the City of Sedona and aligning the installations of both sets of infrastructure, specifically generators and tower infrastructure. The second IT position to assist Josh Clouch is posted and the two radio techs are halfway through their tower classes and certifications.

Chair McNeal stated that she wanted to thank the Chief and Bob for their involvement with assisting the City of Sedona in getting their plans in place, as she feels that helped the goodwill towards the land purchase.

A benefits conference for spouses, etc., is being held next month including Verde Valley FD and Copper Canyon FD personnel and significant others. SFD is providing day care so that is not an issue. This will inform families of the benefits available to them, through their SFD programs.

EMS is tangled with legislative roadblocks and there seems to be a hesitancy to move forward by stakeholders until that is resolved. Many networking contacts and projects that Chief Lechowski has been building are now not in the positions or not responsive.

Last week there was a "sim"-balance on-site at SFD. This simulates calls and is a training mechanism. Chief Mezulis reported that the operators stated that SFD was one of the most professional and engaged staff they had worked with, statewide.

- d. Preparedness & Training – Division Chief Jordan Baker
  - i. Division Updates and Activities
  - ii. Training Report

Division Chief Baker reported that all operational staff have been through a live fire exercise, which is the first one since 2017. All staff completed in one week and will henceforth be on a three-year training rotation. The captain's task books have been evaluated and the assessment center is next week for testing of eight qualified candidates.

Four new hires will start their academy on March 31, with the 31<sup>st</sup> being the welcome potluck. Baker invited the Board to attend the potluck and welcome.

Member Waldrop stated that he thought he had a vehicle for extrication training.

There will be a Regional Training Officer meeting on March 5, beginning a quarterly meeting, to standardize regional training and create a master regional training calendar.

DC Baker reviewed his slide information, noting important training that was met, or is ongoing, along with wellness activities that are ongoing.

There are three career fairs scheduled for the next few weeks with upcoming fairs at Red Rocks High School and Yavapai College.

- e. Fire Chief Report – Fire Chief Mezulis
  - i. Call Volume & Response Review

- a. Incident Summary and Year-to-Date Comparison
- b. Station Responses
- c. Response Times
- ii. Purchases over \$10K
- iii. Community Thanks & Appreciation

Chief Mezulis began by noting the number of interactions and engagements with groups and citizens within the District regarding community concerns since the California wildfires. He has also been busy with Meet & Confer meetings with local labor, most of whom are first time labor representatives.

Chief Mezulis relayed incident numbers and response times and reviewed his response times slide and the donation/community thanks regarding the CPR class.

E. Discussion/Possible Action: Possible approval of BAC for purchase of fleet 2025 Ford F350 4x4 pickup including service body upfit, in an amount not to exceed \$70,000.00 from Sanderson Ford. Chief Mezulis noted that this is a budgeted, scheduled replacement. The cost of repairing it is not worth the value of the current 20-year-old vehicle.

*Clerk Cooperman made a motion to approve the BAC, as stated. Member Christensen seconded the motion, there was no further discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.*

F. Board Member Updates and Ideas for Future Meetings.

Chair McNeal changed the order of the agenda to have Clerk Cooperman provide a briefing on her attendance at the Mental Wellness for First Responders Conference. Clerk Cooperman briefed about the topics covered and the importance of early intervention and peer support programs.

Member Waldrop mentioned being approached by constituents regarding the problems with insurance. Chief Mezulis reiterated that Chief Coil will be working through Arizona Fire Chief's Association with insurance companies. This is not just a Sedona problem, several states are experiencing the same issues with obtaining and keeping insurance in the wildland areas, but the risk factors, etc. are arbitrary and not correctly identified. Chair McNeal stated that the \$9,900 grant from the Arizona Community Foundation that was supported by the Board for Rescue Retrievers was approved and the money has been received.

**VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

These actions were switched to allow Finance Director Buldra to give his input regarding the property purchase and then leave.

- A. Possible vote to go into Executive Session for personnel matters pursuant to ARS §38-431.03 (A)(1) and legal advice pursuant to ARS §38.431.03(A)(3) re: for discussion of Fire Chief's quarterly evaluation and legal advice regarding same.
- B. Discussion/Possible action: For legal advice pursuant to ARS §38-431.03(A)(3), and possible instruction to legal counsel pursuant to ARS §38-431.03(A)(4), and possible instructions to District's representative pursuant to ARS §38-431.03(A)(7), re: possible acquisition of City of Sedona real property and contracts relating to the same.

**VII. RECONVENE TO PUBLIC SESSION**

A. Discussion/Possible Action: Possible approval of Fire Chief's evaluation for Second Quarter, as discussed in Executive Session.

*Chair McNeal made a motion to approve the Fire Chief's Quarterly Evaluation for the Second Quarter as discussed in Executive Session, noting that the Chief's performance has been excellent. Member Springett seconded the motion, there was no further discussion and the motion was unanimously approved.*

B. Discussion/Possible Action: Possible approval of contract(s); pursuant to ARS §38.431.03(A)(7) possible authorizations re: execution of same.

*Chair McNeal made a motion to authorize the Chief to execute the contract for the purchase of the property with the contract provided by the City of Sedona for the purchase of 401 Jordan Road for Two million, two hundred thirty thousand dollars subject to the Chief's review and approval of the attachments. Clerk Cooperman seconded, there was no further discussion and the motion passed unanimously.*

**III. ADJOURNMENT**

Chair McNeal adjourned the meeting at 5:44 p.m.

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Corrie Cooperman, Clerk of the Board

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