

**Minutes of the Regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District  
Monday, 28 Sept 2020  
0900**

**Call to Order**

**Roll Call – Present=Webber, Dorney, Johnson, Archibald. Absent = Bahti.**

**Pledge of allegiance**

**Call to the Public:**

**Dennis Conners** – I’ve been a resident since 2001, Sonoita is famous for its rumors, it is typical of a small community. This is a personnel matter and we can’t talk about it. I find it really sad that small towns act like small towns. Comments often become hurtful and damaging. I find it really disappointing.

**Katherine Prentice** – I grew up in this community, I have deep roots. With the annual budget proposal, on salaries, I’m asking that it be broke down to show the Chief, Battalion Chief, Captains and fire fighters, even include stipend. I think it’s important the public knows exactly who’s making how much. And when each person has received their last raise and how much. Also, are we allowed to ask questions during the meeting, to raise our hands, if we recognize you, we are not allowed to answer them. You can certainly approach individual board members after the meeting, but we can’t answer on behalf of the Board.

**Suzanne Jenkins** – I am not going to speak today.

**Phil Burdine** – I was a firefighter here for 17 months. What I am about to say is not going to be to welcome to some, but I have to say it. I left the day that Mark Bennett allegedly quit. I believe there were some improprieties with his departures. Also, there’s another person here leaving in November, for reasons I believe are questionable. I know the Board does not get involved in operations unless there are improprieties involved. These two people are tremendous assets to this department and I don’t believe their departure is legal. I hope the Board can address this; I do believe that it is something that the Board needs to look at. I appreciate the time.

**Nancy Belt** – I have lived here 14 years. I don’t want to talk to you about rumors, I want to talk to you about fact. I’m not going to go into detail but there was misconduct on the part of the Chief towards my daughter. We filed a formal, official complaint with this Board and there was a legal, legitimate investigation of those facts. I asked this Board to report to us what they are doing about it and what happened with the Chief. Mrs. Belt went on to question hiring practices, alleged retaliation against two members and the creation of a new position. My concern, and this may be rumor Dennis, is that the particular person that was hired is very supportive of the Chief and has created a very hostile work environment. My other concern is the hostile work environment. Why was this district created, it is here to protect the health, safety and welfare of this community and its taxpayers? If there’s not a healthy environment, then someone’s going to be hurt. Either themselves or they’re not going to provide the necessary services that we need. The department that you work for Dennis isn’t the department isn’t the department of today. It is sad and I don’t know why it changed. I believe that there’s always been a lack of leadership, and that there’s always been henchmen. When that person stopped willing to be henchmen, they left when they were asked to leave. I think it is incumbent on this Board and this community, to not just sit by but to make sure these things don’t happen. We have personnel policies in place that keep these things from happening, I have no issues with you as a board, I’m coming here

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today to say what do I need to do? Do I need to go out in the community? Do I need to knock door to door? Do I need to get petitions signed so that you people can do your job? I'm hearing that your hands are tied because of legal reasons... I just want to know what can I do? Because I want to support all these men and women who put their lives on the line for us every day. I do not want them to come to work and be browbeaten, and treated like children. They need to be well-trained, and they need to be respected. I thank everybody for their time.

**Jade Deforest** – Board Chair made note of the fact that Jade was wearing a district shirt that she needed to be clear she was not representing the fire district but her own views. Jade – I represent my own view. I love doing what I do, I'm here as a volunteer. I am concerned for myself what is happening to this department. I am working with these people on a regular basis and I see more and more depression, despair, anxiety... we're talking among ourselves on how can we resolve this. How can we do our job and not be afraid of retaliation. Something has gone wrong and I don't know what that is. But I am concerned. I don't know if you're all aware of this... we are the CON for the Patagonia Fire Department which means we transport their patients. I don't know exactly what that means in terms of financial for us, but I just learned that they are in the process of trying to dissolve that contract and go with Rio Rico. Not only did I see that as a concern financially, but psychically. We work well with Patagonia, we work mutual aid, they need help, we go. We need help, they come. I really hate to see this happening. And, I think we need to address why we're losing personnel, why we're having so much trouble getting people. I'm getting text messages every week, can you cover? I don't mind doing it but I'd like to know what is the problem that has created this situation. How can this be resolved? From my perspective, we're in trouble. I don't want to see the day come and we don't have anybody. My hope is we can come up with solutions and ideas that will work for all of us.

**Kurt Bahti** arrived at 0930

**Mike Wright** – I'm a volunteer Chaplain at the station and community member for 19 years, concerned about the station very much, my heart is here and that's why I committed to being chaplain. Chaplain Wright went on to say a prayer.

Review and approval of the minutes:

- June 22, 2020 – motion to approve by Archibald, second by Dorney. Motion carried unanimously.
- July 27, 2020 – motion to approve by Archibald, second by Dorney. Motion carried unanimously
- August 24, 2020 – motion to approve by Archibald, second by Dorney; Question with regards to item #4; volunteers serving on the board: it would be deemed to be a conflict of interest. Also, a question: Why don't we have a succession plan? Motion carried unanimously.
- August 27, 2020 – Motion to approve by Dorney, second by Archibald; Discussion: Johnson, change the in to and under item #7 as noted in handwritten corrections by Webber. Motion carried unanimously.
- Sept 22, 2020 – Motion to approve by Archibald, second by Dorney; Motion carried unanimously.

**Chief's Report:** For those who don't know me I am Jon Buonaccorsi, I've been with Sonoita for five years. I stepped into the Acting Chief's role in August.

- We had 65 calls for service.
- Status of Grants – no updates

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- Fire Code inspections – I went over and inspected the hood for the fairgrounds, it passed. They are still working on the rest of the kitchen. I have an inspection coming up at the ice cream parlor across the street and one coming up in Elgin this afternoon.
- Community events -no updates
- Rosemont Mine – no updates
- Palominas – nothing to report
- Wildland Billing – We have Brush 825 out of the area right now at the Sears Fire in the area of Cave Creek. They should be there another five days.
- Current Events – there are none at this time.
- Questions – Archibald – we had brought up traffic – if the mine was bringing traffic up 82 & 83. JB – no I just got the information from Meredith as to whom I should contact. Archibald - Did you know about the Patagonia issue? JB - For any CON changes there will have to be a public hearing on it.

**Financial Report** – MS Rutter presented the information on the finances of the fire district which included the Balance Sheet, the Profit & Loss Statement and the Cashflow forecast. There were no unusual items to report. We are on track with income and expenses. Webber – If there are any expenses associated with the new radios where is that in here. Rutter – in Computer and radio in line 59; this is July and August. Webber – so when the software was purchased it would have been last... Rutter – Oh the software? That would be in dispatch, line 49. Archibald – Wasn't that part of the grant that we got, it could have been but it wasn't. Webber – To clarify something, it could have been included in the grant, it wasn't identified as a need for us. So, we ended up having to pay outside of the grant. That's why I would like to see the breakdown here. if we didn't purchase it within the grant, it will be a lot more expensive now. Under unbudgeted income – Palominas – there is no income. Rutter - unfortunately that is a timing issues as to when the checks were received and deposited. Motion to approve the monthly financial report, Bahti, second by Dorney, motion carried unanimously.

**Discussion and direction to the acting chief regrading to the structure of the minutes** – Webber – Katie I noticed you referenced Arizona Open Meeting Law Section 7.8. Katie -That's the law that is the basis for what should be in the minutes. Webber – I am asking the board about the level of detail that is in the minutes. Archibald – I'd like to read the statute; I haven't reviewed it yet. Webber – I can send it to you, don't reply to me, we can review it and discuss it at the next meeting. Johnson – I'll make the request from Katie, so we're not going back and forth with Board members, can you go ahead and do section 7.8 and 7.9. Katie – They are in your Board Binder – Arizona Open Meeting Law. Johnson – Okay.

Chain of Command Chart – this derived from the question I had for the leadership, as to where does this reside for all of the staff. If this is not included in the policy documents, then where does this reside? JB- It's in the HR Binder. Webber – Based on all of the input we've been getting this should be in black and white for everyone to see. I am concerned what the leadership is doing to roll out this process if I am getting calls that the staff doesn't know about it. JB – my input would be, if you're reading all these things from other people, you are not bringing them to me. I haven't had an opportunity, -Webber- but I have brought these things forward to leadership before, and I did it this time, that's why I keep doing it. It's not that I want to get involved in the operations of the district. JB – But now that you have, you have had some of these things for four months now, and I've been here for two months now, start trickling down to me so I can take care of things. If I don't know about it I can't fix it. Webber – It's not an attack

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on you, Jon. JB – Well it sort of is and sort of isn't. What I'm saying is if you want answers and I don't ever know the question, I'm not going to get an answer. So let's work together. Don't assume anything.

There was an out of order public comment to which Board member Bahti responded. You mentioned rumor. I wish we could control rumor. We are addressing this. We have to follow the law. I am asking of the community is trust. I hope you elected us on the basis of trust. We are in possession of a lot more information than the community. I ask patience and trust for us to do the right thing.

**Discussion and update on proposed distribution on questionnaire** – Dorney – I would like to ask the board to table this.

**Discussion and possible action on finalizing Chief's annual review** – Since the Chief is not here, I'd like to table this.

**Review, discussion, and consideration of possible action regarding the Board's due diligence in following up on the correspondence directed to Board members including possible use of outside investigator, and direction to Chief Buonaccorsi to assist in facilitating any investigation.** Johnson – This is a result of our executive session. I'll be looking for a motion and discussion: Archibald & Dorney – what motion are you looking for. Archibald – to begin the process of selecting an investigator and to... Webber ... I make a motion that we direct Chris to get an outside investigation and direct Jon to facilitate the investigation. Second – Archibald, motion carried unanimously.

**Discussion and possible action regarding Acting Chief salary:** Johnson - I would like to save this to the end of the meeting.

**Housekeeping – Compliance with Certification Requirement for ASRS 48-805.02 – Signatures required for same.** Admin – when we adopt a budget you are supposed to certify that we are not in debt and we didn't do that. (Admin pointing to document on table) that is the formal document that you need to sign. Signed by Webber, Board Clerk and Johnson, Board Chair.

**Housekeeping – Elections, cancellation of.** Admin – Because there was only one person who ran, Chris Johnson, the two counties have cancelled elections for the Sonoita-Elgin Fire District. This was to be confirmed by the (Santa Cruz County) supervisors on Sept. 15, I didn't see it on their minutes. However you should be receiving a document you are now the person elected by default. You also need to as a new member taking office on December first, you have to attend a training with AFDA (Arizona Fire District Association) and you have to sign a document swearing that you have reviewed Arizona's Open Meeting Law no less than 24 hours prior to taking office. That's why the Open Meeting Laws are on your desk (Admin pointed to packet).

Johnson – we are back to discussing Acting Chief's Salary. I'd like a motion to drop into executive session to discuss this with Jon Buonaccorsi. Archibald – so moved, second by Dorney, motion carried. 1051 a.m.

Back in regular session at 1210

Members present – Johnson, Webber, Dorney, Archibald, Bahti. Also present; Goodwin, Buonaccorsi

Johnson cautioned all regarding Confidentiality.

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Motion by Webber to pay Buonaccorsi \$2,000 per pay period through October and it will be reviewed during an executive session at the October Board meeting. Second by Archibald, motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment – Motion by Archibald, second by Dorney. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting ended at 1214

Minutes approved on Monday, 26 October 2020, \_\_\_\_\_, Board Clerk.  
Reba Webber