

Holmen Area Fire District

Meeting Minutes – September 24th, 2024

Jeff Herlitzke called the Holmen Area Fire District meeting to order at 6:40 pm on September 29th, 2024 at the Town of Holland Town Hall.

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

Alternates Present:

Members Excused:

Also Present: Ryan Ostreng (Fire Chief)

Guests: Fire department staff

Pledge of Allegiance Recited

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Elam stated that he was behind on the minutes and they would be available at the next meeting.

Public Comment:

Fire department staff voiced their support for the proposed the budget and hoped the board would continue to fund more training, growth opportunities, and education to retain staff.

Resident or Employee Concerns/Comments:

None.

Financial Review:

Jorstad (Treasurer) presented a general fund summary.

Jorstad stated that for the financial year the department was at roughly 73% of the budget. Herlitzke questioned if the department had paid itself back the \$40,000 dollars it owed itself yet. Chief Ostreng stated that he got delayed on the transfer but was working on it.

Check detail was reviewed by the board. Elam had general questions about the new company doing work on the trucks and asked if the proposed budget accounted for the higher rates from the private company compared to the City of La Crosse. Chief Ostreng stated he wasn't aware of the price difference for services yet but the plan was to continue to use De Bauche Truck & Diesel moving forward. Hauser questioned a specific line item on the check detail, and Ostreng clarified that it was the 2% due line item and he was specifically marking expenses that way due state audit requirements.

Herlitzke questioned if the Chief had any quotes or invoices for things related to the recently approved AFG grant. Chief Ostreng stated he directed department staff to find things that could be purchased with the grant. He stated that some of the equipment they were looking at to purchase was in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 range. Ostreng stated the department didn't have enough in savings to make all the purchases immediately so they would have to make purchases, wait for reimbursement through the grant, and make more purchases.

Fire Administration Report:

Ostreng stated there were 110 calls for the month of August, down 3 calls from the previous year. Ostreng stated the department had a total of 744 calls year to date which is down 100 from the previous year. Ostreng stated the call volume is similar to 2020/2021. Ostreng stated he suspects the department will have around 1250 calls for the year. Hauser asked if the call report reflected assistance from Onalaska. Ostreng stated that if mutual aid was required it would be included in the call report.

Ostreng stated there were no staffing updates.

Ostreng stated the department was having issues with engine 1 again. Ostreng specified the issue was computer related and was affecting the engines main pump. Ostreng stated the department was working with Reliant Fire Apparatus and that it was something they hadn't seen before. Chief Ostreng stated Reliant Fire Apparatus was working with the manufacturer to solve the issue. Chief Ostreng stated that as of right now engine 1 is parked and it can only server to dump water.

Ostreng stated the department was having an issue with RPM based control for the water pump on engine 2. Ostreng stated the engine is still in service and they are using the pressure control instead of the RPM for the time being. Hauser questioned if the department could pump from engine 1 with a portable pump if needed and asked about the pressure needed to do that. Chief Ostreng stated that although it's possible it would make more sense just to call for mutual aid if necessary.

Elam asked about the age of the engines and asked if engine 1 was the truck with the door issue as well. Chief Ostreng stated that engine 1 was newer and was manufactured in 2023, and engine 2 was manufactured in 2014.

Chief Ostreng stated that La Crosse Fire was still doing ladder testing for the department on both vehicles.

Chief Ostreng stated the department had been having issues with internet speeds and that Spectrum came out and installed a new modem and inspected the cable. Chief Ostreng stated that spectrum found a cable that looked like it had been fried so they buried new

cable for the building. Chief Ostreng stated he reached out to Spectrum to upgrade their service to 300mb which is typical service for a business. Chief Ostreng stated the internet bill would increase from about \$60 to \$125 per month. Herlitzke stated it was a large increase in price for only 10mb upload. Chief Ostreng stated that since he was hired, he's had issues with virtual meetings at the station. Herlitzke questioned if he was using the WiFi or not. Chief Ostreng stated he is hard wired at the station. Chief Ostreng stated that he would travel home to use his personal internet to attend virtual meetings instead of the departments. Chief Ostreng stated that MCS Networks told him there were no issues with the network infrastructure at the department.

Chief ostreng stated that crews are into the second half of the fire inspection season. Chief Ostreng stated that the department inspects roughly 400 occupancies in the district. Chief Ostreng also stated that Village of Holmen has 3 schools that are in the middle of remodeling. Chief Ostreng stated that Viking Elementary has had a few problems with their sprinkler system after half the building was remodeled but that should now be fixed. Chief Ostreng stated that Holmen Middle School also had some issues. Chief Ostreng stated that the Middle School was using Gym B for storage as well as classes. Chief Ostreng stated Gym B didn't have sprinklers and that this was a violation. Chief Ostreng stated he was taking his time with the code and that he would be inspecting the Middle School again next week, but the Middle School needs to find a different solution.

Chief Ostreng stated for the month of October the department would be purchasing special t-shirts to support breast cancer awareness month. Chief Ostreng stated he gave everyone the opportunity to purchase a shirt to wear for the month while on duty and 10 staff participated. Chief Ostreng stated in addition to the shirt he collected additional funding which would total \$110 that the department would be donating to the Gunderson Medical Foundation for breast cancer.

Chief Ostreng stated that public education group would be meeting Thursday, and that the department would be having a fire station open house for fire prevention month on October 26th from 9 am to noon. Chief Ostreng stated the department would be visiting schools from the 6th – 11th for fire prevention education. Chief Ostreng estimated it would total roughly 35 hours in overtime. Chief Ostreng stated that currently there is nothing scheduled for the daycares in the area but he estimates roughly 10 hours in overtime spent there. Chief Ostreng also stated he gave a fire presentation this month that was geared towards fire prevention for the elderly.

Chief Ostreng stated the second meeting for the collaborative fire investigation group would be held October 3rd with Onalaska Fire. Chief Ostreng stated the group is working together to come up with a vision for the group, a shared toolbox, shared equipment, how to dispatch the group with the two different fire departments, and how to work with law enforcement.

Fire Commission Report:

No report this month.

Future Fire Station Study:

Chief Ostreng gave a brief summary of the evaluation process for the companies that applied to the RFP. Chief Ostreng stated that the process included Village President Patrick Barlow, Town Chair Bob Stupi, and himself. Chief Ostreng stated that 5 companies applied and 2 of them, Advanced Selections LLC and McMahon Associates Inc, were removed in the first evaluation round. Chief Ostreng stated that the 3 remaining companies, BKV Group, SEH, Wendel / Five Bugles Design, moved onto round 2 which included an interview process with the company. Chief Ostreng stated that at the end of round 2, Bob Stupi, Patrick Barlow, and he were favoring Wendel / Five Bugles Design. Herlitzke questioned if they built any stations in La Crosse. Chief Ostreng stated they built 2 fire stations in La Crosse and that the company was familiar with the area. Hauser asked if any of the firms reviewed were working with Onalaska. Chief Ostreng stated that Onalaska awarded their contract to SEH. Hauser asked if the Chief asked the two companies if they would be willing to work together since Onalaska and the department were doing fire studies at the same time. Chief Ostreng stated that neither company would say they wouldn't work with each other and that both companies are aware that the municipalities are doing this at the same time and that the GIS would be used to consider locations and additional requirements. Jorstad motioned to recommend the contract to Wendel / Five Bugles Design for the Future Fire Station Study to the Village of Holmen and Town of Holland boards for approval. Second by Hauser. Motioned carried unanimously.

2025 Budget Draft:

Herlitzke questioned if the budget was the same as the previous meeting. Chief Ostreng stated he hadn't had time to go and modify the budget so it was the same. Herlitzke asked if Holmen had a chance to discuss the budget in detail at their previous board meeting. Elam stated that he brought up the idea of earlier collaboration at the previous board meeting but specific budget numbers were not discussed. Herlitzke stated that Town of Holland was in favor of Draft 2 of the 2025 budget with an emphasis on collaboration. Herlitzke stated that Town of Holland would like to start conversations again about regionalization slowly. Chief Ostreng questioned if the Town of Holland discussed the future, and what 2026 would look like? Chief Ostreng stated that staffing would be stable for the next year but there wasn't any wiggle room in the budget for 2025. Herlitzke stated that Town of Holland was starting their budget process next month and welcomed the Chief to attend their meeting to further voice his requests for funding. Herlitzke stated that the Town of Holland wanted to maintain the department's budget and didn't want to slide backwards. Hauser stated that we need to start thinking about 2026 now because things aren't going to be cheaper a year from now. Chief Ostreng stated there would also be a union contract re-negotiation next year. Jorstad noted there were no changes to the 2025 Draft 2 budget and asked the chief if he anticipated their being anymore. Chief ostreng

stated he wasn't sure about a few grants still but that there wouldn't be any big changes. Jorstad raised concerns about the 9.5% increase in the budget amounting to a total of roughly \$345,000 from the previous year. Jorstad stated that the Village of Holmen would only be receiving \$140,000 in new revenue and that the village could only put \$100,000 towards the fire department in 2025. Jorstad stated, that based on the village's contributions, the budget was about \$16,000 over the absolute max the village could budget for. Herlitzke asked what the village's percentage of the budget was. Jorstad stated it was 66.5% as of August 8th. Hauser questioned if there was any extra money left over in the 2024 budget to cover the \$16,000 difference for 2025. Chief Ostreng stated he didn't anticipate the department to be under budget and that he saved \$60,000 from 2% dues to cover retirement payments at the end of the year if it gets tight. Chief Ostreng stated that money can only be used for particular things and that next year he didn't anticipate having extra. Jorstad inquired about potential grant funding from the AFG grant to cover some expenses. Chief ostreng and department staff gave a general overview of the requirements of the grant and its limitations. Elam noted the largest increase in the budget was due to overtime. Elam asked if there were any possibilities for doing additional training while on duty to cut back on the overtime hours. Chief Ostreng stated that some of the mandatory training couldn't be done in house and required travel to La Crosse or other municipalities to do the training. Department staff commented that certain training involves the trucks and other equipment that couldn't be taken out of service during normal hours of operation without inhibiting response time. Department staff also highlighted that overtime occurs every time a member takes a sick day or vacation because the department is fully staffed and requires 4 staff on every shift.

Chief Ostreng presented a general overview of the EMS Patient Refusal of Evaluation, Treatment, and/or Transport form. Chief Ostreng stated that currently the department doesn't do refusals, but the department was now properly trained and wanted to start allowing them. Chief Ostreng stated that he reached out to the departments insurance for advice and they found no issue with it. Chief Ostreng stated he hadn't yet requested legal review for the form but the form was being promoted by the department's Medical Director. Chief Ostreng stated that agencies within the system already use the form but wanted to get direction from the board on how to move forward. Chief Ostreng stated that because the department lacks the form, department staff have to sit and wait on scene with the patient until Tri-State arrives only to refuse medical transport from them before they can leave. Jorstad asked if the form was verbal or written. Chief Ostreng stated the goal is to have written signatures of refusal, but noted that even then some individuals will still refuse to sign it. Department staff noted there have been circumstance where individuals refuse transport and get in their own cars and leave. Department staff stated they document these events accordingly. Hauser asked if this was the same form used by La Crosse and Onalaska. Department staff stated that Dr. Eberline was the departments medical director and explained that every EMS agency has to have a doctor that oversees their licensing. Department staff stated that all staff are technically operating by proxy under Dr. Eberline's medical license. Hauser asked if Dr. Eberline only covered the Holmen Fire Department. Department staff stated Dr. Eberline covers roughly 40 agencies.

Department staff most agencies use the same form and it's provided directly by Gundersen. Department staff stated that when they did the training a few weeks ago they were told Gundersen's legal team reviewed the form and didn't see any issues with it. Elam stated his approval for the form. Elam stated that ambulance rides weren't going to get any cheaper and that money is tight everywhere for most people. Jorstad motioned for the forms approval, seconded by Elam. Motion carried unanimously.

Department staff presented a general overview of cardiac monitor equipment the department was requesting permission to write a grant application for. Staff explained the monitor was expensive even with the bells and whistles removed but stated that it did a lot of things staff have to do manually during a call. Staff stated that a new cardiac monitor would save them a lot of time on calls and it would make transferring a patient to Tri-State more seamless because they use them. Staff stated that the total amount for one cardiac monitor would be roughly \$39,000. Department staff requested permission to apply to the La Crosse Area Foundation Grant. Department staff also noted that Ashley Furniture, Dave Skogen, Holmen Area Business Foundation, and other seemed interested in donating money for the device. Chief Ostreng noted that he was at a meeting recently with the Wisconsin DHS that covered FAP (Funding Assistance Program) and that could be another fund stream to purchase the device. Herlitzke stated that the La Cross Area Community Foundation Grant Application ended October 18th, and that the total fund available were \$15,000. Herlitzke motioned to approved grant applications for the total cost of \$39,000 to purchase the cardiac monitor. Seconded by Elam. Hauser asked if any additional training would be required. Staff stated that additional vendor training would be provided and that with the addition of the device the department would be able to fully provide all of the services it's licensed to provide under Dr. Eberline. Elam asked if the unit was upgradeable in the future if staff decided they wanted some of the extra bells and whistles. Staff stated that was unlikely and that most of the features cut from the device were outside of their scope of practice. Department staff noted that a lot of grants have a short application window and asked if the motion on the floor would prevent grants from being award due to the lengthy approval process through the board. No vote occurred and motion was revoked. Herlitzke motioned to allow the chief to approve grant application requests. Elam seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Chief Ostreng stated that some of the department staff wanted to plant two gardens on the property. Chief Ostreng stated he already gave staff approval. Jorstad asked if the gardens would be flowers or vegetables. Staff stated it would be a combination and that they intended to eat some of the vegetables and give away any extra the gardens produced. The board gave their approval for the space. No motion occurred.

Announcements and Future Agenda Items:

No future agenda items were presented.

Next Regular Meeting Date:

Next regular meeting October 15th, 2024 at 6:30pm at Town of Holland Town Hall.

Adjourn:

Motion to adjourn Hauser/Jorstad. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes by Travis E. Elam, Secretary