

# Mosier Fire District Board Meeting

## Friday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 9:00am

### Held as a Zoom meeting

## Minutes

### Attendance

- **Board members:** Phil Evans, Kris McNall, Joanne Rubin, Todd Reeves, Steve Fisher
- **Staff:** Chief Mike Renault, Maggie Goter
- **Others:** Witt Anderson, Joe Sacamano, Henri Mattson, Carole Dearholt, Charles Young

### Call to order at 0906

### Agenda additions or corrections

**Introduce Witt Anderson as new JUF project manager**

### Comments from the public

Several written comments were read or summarized. Comments submitted from Karen Bailey, Dan Fager, Barb Ayers, & Maggie Goter are attached at the end of the minutes.

Todd Reeves commented that he believes the district needs an improvement to facilities, but the costs have been allowed to balloon out of control. He worries that we may sacrifice our life safety budget for the life of the loan. He references a new Pilot Butte station completed in 2020 - they built a 10,000 sqft structure to house nine firefighters and apparatus for under \$4 million, but now do not have the funds to staff or equip it.

Henri Mattson comments that he feels like information about the JUF has not been sufficiently widely distributed and suggests putting it in the Mosier Valley News. He advocates for less "fluff" and a smaller building at lower cost.

Carole Dearholt: she would like more information on meetings & JUF progress, perhaps in Suzi's newsletter. She wants to support the fire district, but wants tax dollars spent on safety, prevention, needed response, equipment, etc rather than a building. Fire seasons are longer and more costly than they used to be so she wants Mosier to have money available for equipment, safety, prevention, responses, etc.

Chief Renault: our current buildings are small and apparatuses are getting bigger. Without a new building, we might get to the point in 10-15 years where we have to have apparatus custom-made to fit in our facilities which would add cost. A new station also gives us good interior training space, space for gear, etc.

Evans clarifies the JUF is more expensive than just a fire station because it's a joint building with the City. Fire department's contribution will be less than the total cost.

Fisher comments that EMS calls are most of the workload of a modern fire department and we need a new building to be effective at EMS and retain volunteers. Plus we've already invested approximately \$250,000 in soft costs which we would lose if we don't move forward.

Clarification from McNall: Evans had mentioned a contribution of \$500-800K, but total ask from the district right now is up to \$1.9 million including \$965K in cash and up to a \$900K loan. Also, re the issue with large equipment not fitting into our current buildings: how will we deal with this when it's time to rotate large apparatus out to outer stations in 20-30 years?

### Business:

1. Introduce Witt Anderson as new JUF Project Manager.

Witt is taking over from Colleen, who is retiring. Witt is a City Council member and volunteer firefighter.

Witt has agreed to do this on a volunteer basis as his professional background is suited to it

He mentions there could be a potential concern for conflict of interest given that he is a City Council member. Technically Chief Renault is the project manager for the Fire side and Colleen was the project manager for the City side, so Witt would take over in representing the city. But Colleen served as the primary project manager and he'd take over the bulk of that work, at least on an interim basis. In the future the JUF may need a paid professional project manager. As a fire volunteer, he also is aware of Fire Department concerns and perspectives.

Design team is going into Phase 2: Design Development. That will give us a higher-confidence cost estimate in the next couple months.

We are still working on fundraising and we are paying Jill Burnette to continue that work.

Other details in progress: operations & maintenance agreement, etc.

Has found some errors with prior assumptions - we're still maybe \$1 mil short even assuming maximum Fire Department commitments and that would have to be fundraised. Next JUF meeting is 2/15.

Rubin: when building homes, end cost can be 30% more than estimate. Is that true for a commercial project like this the way it may be for homes? Anderson is also concerned about this; escalation has been 5-6% per quarter recently. He thinks we have to be somewhat conservative and assume costs will continue to go up but we'll know more with better cost estimates in a couple months.

McNall & Reeves both express they're in favor of Witt coming on board in this role.

John Grimm can be backup when Witt is out of town in next couple months. We have other expertise in town that can provide some volunteer support.

2. JUF utility costs and plan - Evans

At the last JUF meeting the JUF committee decided on an IGA format to oversee maintenance and handle costs. Background work is being done now but specifics will need to be worked out in the future. Fire Board will need to vote to approve this when documents are worked out.

McNall: The operations and maintenance costs determine how big a loan the fire district can afford.

McNall shared a document looking at different possible loan amounts and tax increases. Assumptions for operations & maintenance (O&M) costs are .5-1% of the building's cost per year (1% is comparable to what John Day is paying for new station) and Fire District pays half of that. Costs will increase with inflation; we hope that inflation and growth will average out.

McNall looked at scenarios with loans ranging from \$0 to \$800K and tax rates ranging from \$1.95-2.10. Took Capital Equipment Plan into account. Plan is to let Capital Equipment Plan go unfunded for first ten years in order to pay off loan.

Maxing out tax rate for a loan will mean we can't increase taxes for operational budget increases, especially staff increases or raises.

We need to learn maintenance costs and decide how much of current tax rate we're willing to commit to JUF.

3. Potential JUF loan with Business Oregon - Evans

Loan rate from Business Oregon is about 2%, which is fantastic - a loan is cheaper than a bond.

If we can drive O&M costs lower that gives us a big bump in the loan amount we can afford.

We may be able to recoup some costs by renting out meeting space and commercial kitchen. City has looked into what these rates may be. The Dalles Readiness Center can charge \$1300 for a 150 person wedding.

We also need to consider the degree to which we want the space available at a low cost for the benefit of the community, e.g. for community exercise classes.

In her opinion, we can't compromise on public safety or volunteer safety and that means we can't go to our maximum rate limit of \$2.10 for the JUF.

Joe Sacamano comments: the members of the public who commented earlier were concerned about tax increases and they were cautious about moving forward quickly. We're moving forward as if this is all final - do we need to do more public information or education? How can we get more public buy-in?

Evans says yes we need more public information but reiterates that the Fire District is committing a minority of total cost.

Fisher: We should enact a public education campaign. Surveying the community can be part of this. He would like to go back to in-person meetings as soon as possible.

Reeves also doesn't want to go to the very edge of our capacity or burden community. Should we start lower with ~\$500K loan for now? Evans: we can hold on to that low rate for up to 6 months after our initial application.

Pre-application will come back in 7-10 days.

Jill is still working on grants but we're "scratching the bottom of what's out there" per Anderson. There's still a gap between what we have and the total needed, even with 800K loan. Rubin says we should be cautious and make sure we could cover escalations or overruns.

If the board commits the \$965K on Jill's spreadsheets, that will leave us with approx \$200K in capital reserves.

Fisher: Being approved for \$800K loan does not obligate us to borrow up to \$800K.

Earliest we would get cash from loan would be Oct-Nov 2022.

JUF will start reporting monthly soft costs to fire board for greater awareness.

Technically, project managers (Chief Renault & Colleen) should probably be billing time to JUF rather than their respective entities.

McNall: it would be helpful to report back to fire board after JUF staff meetings and for all JUF documents to go to fire board.

Renault: the issue with Bend Fire Station is more to raise money for staffing than the building itself.

Board discussed sending meeting summaries or agendas to Mosier Valley News. We want the public to be aware of what we're doing.

Board will vote next meeting on how large a loan to apply for and how much of our capital in hand to commit. We've voted to commit the UP money and \$200K additional. That leaves about \$215K Jill is assuming the Fire District will commit but has not been voted on.

## **Comments from the public**

**Adjourned at 11:24.**

*Next month's board meeting will be on February 10<sup>th</sup>.*

Public comment from Karen Bailey submitted by email on 1/28/22:

To the Mosier Fire District Board Members

I just recently became aware of this meeting on whether or not to use fire funds to help with capital costs for the Joint Use Facility and securing a sizable loan for the “extras” being discussed.

My concern with the size of the loan being considered is that our fire seasons are longer, our potential for more and more damaging fires is increased due to climate change and using up all the district has may not be prudent.

I understand the district tax rate is presently \$1.65 per thousand and it has the ability to raise it to \$2.10 without a vote and going above that amount would require a levy or bond. Because of increased pressure from growth, tourists, climate, etc. I think it would be hard to pass an increase so leaving a reasonable balance on hand seems prudent to me. We don't know what type of emergencies will arise and putting the entire amount of what is in savings puts the district in a risky spot in my opinion.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my concern and thank you for your work in making our small community a safe one.

Sincerely,  
Karen Bailey

Public comment from Barb Ayers submitted via email on 1/27/22

Dear Mosier Fire Board:

I appreciate all that you do and miss being part of your team. As you consider raising taxes and leveraging much of the remaining assets the Fire District manages to fund the Joint Use Facility (JUF), please consider three things:

**1) Long-term escalating fire risk requiring more MFD budget expense for life safety, fire response and prevention:**

In the next 30 years, these are the escalating fire seasons Mosier can expect, from a recent State risk assessment on Wasco County:

**“Wildfire risk, as expressed through the frequency of very high fire danger days, is projected to increase under future climate change. In Wasco and Hood River Counties, the frequency of very high fire danger days per year is projected to increase on average by about 40% (with a range of -13 to +99%) by the 2050s under the higher emissions scenario compared to the historical baseline.”**

This study was for the Hood River and Wasco County Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans– start on page 386 of this NHMP:

[https://www.hoodriversheriff.com/images/uploads/documents/Hood\\_River\\_MNHMP\\_2018\\_small.pdf](https://www.hoodriversheriff.com/images/uploads/documents/Hood_River_MNHMP_2018_small.pdf)

**2) Long term financing for a building could potentially cripple our ability to respond to long term MFD emergency response (operational) needs:**

If a long-term loan and/or a long-term tax increase are enacted, will it allow for future unforeseen operational needs? I worry that it will leverage our future department growth and sustainment by leveraging every dollar we have, or could have, for 15 to 30 years to build an expensive building.

With global warming escalating wildfire risk in counties such as ours, a more robust department may be needed over time - or contracts, equipment, or other ways to address escalating risks.

Is there a less expensive building option?

**3) Can we please cut JUF building costs to reduce MFD’s long-term financial impact?**

Our JUF contractors completed a fire station in John Day that is larger, (11,000+) square feet, with a 911 center, for \$1.9 million. Why can't we build a fire station adjacent to city hall for the

same amount, leveraging grants and reducing costs? This still supports the JUF concept. Or cut costs to reduce overall MFD dollars needed? As public members have repeatedly commented to MFD, we could build a cheaper building.

The John Day building is bare bones but substantial, with 6 vehicle bays and a 911 Center. We have cut corners on the fire portion of the JUF to accommodate city needs for joint use but MFD costs have increased from the partnership. Absolutely true that fantastic grants have also been obtained!

The proposed JUF building is not bare bones, it is "aspirational," with a high price tag. Can't we right size the price tag to match our community? LINK HERE to John Day station:

<https://pinnaclearchitecture.com/portfolio/john-day-fire-station/>

Please carefully consider NOT leveraging all of the money MFD has to serve its core mission – life safety, fire risk reduction and suppression, for this important building investment.

Thanks for listening.

Barb Ayers

Homeowner, former MFD Board member

P.O. Box 333 Mosier 97040

[gorgedogmom@gmail.com](mailto:gorgedogmom@gmail.com)

Public comment from Dan Fager submitted via email on 1/27/22

Note: To The Fire Board to be read by the recorder for Jan. 28th meeting

We are short on the details of the proposed use of fire department funds and/or credit to help plug the roughly two million deficit in funding the multi use facility. As tax payers with property at extreme fire risk we are concerned that emergency situations might arise and fire dept. funds or credit would not be available. We believe a significant amount of emergency funds should be kept on hand. What will the fire department budget/balance sheet look like after this money or credit is allocated? Also, from a taxing perspective don't capital improvements have to be voted on separately from everyday tax supported funding? If so this combination of fire dept. and city hall seems to be a little unconventional. We feel it would be more appropriate to scale back the project. Especially if as expected we head into another period of significant inflation.

Dan Fager. 2005 Hood River Road 541-503 5151

Public comment from Maggie Goter submitted on 1/28/22

For consideration as the board debates funding for the JUF.

Mosier has a finite tax base. We're a small town and that's just the reality we're living with. It might grow a little, but for the most part what we see is what we're going to be working with for the next few decades.

Going all-in on the JUF and committing as much money as we think we can manage to that means we're going to push our apparatus to the very edge of their functional life. This is dangerous, because you often don't know where that line is until you've crossed it.

On the Memaloose 2 fire a few years ago, I was on an apparatus defending a house in our fire district and that piece of equipment suffered a mechanical failure and stopped working. We couldn't move it.

It's pretty normal to talk about trigger points when you're fighting fire, e.g. if the fire gets into this room we're pulling out, or if the fire crosses this line we're going to attack. But having a trigger point of "ok, if the fire gets this far we are dropping everything and running for the road" was actually pretty scary. That's one of those moments I'm going to remember.

I love the idea of the JUF, but I think it's not prudent to spend to the edge of our financial capacity for it. We saw some solid numbers last meeting on what it costs to keep apparatus running at our current level: about \$35-40K per year. We can't pull money from that for the JUF. We need to keep money allocated for apparatus.

We need new facilities. I want new facilities. I'm excited for the JUF. But going all-in on the building and not reserving money for replacing apparatus potentially puts volunteers at risk.