

Holmen Area Fire District
Meeting Minutes - May 29th, 2024

Jeff Herlitzke called the Holmen Area Fire District meeting to order at 6:30 pm on May 29th, 2024 at the Town of Holland Town Hall.

Present: Doug Jorstad (Holmen), Travis Elam (Holmen), Rick Hauser (Holland), Jeff Herlitzke (Holland),

Also Present: Ryan Ostreng (Fire Chief)

Excused: None

Guests: Fire department staff

Election of vacant Secretary position:

Travis Elam volunteered for the vacant secretary position. Motion by Elam, second by Jorstad. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Jorstad/Hauser motion for approval of the minutes. Motion carried unanimously.

Resident or Employee Concerns/Comments:

None

Financial Review:

General review and discussion on balance sheet. Jorstad highlighted that as of May 21st the board has spent 33.2% of the budget. General review of check details. Hauser questioned new hire payments for physicals. Ostreng, stated that it is typical practice to cover the entire cost of physicals for firefighters. Herlitzke questioned recurring payments for uniforms. Ostreng stated it was due to new hires. Ostreng reminded the board that the 33.2% of the budget spent also includes capital expenditures and to expect the capital expenditures to impact the budget later.

Fire Administration Report:

Review of April incident/activity report. Ostreng stated that he is still working on transferring reports from the La Crosse software to internal software for more reporting. Ostreng highlighted the Country Road T fire, a few smaller brush fires, and a few gas leak calls.

Ostreng stated that we have the ability to apply for the DNR Forestry Fire Protection Grant which is a 50/50 match for a maximum amount of \$20,000. Ostreng stated that he wished to use the grant money to replace forest fire fighting PPE. Elam questioned how many forest fires we have yearly. Ostreng stated about half a dozen or so. Ostreng stated last April was the largest grass fire he's responded to since joining the department. Fire staff elaborated that it was multiple acres and structures that were on fire. Herlitzke stated that we should expect more forest/brush fires that the department will have to

respond to. Ostreng agreed. Ostreng stated that the department also protects black river bottoms. Jorstad/Elam motion to approve. Motion carried unanimously.

Fire Commission Report:

Ostreng stated the fire commission is reviewing the job description of the fire fighter position.

HAFD Website:

Ostreng stated the website is up and running, but it's still a work in progress. Hauser questioned why the domain was only "holmenfire.com" when it represents the Village of Holmen and Town of Holland. Hauser questioned why the domain wasn't "hafd.com". Ostreng stated that the department was just re-using the domain that was previously purchased years ago by the department and was unsure of the cost to change it. Elam explained to everyone the process behind purchasing a web domain. Hauser questioned why the site didn't end in ".gov". Ostreng stated that he started looked into it.

Future Fire Station Study:

Ostreng stated that he is looking for a RFQ for the study and is still in the draft stage. Ostreng stated that he hopes to have it done by Friday and that he had reached out to Scott Heinig for review. Herlitzke asked that when it's finished the draft also be sent to Bob Stupi for review as well.

Open records request:

Ostreng stated that according to the boards attorney the initial request was too broad and there are no actions required until the request is narrowed.

Paid meeting minutes recorder:

Jorstad stated the Village of Holmen clerk was not interested in recording minutes. Herlitzke stated the Town of Holland's clerk was interested. Jorstad stated the Village of Holmen's administrator doesn't support paying for an additional body to record minutes and agreed with the administrator. Elam agreed with Jorstad and the Village of Holmen's administrator. No motion occurred.

2025 Assistant Fire Chief Position Request:

Ostreng requested a budget of \$150,000 to cover wages and benefits for the additions of an assistant fire chief for the department. Ostreng gave a brief explanation of the reasons he thought the department needed an assistant fire chief.

Hauser request an explanation of the fire departments command structure. Hauser stated that he thought an assistant fire chief in a 14-man department is a redundant and unnecessary thing to have. Hauser asked if an administrative assistant would be more practical to help with the issues Ostreng was facing. Ostreng stated that it would be helpful but wouldn't address all the needs of the department. Hauser stated he would be more open to the idea of an assistant fire chief once the results of the fire study were finalized.

Ostreng stated that he is overwhelmed with the day-to-day responsibilities of the fire chief and that he doesn't have the time/capacity to think about the future of the fire department and its growth. Ostreng stated that he should be at the planning and zoning meetings but doesn't have the time with normal operations. Fire staff stated that they would also like an assistant fire chief to focus on the day to day, training, staffing issues, meetings, etc. while Chief Ostreng could focus more on growing the department and taking the department where it needs to go.

Herlitzke stated that the Town of Holland Board needs to discuss the details in depth as a whole before moving forward with anything.

Elam requested additional details on some of the issues that the department is facing that would require an assistant chief position. Elam also asked the chief if it would be possible to offload some of his day to day tasks to higher ranking staff within the department.

Jorstad stated that after talks with Administrator Heinig that the Village of Holmen supports Ostreng's request for an assistant fire chief but request that he waits to propose the new position until 2025. Jorstad also requested Ostreng bring up the assistant fire chief position to the Fire Commission so they can establish a job description prior to the approval of an assistant fire chief should it pass.

Paid-On-Call Staff:

Ostreng stated that we currently have 2 paid on call staff and 1 starting soon. Ostreng stated he wanted to know the boards opinion of paid-on-call staff. Ostreng stated that he has concerns about staffing of the department in the event of major fire/incident. Ostreng stated during calls only 2 staff remain at the station if the other 4 respond to the call, and sometimes he is the only one at the station to cover additional calls. Ostreng stated that anytime the department responds to a structural fire the department is reliant on paid-on-call staff and additional aid for any other calls. Ostreng stated that he is **very** concerned about this issue.

Herlitzke stated that the Town is concerned about the lack of response and the cost associated with paid on call staff. Herlitzke stated the purpose of the previous referendum was to hire more full-time staff instead of spending resources on paid-on-call staff. Herlitzke raised concerns about the cost of staff in addition to the requested \$150,000 in funding for an assistant fire chief. Ostreng stated that the department covers all training and equipment for paid-on-call staff and that the total cost is around \$16,000 per person. Ostreng stated he is still weighing the cost/benefits of paid-on-call staff.

Elam asked fire staff for their opinion of paid-on-call staff. Fire staff stated that only 1 person in the last decade has transitioned from paid-on-call to full time firefighter and they are unreliable. Jorstad stated that he doesn't think they are enough people out there to make the commitment as paid-on-call, and that hopefully the department can add full time staff in the future instead. Fire staff commented that other municipalities also have issues with the reliability of paid-on-call staff.

Ostreng stated that changes were coming, and that paid-on-call staff will be required to attend a minimum amount of monthly training and will be required to attend a certain percentage of call backs.

Ostreng stated that paid-on-call staff were required to be firefighter 1 & 2 and EMT trained which is roughly 300 hours of training. Fire staff commented that their training took them roughly 18 months to finish all of the required training.

Elam asked if there was any form of contract that could protect the fire department from spending resources on non-committed paid-on-call staff similar to how the Holmen Police Department ran the Police Reserves. Elam stated he didn't think the department should close the door to individuals who were seriously committed to future firefighting careers. Elam stated a positive experience with Holmen Police reserves and thought other individuals should have a similar opportunity with the fire department. Ostreng stated that he would love to see a contractual agreement but in practice they are hard to uphold.

Herlitzke stated he would like to see buy in from the rest of the fire staff before supporting additional paid-on-call staff. Hauser stated that he would rather see the money used to pay paid-on-call staff moved into the budget instead. Jorstad raised concerns about paying for the training for paid-on-call staff only to have them leave to take a full-time position somewhere else. Jorstad stated this had happened in the past due to lack of funding and the inability for the board to hire paid-on-call staff as full-time firefighters. Jorstad stated he would like to see the full-time staff increase overtime instead of paid-on-call.

No actions occurred.

Potential Command Vehicle Replacement:

Ostreng stated he would like to replace the current vehicle he is using right now which is a ford expedition, use the expedition as a reserve vehicle, and get rid of the department's excursion. Ostreng stated that he would like to replace his expedition with a new suburban so that he can outfit it with a slide out tray that can be used to carry additional equipment to calls. Ostreng suggested using the 2% dues to purchase the vehicle only, and explained that it wouldn't cover the entire cost to outfit the vehicles with lights, radios, and additional graphics for the department. Ostreng estimated the total cost to purchase the vehicle would come out to \$110,000. Ostreng stated he doesn't currently have any quotes lined up yet. Ostreng stated that he had plans for a 10-year vehicle replacement plan for the department. Herlitzke stated he thought this was a good idea and that we should establish this.

No actions occurred.

Credit Cards for Captains:

Ostreng requested approval of credit cards for captains with a limit of \$500. Motion by Travis/Hauser for the approval of the 3 fire captains not to exceed a total amount of \$500 each. Motion carried

unanimously.

Closed Session:

None

Next Regular Meeting Date:

Next regular meeting June 17th, 2024 at 6:30pm at Town of Holland Town Hall.

Adjourn:

Motion to adjourn Jorstad/Hauser. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes by Travis E. Elam, Secretary