

Albany County Fire District #1 Special Board Meeting February 26, 2021

Meeting called to order at 8:33 am. Board members present were Luke Hawkins, Art Sigel, and Brett Wadsworth.

Mullen FMAG Grant: Chairman Hawkins has read through the application for the FMAG 75/25 matching grant on the Mullen Fire and feels it an important thing for the County to contribute to, as there is a lot of money on the table for the residents who have been affected by the Mullen Fire. The District Board members feel that supporting the communities/property owners affected is the right thing to do. However, after reading through the District's By-Laws/Goals and Strategic Plan Chairman Hawkins feels there might be a couple of different places that might tie our hands, and he is not sure if we are financially/legally allowed to support this. Concerns were expressed about the use of District funds, which are public monies, being used for private property, and is this a justifiable use/intent of ACFD#1 funds. It will also set a precedent that would then require the Board to have to go back and justify the previous decision to either support, or not support the next issue that comes up.

Note: PILT funds from the Forest Service are being paid annually in June to the County. The District has not been a recipient in the past because we have not asked to be. The District could ask for a portion of those funds to possibly use for this. The District could also just ask the County Commissioners, that in lieu of allocating PILT funds to the District they simply use a portion of that to help with this matching funding, and that way the money never even comes to us. Either way, the District should ask for the PILT funds regardless of this grant.

The FMAG grant states they will go in and remove damaged trees, soil stabilization and then install debris traps. All these items benefit not only the landowners, but the surrounding area as well, in regards to, the potential for reburn, flooding, and mud slides. The grant is a 75/25 matching grant, so they are paying 75 cents on every dollar. However, the District has already been hit for 75% of the apparatus funds which has amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Also, for Keystone and Badger the fires occurred earlier during the season which made it possible for a team from the fire to stay on and rehab the area. The lateness of Mullen and the onset of snow prevented that on this fire, thus the FMAG funds to go in after the fact and rehab the area. County Fire Warden Dinges indicated that this fire was declared a federal disaster because of the number of structures/property owners impacted. Also, historically with the suppression account has been for suppression efforts but when you have suppression efforts towards the end of the fire occurring with rehab it is not a big deal. However, when suppression efforts cease then suppression funds are no longer available, thus the FMAG funds. County Fire Warden Dinges is asking for \$25,000 over two years as match funding and all \$25,000 can be in-kind donations.

In-kind contributions are very board and can include bookkeeping in terms of landowner private match, volunteer fire departments burning piles or chipping piles, helping and working with tools to rehab dozer line, fix fence, or really any work that's done in lieu of money can be utilized for the match. The County is going to track landowner efforts and that will count as part

of the County's 25% match. There are rates for these types of things that would need to be looked into. However, the District Board cannot commit volunteer time to do this when they have not reached out to the volunteers themselves. The Board could possibly compensate volunteers for their time and that would count as a match and keep the money in-house. Also, the Board does not have to commit now, this project will be ongoing for several years. Basically, County Fire Warden Dinges is asking the District commit to supporting this project to the tune of \$25,000 over the course of two budget periods, with a letter stating as such.

Would there be enough standing trees on private lands to run a Sawyer course? Yes, there is a lot of cutting work that needs to be done removing damaged fuels, and probably in some cases fuels that are not that damaged that need to be removed. The trick would be to get landowner support. The District does have several firefighters that need recertification on their Sawyer qualification and Eric would be able to lead as an instructor. Their time can then be used as an in-kind contribution.

Treasurer Wadsworth would propose a letter of support stating that the Fire District further intends to conduct a Sawyer course annually over the next two years and use red card equivalent rates as in-kind contributions towards the effort, along with physical labor of our removing damaged trees on private property, and they will utilize the training expense, expenditure, and the actual fuels mitigation as an in-kind contribution. Chairman Sigel would like to leave the letter with a statement that we believe that it is inappropriate the District should contribute cash and cite our reasons for 1) precedent 2) the manner in which we have been compensated for this fire already (we have already foregone x amount) and then let that lead into the District supports the community and we think we can offer some in-kind contributions to this. As a closing paragraph, we will continue to explore other ways in which the Fire District can assist in the future on a case-by-case basis. It should also be pointed out that this is a rare circumstance because it was a late season fire and that the District is doing something that would normally be done by the fire suppression fund. Bottom line the District has chosen to support the match grant, but not with financial funds in terms of actual dollars, but through creative in-kind donations.

Treasurer Wadsworth – Moved that Attorney Goetz, as our scrivener, draft a letter capturing the intent and tone of what we just discussed containing all the disparate sections that we've mentioned, into letter format committing the District to in-kind contribution towards our matching side of this grant, to be spread out over the next two years, and potentially beyond, if there remains an option for value added to future training by continuing the Sawyer course. Motion was seconded by Chairman Hawkins and approved unanimously. And it was agreed that Chairman Hawkins would sign.

Meeting adjourned at 9:25 am.

Respectfully Submitted,
Michele Turner, ACFD#1 Administrative Assistant