

Albany County Fire District #1 Budget Work Session Minutes June 1, 2022

Meeting called to order at 5:02pm. Board members present were Luke Hawkins, Brett Wadsworth and Matt Burkart.

Budget work session to solicit information in terms of how best to manage the limited funds that we get each year and move forward as a District. The Board appreciates the documents and proposals that were sent in. This is an opportunity to verbally communicate needs/wants/desires and how we move forward.

In FY22 we had \$620,000 total. This included overhead for board, and monthly variable expenses including retirement, MASA, WARM, LGLP, Workers Comp, ER, payroll, CPA audit, and Laramie Boomerang advertising which equaled about 48%. Money was set aside for Strategic Plan A (new City of Laramie engine), LFD contact, tender repair and replacement, capital improvement funds all totally just under \$300k. The departments received about \$295,000.

Teri Jo compiled the District budget, along with the department individual budgets into the budget document that goes to the state. Must consider the rate of inflation. We also have \$280,000 of ARPA funds for bathrooms for CVVFD, TSVFD and VVFD. However, all departments were represented. It is federal grant money funds for touchless, ADA, COVID compliant bathrooms within the District. We might also receive wind project funds start monthly when they start construction, supposedly Spring 2023. They are working on details of how the monthly amounts will be divided between the departments that submitted information. The intent is to follow the percentages as were submitted. But there will be extra overhead when managing these large sums of money. We also didn't receive the dollars that we requested which lowered the amount.

For FY23 the estimated mil levy is \$635,000 (\$421,000 being just property taxes, the rest includes vehicle registrations). The City of Laramie Contract has also increased by \$30,000. The department proposals exceed what they were awarded last year. Department discussions followed on their submitted budgets and various line items. They expect increases in fuel and vehicle maintenance costs. Still trying to answer the question, how much does it cost to run a volunteer fire department. Hard to quantify because currently both federal dispatch and home responses are lumped together. Also, the auxiliaries contribute to running each department. Discussion surrounding the Central North Station lease agreement, having a north station and what to do about maintaining the response in that area but also getting the best value for taxpayer monies.

Board is looking at pushing direct operating costs to department for them to see and manage, including insurance costs. The Board knows the costs based on apparatus and building costs and would like the departments to be aware of their apparatus and station costs. This may assist the departments in the decision-making process regarding the selection, maintenance and acquisition of apparatus. The District still need to look at obligating funds for the LFD replacement engine, as well as tender repair and replacement. The tenders were a District acquisition (no departments funds were used for purchase) and part of the Hauled Water Program which is a District interest.

The entire district is underfunded. We are limited by State Statute on the mil levy we get. What's the best way to move forward? Treasurer Wadsworth's expectation is we are not going to a single department. So, how do we most efficiently use the limited resources we have.

Discussion regarding the City of Laramie Contract with LFD including the benefits we receive, as well as the public view and expectation. However, we do need to be self-sufficient so if things were to change ACFD#1 would be okay.

Capital improvement dollars were being set aside to help pay for bathrooms, that line can be squeezed now because of the ARPA funds.

District Coordinator position to coordinate between all six depts for grants. There are a lot of things going on as a district with wind projects coming in and receiving impact assistance monies, so how does it get coordinated and allocated. We also have the new training facility and the invitation to join in LFD's fire academy. Chief Johnson would like district firefighters involved, so how do we coordinate that. We need one person contacting people, not six. There are County Commissioners meetings every Tuesday, and that does not include all the special meetings. Chairman Hawkins feels strongly it is a vital position for the District to move forward and grants can help pay their wage. Contact for department training officers to get feedback for training and maintenance. Chief Essley is more in favor of grant writer, they can write some of their salary into grants, but would like grant writing to be the primary part of the job. This position would also assist with Emergency Reporting and could gather data for various requests and grants. The Board would need to decide how funds are allocated. Treasurer Wadsworth would like to allocate money to departments on what they provide, not on a tax basis. Secretary Burkhart stated the value is if they can cover salary and benefits in grant funds as the District Coordinator position doesn't help departments to make up the balance for them to do their jobs unless they are successful at grants. Chairman Hawkins thinks it's important to realize we probably won't be able to quantify what the benefit is going to be until they are there for a couple of years, bringing in a lot of grants, coordination, and increasing the level of service. Currently 10% of the revenue is salaries and this would grow it to 16%, must be careful so we don't look like we are "growing government". Will there be a performance review? Yes. Move forward with the submitted department budgets, the Board will have to look at what to cut to make it work. Chairman Hawkins mentioned the WYCO tax dollars should stay in the WYCO response area as a base thought process. And then look at the level of the service of the area. Chief Isborn stated we need to find the middle ground between the two extremes. Chairman Hawkins wants to make sure the firefighters are supported in what they do, but we have limited funds to do so. What about a smaller scope and fewer hours for the first year to see the benefits with the position? We have to have a way to see the calculated return on the investment if we bring this person on. What about hiring a grant writing firm to help with the grant writing, then you wouldn't have to pay benefits. Grant writing takes priority over other job description other than a red card class. It will be hard to recruit anyone with \$50,000 plus \$15,000 benefits. Treasurer Wadsworth suggested it might be a place holder for a couple of years, and in the meantime could use those set aside funds to pay a grant writer. Need to determine how to allocate – allocation on tax base, or capability, or somewhere in between.

Lengthy discussion followed regarding the following: Variable Expenses, LGLP, Regular Expenses, Strategic Objective A, LFD Contract, Tender Repair and Replacement, Capital Improvements, Contingency Funds, District Coordinator position, including insurance (property and liability), fire

suppression account, MASA, and Retirement. Further discussion surrounding the percentage of the district versus the percentage to the department, as well as the department allocation percentages.

Meeting adjourned 10:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michele Turner, ACFD#1 Administrative Assistant