

CENTRAL OREGON COAST FIRE AND RESCUE DISTRICT
MAY 10, 2016
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Chair Woodruff called the special meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Chair Woodruff and Board Members Grady, Quayle and Brooks answered the roll. Mr. Phillips was absent, a quorum was present. The meeting was held at the City Council Chambers in Waldport City Hall, 125 Alsea Highway.

Interim Fire Chief Marcus Reed addressed the audience, noting that the main objective was to provide information. He then deferred to Mr. Grady to provide a history of the formation of the District.

Mr. Grady began by stating that the District was formed in 1998 in response to a desire of the volunteers to form their own district, rather than being a City department. The original tax base was \$1.31 per thousand. In a subsequent merger with the Tidewater Rural Fire Protection District, the tax rate was recalculated, and dropped to \$.82/\$1000, which is where it has remained, along with a \$.25/\$1000 equipment levy. The ambulance service was also brought into the District during that time, though the funding of the ambulance district was not based on property taxes, but on run fees. The ambulance service had one paid part-time paramedic, with the remainder of the force being volunteers. Over time, with the increased amount of required training and a general attrition in the number of volunteers, more paid staff needed to be hired, especially to cover the daytime hours when most volunteers were working their regular jobs. One part-time staff person was a shared position with Yachats RFPD, but in 2012 Yachats had to hire additional personnel and it no longer made sense to share a part-time person. The loss of the Forest Service personnel also had an impact, as many of the trained volunteers were Forest Service staff members that were actually working in the area. Coupled with the need for additional paid staff, there was also a reduction in payments from Medicare and Medicaid or Oregon Health Plan, which pay a flat rate which is about a third of the actual amount of a run fee. Well over half the dispatched calls for service fall into this category, and because the District is a public agency, it is not allowed to attempt to recoup the remainder of the fees from the patient.

The Board had been very concerned about the fact that the Fire District's tax base was, in essence, helping to subsidize the Ambulance Service Area (ASA). The District's boundaries encompass a little over 30 square miles, in a strip from Waldport to Five Rivers, while the ASA covers over 300 square miles, from just below South Beach to the County line both east and south. The County Commissioners, who are in charge of awarding the Ambulance Service Areas, require that a successful bid for the ASA includes guaranteed staffing and equipment. It was determined that, in order to fully fund the ambulance services to guarantee the coverage, over \$2/\$1000 would be required, and this could still only be assessed in the Fire District area, not the total area encompassed by the ASA. Given the existing taxes already being assessed by the School District, the City of Waldport, the Port of Alsea, and other entities, an assessment of this magnitude would exceed the \$10/\$1000 compression limit for taxes, which would mean that taxing entities

could more than likely be adversely impacted. At present, there is only about \$1.80/\$1000 available before that compression limit would be reached, and this would also exclude any other taxing entity, such as the Port of Alsea, from asking for additional revenues. The Board therefore decided to return to the original mandate upon which the District was formed, to be a Fire District with first responders available for medical calls. The ability to bid for the ASA was simply not financially feasible, given the restrictions placed on revenues by Medicare/Medicaid/OHP, the necessity for paid personnel to provide guaranteed coverage, and the size of the taxing district versus the total benefitted area. PacWest has temporarily been assigned to the ASA, with a final decision to be made in August, once Yachats has made a decision whether to submit a bid as well.

It was explained that the requested levy amount of \$1.27/\$1000 would allow the District to have the equivalent of one paid person on staff at all times. The Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating, which is used by some insurance companies to help determine rates for coverage, is scheduled for reevaluation sometime in the near future. Levels of staffing, as well as other requirements such as training level of paid staff and volunteers, the amount of water and the water pressure available, the number and location of hydrants, etc., have a direct impact on the final assigned rating. The staff person on duty would be a qualified first responder and they, along with the volunteer personnel, would be responsible for stabilizing and preparing the patient for transport, and could also transport if no other ambulance is readily available. Though the District did sell its existing ambulances and equipment to PacWest, there is an ambulance coming that was obtained by a grant and that would also be capable of responding in areas previously not accessible by the old equipment. It was noted that any billing for services would be handled by PacWest.

Questions were raised about the timing of the dissolution of the ambulance service and the required layoffs. The Board explained that the District had been engaged in union negotiations at the time and had been advised that they could not speak publicly about their financial straits until they actually ran out of money, as such talk could be viewed as a threat to those negotiations. This also had an impact on the amount of time ahead of the election that information could be provided.

It was suggested that the City should, in some way, financially assist the District. However, the boundaries of the City actually include areas within all three South County fire districts. Additionally, the District boundaries extend far beyond the City limits. The topic will be discussed further at the City Council meeting on May 12 at 2:00 p.m.

Another suggestion was to form a South County fire district, but the observation was made that a merger of the districts might result in a reduction in their respective tax bases and an overall loss of revenue. Formation of a new district and establishment of a tax base could be more appropriate, but in order to do this, there would have to be a simultaneous vote to dissolve the existing districts and form a new one. This would need to be carefully explained and extensively promoted in order to gain the necessary support to make it successful. The idea of forming a single district has been discussed for several years, and will probably be brought to the voters at some point, but not in the near future.

The terms of the Fire Board were also discussed, and it was pointed out that there had only been one contested position since the formation of the District. The Board members were unanimous in their positive response to whether they would like to see other members of the public running for office.

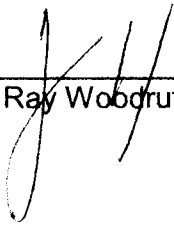
Following further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Reda Q Eckerman, Recording Secretary

Approved:



Ray Woodruff, Board Chair