

# Mosier Fire District Board Meeting

Thursday, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 6:00pm  
Held as a Zoom meeting

## Minutes

### Attendance:

- **Board members:** Barb Ayers, Joanne Rubin, Todd Reeves.
- **Staff:** Chief Mike Renault, Maggie Goter
- **Others:** Kris McNall, Tom Oswald, Lynda Sacamano, Christa Louise, Sheila Dooley, Phil Swaim, Megan Pingree, Carol Goter, Jim Appleton, Rose Blackwell

### Call to order at 6:02

### Agenda additions or corrections

### Comments from the public

**Kris McNall:** I think the board has stepped up in the past month re communication and making sure the public is informed and opportunity for public comment. Major effort to keep the public better informed. Thank you and keep up the good work. Lots of major stuff coming up with JUF and it's essential everyone be kept in the loop.

**Jim Appleton:** Has a correction for last month's minutes - he was not listed as a participant in the last board meeting. Agrees that opportunities for public comment are good.

**Phil Swaim:** Listening to Wasco County Board of Commissioners last week re double track issue. There's a 5 year moratorium. Wants to give a heads up that in 5 years, the discussion of double tracks in Mosier could be coming back.

### Consent agenda

- Approve minutes from August 12th regular board meeting, from August 18th and August 24th special board meetings, and August 7th and September 7th minutes from financial advisory study sessions. Review and approve August bills for payment.
- Rubin moves. Reeves seconds. All in favor.

### Business:

#### 1. Great River LLC - Lynda

Presentation from Friends of Mosier Valley which represents 18 people who have concerns they want to address.

Renault: 1 y ago he was approached by Russ Hargrave. After the fire he's been working on cleaning his property up and turning it into a youth camp/campground. Went to the county to readjust the Conditional Use Permit for the RV park to change it to a campground. He's done work, talked to Chief Renault. He's done a lot of due diligence: produced a binder full of safety concerns. Renault and Captains have toured the site.

Lynda Sacamano: Thanks to Chief for trying to make sure it's safe. Correction: prior conditional use permit had expired. This is a start for a new one for a youth camp and cemetery with 2200 burial plots. Approved by Wasco County planning commission. Represents 18 petitioners who oppose the project. Approval is for up to 350 overnight campers, 35 tent campers. Project is on the upper gravel portion of Carroll Rd with 3 entrances over a mile, all on gravel road.

3 points to make:

- Applicant has stated there is water on the property from a well to supply campers as well as for fire suppression. Primary fire protection based on that assertion. 30,000 gal tank for suppression. He has not provided proof that he has a working well. There is evidence of 4 abandoned wells since 2013 or before. Evidence that last 2 commercial ventures went up because of water issues. Due to Mosier water table issues there are no new commercial wells allowed, not allowed to drill deeper due to water issues. He could truck in water, but that's not what he represented in the document which is a red flag. Wasco is a complaint-driven county with little monitoring of compliance so it's important to be clear on what's going on.
- Re traffic: numbers in conditional use permit appear very low. Do not account for all vehicular traffic. Application was not consistent, sometimes contradictory. At times it could be high enough to impact the ability of fire/EMS traffic to move through town.
- There is no evacuation plan in case of fire except children will gather in a meadow. Carroll Rd has a limited road network. Evacuating while fire suppression vehicles are arriving could be terrifying.

She asks the fire board to add an addition to Chief Renault's approval of project. Could ask county commissioners to ask for 3 things: a certified well flow test to verify applicant's claims of sufficient water, an independent analysis of traffic flow, and an assessment of wildfire evacuation potential as it pertains to egress around Carroll with recommendation to improve gravel road. She hopes the applicant works with the Mosier Fire Dept to come up with a realistic evac plan.

Rose Blackwell: She expresses worry about the community. It's such a severe drought right now.

Sheila Dooley: Lives on Venzel Rd. Has concerns related to fire evacuation of Carroll: if it were blocked to north, they'd have to use cutoffs to south. Those are narrow. Could get blocked like it was last year. Steep, narrow, limited visibility roads. Last year trying to evacuate on Chenoweth there were cattle trucks coming up - there was gridlock, cars had to back up. This property has had a history of fire related concerns. David Jacobs, a Unit Forester with ODF in 2016 saw a significant amount of issues. When this campground existed previously in the 80s it required constant work from ODF and campground owners. Use of fireworks, chainsaws, campfires were all concerns. An increase in humans means an increase in fire starts. Bob Wood, water master: issues with this well over the years. Does not expect it to have gotten any better over the past several years. There's been no power to site since Jan 2013, don't know how they can know what the well is producing. It's in a location of extreme fire risk, steep slopes. Senate bill 762 mandates avoiding development in high risk farm/forest lands, though this application came in before that. In the future this use might not even be allowed.

Megan Pingree: Agrees with Lynda and Sheila. She's concerned about traffic, evacuation plans, lack of documentation: it doesn't seem like there's any water there. This project needs to be scrutinized more closely, and things that are contradictory need to be sorted out.

Jim Appleton: not part of the group of 18 petitioners. As a former fire chief I would not have supported this application. There's no way 320 kids can be evacuated from oncoming fire in a way that is safe and acceptable to anyone. Question of access should be disqualifying concern for this project.

Christa Louise: This is anecdotal: I'm on Dry Creek. People most in support seem to be living in town. Not living in this area. Likes the idea of youth camp, taking young people to appreciate nature, but people supporting this aren't people who will be affected if there's a fire. The fire last year moved really fast. She worries about what can happen to homes, wildlife, and people around here.

Reeves asked Renault about what our role is here - much of this is outside the fire department's jurisdiction. Renault: if the land use agreement says they'll have water available they need to show that before they can go any further. Yes, Wasco Co is complaint driven but they still have to show that the things in their plan are there.

Sacamano: if we weren't appealing, they wouldn't have to prove they have water. When do they have to do that? Chief says the county needs to check that requirements are being met before they give a certificate of occupancy.

Renault reiterates this project has been very forthcoming about information and has reached out for recommendations. He's reached out to Boy Scouts of America: they have Camp Baldwin in the forest outside Dufur to get information re evacuations, fire support.

Chief Renault is willing to check back and verify before they open. Renault: fire code doesn't have many specifics about campgrounds. Re camp fires: they're only allowed in certain campgrounds during fire closures depending on state approval. That's more stringent. He's seen everyone be more aware and prevention-minded this fire season anyway after recent bad fire seasons.

Dooley: this summer after the conditional use permit was approved, Russ Hargrave was having a summer camp without meeting the conditions. I hope this is monitored.

2. Approve Todd Reeves replacing Joanne Rubin on JUF committee – Ayers

Ayers moves, Rubin seconds. All in favor.

3. Possible options for continuing JUF format – Ayers

Evans wanted to bring this up: historically JUF committee hasn't been meeting the obligations in IGA to meet monthly with a quorum. Wanted to raise the question of changing the format, e.g. whole fire board and whole city council getting together. Ayers thinks we should have some meetings like that, but not for nuts and bolts. Rubin and Reeves agree. With that many people it'll be hard to keep us moving forward. A meeting at some point with both entities once would be good. Not a lot of City people were at that last JUF meeting.

Ayers: what about a quarterly check in with both boards? Reeves agrees that could help communication issues.

Other option: we could try to simplify it to just a couple people, but then that's not really a public meeting and communication isn't clear. Evans suggested more ad hoc meetings, but Ayers thinks it's been ad hoc meetings for the past year and a half. We just need to do a better job meeting obligations.

Ayers asks Renault to take feedback to JUF to request quarterly meetings with the fire board and city council. Would be nice to have the first one in a month or two to make sure we're in sync. Might have helped prevent comms issues we've seen.

Also directed Renault to ask the committee to enhance public outreach: one public meeting isn't enough. Rubin and Reeves think that's reasonable, Reeves and Renault will take that back to committee.

4. JUF fire breakroom modification update – Reeves

Renault: has talked with Evans about this issue about how to enhance space for volunteers. Build to East, build to north, or even going to the city and asking them to get rid of the bathroom and kitchenette.

Ayers: Evans indicated he thinks there are already 5 bathrooms, doesn't see why 4 wouldn't suffice. Also we could move the kitchenette into the corner of another room.

Renault: Bathroom isn't a big deal. Lots of things we could do instead of a kitchenette, like a coffee maker in the conference room in addition to the full community kitchen.

Ayers: motion from last meeting indicated we don't want to pay more to expand the footprint.

Renault: we don't have a good answer because we haven't gotten revised drawings from the architect. Architect gave us questions, we solicited input from volunteers, but that information hasn't been submitted to him.

Evans communicated our concerns to the architect and the City. Mayor Burns wants to bump out the footprint and add a shower to the restroom, not cut back.

Reeves got feedback from the volunteers. Won't necessarily be able to meet all their wants and needs, but we don't want to expand sq footage or add dollars if at all possible.

Renault: there's no way city staff would be able to put a shower in that restroom. It's not big enough. They'd have to punch into meeting space or into our space.

Burns proposed pushing out into Fire offices to accommodate a shower. That's why the architect solicited information about our needs for the space.

Ayers: Mosier Fire gave up a lot of space to try to save money. It would have been dedicated to volunteers or other stuff. Chief did a great job trying to be accommodating in the early stages. Tell City let's not play hardball, this is supposed to be equal.

Reeves and Ayers: get rid of the coffee cart space, move everything down, that gives us the space we need. We have a lot of volunteers, fire is a top priority in the community. Reeves says to add one more bay would be roughly ~\$71,000. That's way cheaper than any of this office space. Adding office space adds a lot of expense. We'll try to hold our cost down but that needs to be a goal among all of us.

Reeves asks about tax funds. McNall: Evans said If we raise the tax to max of \$2.10 we could get a loan of about a million. She thinks that's pretty close to accurate. She'll get numbers to Reeves.

5. Chief's report – Chief Renault

See written report.

Reeves and Ayers: would recommend we add bullet points re response times. A member of the public has been talking about it, they want him to answer that.

Renault: just switched reporting system so working on data. Times are going up a minute or minute and a half but that minute we're adding is giving us qualified crews on apparatus heading out the door rather than a solo responder. Lots of single resources in vehicles makes it harder to manage an incident. 7 minutes is still not bad for volunteer agencies even with more people at the station.

Looking at times as a whole, we're tracking every piece of rolling stock today. Can pump the numbers up by looking at things like the 2nd out tender which took 30 minutes to respond. He could make times look awesome by looking at just one vehicle.

Fleet of nine vehicles.

Reeves: what about also reporting the first out response time? Renault: tracking one piece of equipment skews the numbers. What if he jumps in the command rig in 30 seconds? That's a great response but it's not showing up with equipment that can do work. One person's not trying to fight the battle if we wait for a crew.

Solo responses still happen on occasion, but not much. Most calls have 3 plus responders, even in daytime. He doesn't want to show up and try to run a CPR call by himself.

Ayers: you want accountability and a team on fires. 2 in, 2 out. Rubin: same with EMS. She wouldn't want to go on a call without a partner.

Renault: he's responded solo on an engine in other fires, but it's better to bring a team of trained and qualified people.

Renault has also added how many calls are outside the district to paint a cleaner picture.

Over 5 years: our numbers are getting a little higher. Interoperability and mutual aid adds to that. This month we've responded to 2 structure fires out of the district.

It's becoming more the norm for agencies to help fight fires outside their jurisdiction. Warming climate, plus not always enough people in volunteer agencies. Ayers: cooperation is what the Gorge is all about; Chief has done an excellent job.

There was one "dispatched and unable to respond" recently. That call was for a structure fire in Hood River, not something in district. We don't want to do that but it happens. It was one of 3 times this year we weren't able to staff, all those were calls outside the district.

6. SAFER update – Goter

Last month: we're working on getting new volunteers physicals so we can get gear reimbursed. After reimbursements are done we can submit an amendment/extension. 6 new vols have had physicals including all people we bought gear for, so we can submit reimbursement request. Hoping to submit reimbursement by Monday at the latest.

Approximately 2 more months left in the grant period.

We've been in contact with the grant officer on an extension request. She sounds pretty confident on a six month extension, but a one year extension would have to be escalated up the chain.

3 prospective volunteers in the pipeline.

7. Volunteer report - Tom Oswald

4 vols are getting ready to head to Firefighter 1 training. We're switching drill meeting nights to Wednesdays starting in October so advanced volunteers can help with the academy. We're excited to see them continuing their training. He thanks the board for seeking input from the volunteers. Also, everyone's jealous of our cool new helmets.

8. Committee reports

Ayers: Finance committee: wanted to investigate whether we will be cash poor after committing money to the JUF. McNall concluded Renault's done a great job spending within our tax revenue for annual operating expenses. UP funds are all spent or spoken for. We have about \$1.3 million in the bank: UP funds, capital reserve, operating funds. If we commit \$750K-1 million, that's subtracted from 1.3 million. We'll have some cash flow from conflags, SAFER reimbursements, but within 5 years we will not have money for JUF expansion. We need to get the building way we want it now and for 20 years or so. No savings account anymore.

We absolutely need to pursue grants for things we want to reduce operating costs. Looking for a "wish list" of short, medium, and long-term needs by priority from Chief Renault.

Interest income is going away with broader economic changes.

They still need to get the bank statement and confirm everything. There was a transition on how books were done when we switched bookkeepers.

Takeaway assumption: new building will cost more to maintain, e.g. utilities. Consider inflation over time. We can afford it but we don't have a lot of padding. Again, we need to pursue grants.

McNall reiterates we absolutely have spent or committed all the UP money and general operational expenses can't be covered by SAFER, so we need grants.

Reeves highlighted that to go over about \$1 million contributed to JUF would require a tax increase. That's not necessarily a bad thing but the public needs to be made aware. Also, a loan and a tax raise are basically the same thing: a loan would require us to raise taxes to pay it off.

McNall: Very against raising taxes to the maximum cap for the JUF. We don't have enough room to keep up with increasing operational expenses if we go to the ceiling for JUF - it would be foolish.

9. Correspondence

- Email from Colleen Coleman re JUF
- Email from Tom Oswald re volunteer input on JUF.

**Comments from the public**

**Reeves:** My mother is not happy because they're canceling her fire insurance. They call the location "undefensible." Renault: after all the fires in CA and locally last couple years, lots of insurance companies out there are not renewing policies. It's about location, defensibility, etc. Lots of payouts have been happening. It's nothing to do with the fire district or department or whether we show up or don't. They're just looking at where your house is on a map.

**Appleton:** Re response times and personnel: hats off to Chief and vols for upping the game re qualifications etc. Disputes the idea that centralized response is an unqualified benefit. For Mosier, thinking the handful of people we have available is going to make a difference vs a big city department is a mistake. The idea that one person with good equipment and training can make a difference while waiting for backup is something that has been shown to save lives and property. The idea of going by the book and waiting is a huge mistake. Very serious gap that does not serve constituents of the district.

**Adjourned at 7:32.**

*Next month's board meeting will be on October 14<sup>th</sup>.*