

Holmen Area Fire Department Board

Meeting Minutes – June 17th, 2025

President Barlow called the Holmen Area Fire District meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. on June 17th, 2025, at the Town of Holland Town Hall.

Members Present: Patrick Barlow (Holmen), Travis Elam (Holmen), Jeff Herlitzke (Holland), Rick Hauser (Holland)

Alternates Present: Doug Jorstad (Holmen), Dave Weber (Holland)

Members Excused:

Also Present: Ryan Ostreng (Fire Chief)

Guests: Fire Department Staff

Pledge of Allegiance Recited

Approval of Agenda:

Motion to approve the agenda by Herlitzke. Second by Hauser. Chief Ostreng requested agenda item number 10, “Review current apparatus and draft replacement plan”, be postponed to the next meeting for discussion. Herlitzke moved to amend his motion to approve the agenda except for agenda item number 10. Second by Hauser. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the minutes by Herlitzke. Second by Elam. Herlitzke requested the meeting minutes earlier so they could be available for the Town of Holland’s board meetings. Elam stated he would be timelier. Motion carried unanimously.

Resident or Employee Concerns/Comments:

Doug Jorstad, as a resident, spoke about his disapproval of adding an additional captain to the department. Jorstad stated that 33% of the department operating at the captain status was unacceptable and asked the board to consider this when discussing this agenda item. Jorstad also voiced concerns regarding the budget increase for a new captain position.

Financial Review:

The board reviewed the Balance Sheet (Item 7a) in detail. No questions or concerns were raised regarding the balance sheet. The board reviewed Profit C Loss Budget vs Actual (Item 7b) in detail. Herlitzke stated the total expenses for the year equaled 42.9% of the budget. Herlitzke stated he was happy with the total percent of the budgeted used so far. No question or concerns were raised.

The board reviewed Check Detail. Barlow questioned a check written to Thin Line Outfitters. Chief Ostreng stated that check was for outfitting the command vehicle. Elam questioned a check written to Zoll Medical and asked if the department had purchased one of the new heartrate monitors. Chief Ostreng stated that the check was for a new heartrate monitor.

Chief Ostreng informed the board that the quoted price for the slide out tray for the new command vehicle was higher than originally anticipated. Chief Ostreng requested to exceed the previously approved \$100,000 budget and requested approval for an additional \$8000 for the purchase of the command vehicle's slide out tray and other remaining equipment. The board reviewed Chief Ostreng's New Car 1 Expenditures report in detail. Hauer asked where the bed was manufactured and whether any company locally could produce the same thing cheaper. Herlitzke disagreed and stated he didn't think a shop who wasn't specialized in this item could produce it cheaper. Chief Ostreng stated that he had not investigated any local manufacturers and that he had previous experience with this type of slide out tray at a previous employer. Barlow requested a summary of how the command vehicle would be used and the purpose of the slide out tray. Chief Ostreng

explained his position and informed the board that the vehicles primary use was for command, but it was his intent that the vehicle would be multi-use in the event that he was first on scene. Elam raised a question about the labor cost to install the slide out tray and noted two similar line items. Chief Ostreng stated this wasn't the case and that he was trying to account for any unforeseen costs. Motion to approve an increase of \$8,000 towards the command vehicle using 2% dues by Herlitzke. Second by Elam. Barlow requested that future capital expenditures have all the quotes at the beginning of the purchase process so that large purchases can be more efficient. Barlow requested the vehicle be operational before the end of the year. The motion carried with three ayes (Barlow, Herlitzke, Elam) and one nay (Hauser). Elam asked for an estimate on the install time for the slide out tray and who would be installing it. Chief Ostreng stated the Extendo Bed would be shipped and Thin Line Outfitters would be installing it, and he was unsure of the time frame.

Chief Ostreng requested approval of the I.T. Support Contract from MCS Networks for 2025 for a total amount of \$9,566.10. Chief Ostreng stated the new contract was cheaper than the previous year. Hauser questioned if the board recently approved a different contract with MCS. Chief Ostreng stated that was in fact a different purchase and that it wasn't the yearly I.T contact. Herlitzke questioned how many devices the department had that needed to be supported. Chief Ostreng listed the devices and Herlitzke stated the contract price was fair. Elam questioned if the department could get a better deal by going with a multi-year contract instead. Chief Ostreng stated this wasn't possible. Herlitzke motioned to approve the contract for \$9,566.10. Second by Hauser. Motion carried unanimously.

Chief Ostreng updated the board on recent donations towards a new cardiac monitor. Chief Ostreng stated the department had received a donation of \$502.70 from Christian Farms Nursery through a fire boot drive. Chief Ostreng stated that Emplify Health / Gunderson Community Contribution Program donated \$5000. Staff stated it was their intent to receive enough donations to pay for 2 new cardiac monitors and 2 new Lucas devices.

Fire Administration Report:

The board reviewed the calls for the month in detail. Herlitzke noted the substantial decrease in calls compared to previous years. Chief Ostreng stated that the reason for this was the automatic fire response.

Chief Ostreng raised concerns about the rise in overlapping calls and stated that it was his intent to keep a closer eye on this issue. Chief Ostreng explained that overlapping calls were calls that were dispatched to crews while they were already on scene. Chief Ostreng stated that the department had 43 overlapping calls this year, roughly 60 in 2024, and roughly 80 overlapping calls in 2023. Chief Ostreng explained the overlapping calls where the reason 4-person crews were being split up onto 2 trucks. Chief Ostreng explained there were even incidents of a third call coming in. Herlitzke asked how many overlapping calls the department was not able to cover. Chief Ostreng explained there were a few incidents where Onalaska or Brice Prairie was requested to take over a call. Chief Ostreng stated that the department was working with their medical director to determine protocol for calls that don't require their expertise and give them permission to leave to respond to other calls when necessary. Elam requested the overlapping calls be included in the monthly meeting report. Elam stressed that the crew on call couldn't be in two places at once and that this issue should be closely monitored. Barlow questioned how the response time was from Tri-State and how they factored into calls. Department staffed commented on the response time from Tri-State.

Chief Ostreng updated the board on staff and noted that a new firefighter, Emmaline Zabel, would be sworn in Monday June 30th at the next fire commission meeting.

Chief Ostreng informed the board the command vehicle would have new lighting, console, sirens, and radios installed June 14th.

Chief Ostreng stated that he was reaching out to multiple local roofing companies for options regarding the leaky roof.

Fire Station Study:

Chief Ostreng stated the station tours were very productive and that he, department staff, and Barlow got to see two stations that were comparable to what the department would be looking for in a new station based on community and staff needs. Barlow stated he was grateful he got to see the next evolution of modern fire stations and that it was his intent to coordinate a meeting between both municipalities and Wendel Five Bugels so that the

maximum amount of board members from both communities could be present and ask questions regarding the final draft. Barlow also stated it was his intent to have the meeting on a night separate from the fire board meeting to reduce the length of the meeting. Hauser requested to have the meeting materials prior to the meeting so that the board members could formulate questions ahead of time. Chief Ostreng stated that he had requested that and that it shouldn't be a problem.

Review current apparatus and draft replacement plan:

This agenda item was postponed for discussion until next month's meeting.

Review of Fire Chief Annual Evaluation Options:

The board reviewed the evaluation samples in detail along with the Fire Chief job description provided by Chief Ostreng. Herlitzke voiced approval for Example #1. Elam stated that Example #2 would not be useful without feedback from fire department staff. Barlow voiced approval for Example #2 and stated he was familiar with evaluations like that example. Herlitzke stated he also like #2. Chief Ostreng stated he had no issue with any of the evaluations examples previously provided by Herlitzke. Hauser stated Example #2 was similar to evaluations he had in the military and noted that those type of evaluations were typically done by officials who were part of the day-to-day operations and not necessarily outsiders. Hauser voiced concerns about Example #2's effectiveness and reliability. Barlow proposed nominating somebody on the board to draft an evaluation based on the Chief's job descriptions and pieces from the examples that the board liked. Elam suggested the board, the Chief, and fire department staff all write down their priorities for the Fire Chief position and bring them back for discussion at the next meeting to make sure the evaluation of the Fire Chief position considered all the chief's responsibilities while addressing the needs of all parties. The board and fire department staff supported the idea. Elam reiterated the importance of keeping the first evaluation as simple as possible and suggested doing it quarterly to work out any issues. Hauser voiced support for quarterly evaluations.

Discussion of potential Captain positions:

The board reviewed the current fire captain job description as well as Flex Captain job description from the City of La Crosse Fire Department. Chief Ostreng stated that the department has a firefighter who is doing all their required work in addition to taking over the department's training program and it was his intent to promote the individual to a Captain position overseeing training. This promotion would initially happen within a current four-person shift with the captain position remaining attached to that shift. Chief Ostreng stated that he anticipated a \$15,000 - \$18,000 cost increase to the wages category within the budget for this position. Chief Ostreng stated the new position would be taking over an administrative task he currently handles and doesn't have enough time to devote to and would be looking to implement the new position as soon as next year. The future plan would be to move this position from an assigned shift into a flexible schedule position (flex captain) similar to what the City of La Crosse Fire Department has done. This would not happen until the fire department is authorized to add an additional FTE in order to hire an additional firefighter to fill the shift vacancy created by the move of the training captain off the shift. Hauser questioned if the task could be given to a Lieutenant position instead and asked for clarity on the fire department structure. Hauser asked if there would be two captains on one shift. The board voiced concerns with two captains being on one shift, power dynamics, and different responsibilities with the same pay. Hauser questioned who would be the one in charge on the scene of a call. Chief Ostreng stated that whichever captain arrived at the scene first would be the captain in charge. Chief Ostreng stated the two captains on shift would be equals and one would be on rescue and the other would be on the engine. Chief Ostreng stated he still needed to speak to the department staff about it as well as the commission and the union but wanted to bring it to the board for discussion first. Herlitzke requested all three current captains come to the next meeting so the board could get their feedback. Hauser reiterated his support for additional training in the department and stated his only issue was with an additional captain position as the training officer. Elam agreed with Hauser and explained that anything that could be done to avoid potential conflicts of authority on scene should be done. Chief Ostreng explained to the board that multiple lieutenants and captains arrive on scene all the time and gave examples of how the City of La Crosse and the City of Rochester Fire Department handle this. Chief Ostreng also stated that as the department grew it is something that would eventually need to be addressed. The board voiced support to continue looking into a position to fulfill the training needs of the department.

Announcement and future agenda items:

Hauser requested the adjustment of the Wendel Five Bugels meeting to the week of July 28th. Herlitzke stated he wouldn't be able to attend the July 15th meeting and that Bob Stupi would possibly be filling in for him.

Next Regular Meeting: July 15th, 2025

Adjourn:

Motion to adjourn at 8:41 p.m. by Herlitzke. Second by Elam. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes by Travis E. Elam, Secretary