



Wellington Fire Protection District SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES

The **Special Board Meeting** of the Wellington Fire Protection District was called to order at approximately 7:00 PM. The meeting was held at **Station 16** located at 8130 3rd St, Wellington, CO 80549 on **September 2, 2021**.

Pledge of Allegiance **Roll Call**

DIRECTORS PRESENT: DIRECTORS SARNO, STORY, REED, PIERSON

M/S SARNO/PIERSON to unexcuse DIRECTOR PETTIT's absence. Voice votes unanimous; motion is APPROVED.

Additions/Deletions to the Agenda - none
Conflicts of Interest - None
Correspondence - none
Open for Public Comment - none

DIRECTOR SARNO addressed the staff and public regarding the challenges surrounding the change in leadership. The Directors are working to ensure there is no concern to the staff or community. The Board will be seeking input from the Staff for the hiring process for the next permanent Fire Chief hiring process. This is an extremely important decision, and the Board will be taking their time to select a search firm for the permanent hiring process.

DIRECTOR PIERSON added he is concerned regarding the stress level of staff and taking extra precaution to ensure that everyone is using the tools they need so nobody gets hurt. DIRECTOR PIERSON is optimistic the next steps will be good and provide an outside perspective for new ideas.

DIRECTOR STORY ensured staff this is a roadblock the board can handle, and they are committed to doing what they need to do. DIRECTOR STORY expressed her appreciation and value of the staff.

DIRECTOR REED explains the boards job is to oversee the high-level budget decisions and not day-to-day decision and she thanked the staff for hanging in there.

R. GONZALES, PIO, wanted to address and thank the Board for acknowledging staff and expressed that we start healing and move forward as a family. Ms. Gonzales encouraged everyone to find courage to have a voice to encourage the family environment once more. DIRECTOR SARNO explained this is the first time the Board was allowed to address the staff



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openly and to reiterate the purpose of addressing staff was to provide a status update to staff and encourage everyone to start moving forward. DIRECTOR SARNO provided a brief explanation of what the future Fire Chief hiring process could look like.

CHIEF HOBBS asked if the Board been researching leads for interim positions. DIRECTOR SARNO shared the Board is actively recruiting for an Interim Fire Chief.

LT. SCHNEEBERGER asked for clarification on foresight for changes to potential operations staff changes. DIRECTOR SARNO clarified the directive is for operations to operate as efficiently and as safely as possible. There have been no further discussions amongst the Board regarding any changes to Operations staff. DIRECTOR REED clarified that inevitably there will be changes that come with a new Chief but there have been no specific discussions at this time. CHIEF HOBBS clarified that the three Battalion Chiefs are working diligently on Operations plans to have a strong unified voice for the new leadership. Chief Hobbs asked that everyone be thoughtful and purposeful about their communication and to use the chain of command. A. Macdonald provided clarification on the Employee Manual regarding chain of command and addressing the Board.

DIRECTOR PIERSON added that he would like to be included on shift change days for a period of time. CHIEF HOBBS expressed that would be welcomed, he would get DIRECTOR PIERSON the information and it usually starts at 0700 hours.

FF. DEWITT asked what tools are being provided to lower the levels of stress for Staff. DIRECTOR SARNO clarified the Board is limited on day-to-day basis and encouraged Staff to reach out to Peer Support or other District resources for managing the stress.

LT. EVANS shared a brief overview for how to engage in the Peer Support Program and the purpose of the program. DIRECTOR SARNO requested that information be redistributed to staff. CHIEF HOBBS shared that information would be helpful for the Reserves and explained the benefits of the program.

DIRECTOR PIERSON asked about assistance from R. Gonzales to handle the messaging from a Public Information standpoint.

District Business

1. Hiring Interim Fire Chief



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DIRECTOR REED encourages staff to reach out to the Board via email with any suggestions for Interim or permanent Fire Chief candidates. DIRECTOR REED shared one candidate that expressed interest is no longer available and prior PFA Chief Tom DeMint is the other candidate the Board currently has for consideration.

R. Gonzales shared with the Board concern regarding the current candidate pool.

DIRECTOR REED would like to close the process September 8th.

DIRECTOR SARNO has attempted to contact the State Fire Chiefs Association and they were better suited to handle the permanent Fire Chief process. DIRECTOR SARNO asked A.Macdonald if she knew of any additional outlets for appealing to Interim candidates. A.Macdonald advised she had not but to be sure and send over the information regarding the consultant firms to ensure we are following the proper procurement process in case the assessment/consultant services need to go out to RFP.

DIRECTOR SARNO requested R. Gonzales put together the template for the Interim Fire Chief and to post to SDA and Colorado State Fire Chiefs website. The email contact for the posting should be the Board of Director distribution list.

M/S REED/PIERSON to create a temporary position for an Interim Fire Chief, for R. Gonzales to coordinate and facilitate the posting to find candidates. Voice vote unanimous; motion APPROVED.

2. Employee Handbook Changes

DIRECTOR REED stated that it came to the Board's attention that changes were made to the Employee Handbook without Board approval. The Board wanted to clarify that review of any changes or updates to the Board is required before any change is made to the Employee Handbook. DIRECTOR REED would like to address the PTO policy changes.

DIRECTOR STORY asked since the presented Employee Handbook was not approved, does the Board refer to the prior approved Employee Handbook?

DIRECTOR REED stated the prior approved handbook did not have PTO limitations and has concerns regarding the proposed version. The board needs to review and approve the proposed and changes to the PTO policy. K. Townsend provided the prior version did not have a carryover limit, and the state requirement for carryover is a minimum of 48 hours of PTO carry over per year. Employers Council provided a free review with the suggested changes presented to the Board in the revised handbook.



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CHIEF DORITY shared thoughts regarding the employee handbook on behalf of the Battalion Chiefs. Try to find the most recent copy the Board approved, and then incorporate or highlight the sections that have been changed over time. The BCs are willing to take on a review of the side-by-side comparison changes. CHIEF HOBBS supported CHIEF DORITY's suggestion for review. DIRECTOR SARNO clarified the version that was approved in 2018, and the 2018 version is the current Employee Handbook. DIRECTOR REED would like clarification on how PTO accrues in conjunction to the years of service in the 2018 Employee Handbook version.

CHIEF HOBBS asked which handbook is the handbook that should be enforced at this time. DIRECTOR REED said we should operate under the August 5, 2021, handbook. A.Macdonald provided that there was not a 2018 or 2021 Employee Handbook provided with the packet so it is unclear which draft version is specifically being referenced for enforcement. The recommendation is present the version for approval at the next meeting for transparency and clearly defines which should be enforced. DIRECTOR REED agreed this would be the best course of action.

DIRECTOR STORY stated the 2018 version is what was last approved by the Board. The August version is only a month old, and staff should have been operating under the old version. K. Townsend stated Chief Green authorized K. Townsend to start enforcing the 2021 version in the Spring.

DIRECTOR REED will check with legal council to definitively decide which handbook the District should be operating under.

3. Capital Impact Fee Account Policy and Fund Management

DIRECTOR REED and DIRECTOR SARNO that the District was using the Impact Fee Fund to borrow money and paying it back out of the General Fund, is not illegal but it is also but not best practices. The Board would like Staff to stop using the fund in this manner, use the funds only for capital improvements

M/S SARNO/REED would like the impact fee funds moved from PointsWest Bank to a separate institution (First National Bank) and to be totally separate from the general operating account held at Poinstwest Bank, and at least two Board Member signatures are required to withdrawal funds from any account. Voice vote unanimous; motion APPROVED.

4. COVID19 Vaccination Policy Discussion

DIRECTOR PETTIT requested a future discussion item regarding the COVID19 vaccination mandates. With recent changes to legislation, Staff is looking to the Board to take a position on mandating vaccines. Staff is not recommending a policy be implemented at this time but



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wanted to be sure we are proactive to developing a policy that aligns with the values of the organization if the State does begin mandating vaccines for first responders.

DIRECTOR REED is in favor of vaccines but is not in favor of mandating the vaccination at this time.

CAPT. CONVEY shared that hopefully this is just a discussion to have a discussion. At this time mandating the vaccine is the last thing we need is to have a charged passionate discussion about this. The State is going to have a hard time regulating what we do as a fire Department and until we get a formal notice from the State, I am comfortable waiting and responding then. As a department we will do whatever we have to do at that time. Information from both sides of the argument will be important for formulating a mandate policy in the future, and there are questions how the mandate would apply to variants and boosters. There is a lot of science out there, and we should try to put it in a package we can all understand before we dig into the issue prematurely. We will walk into it and are actively checking with other department and monitoring how its being handled across the front range.

DIRECTOR REED thanked staff for doing what needed to be done to stay safe. She referenced the additional precautions and cleaning procedures implemented by Cap Convey. Capt. Convey reinforced these practices are the Department's best defense and prefers for this to be where his lane is.

DIRECTOR STORY is going on record to say she is unequivocally opposed to vaccine mandates. I believe it is a personal choice. I do not think it should be mandated for anybody. Personal choice.

DIRECTOR SARNO stated he agrees 110% and am opposed to any mandate. There are lots of medical conditions that we do not require vaccinations as a term of employment.

A.Macdonald provided that closing that at this time the District is not interested in taking a position to mandate vaccinations for District employees.

Other

Station 16
8130 3rd Street
Wellington, CO 80549



Station 17
108 E County Road 66
Fort Collins, CO 80524

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DIRECTOR SARNO will be absent at the next meeting.

DIRECTOR PIERSON asked for Bunker Gear discussion on the next agenda.

M/S SARNO/ PIERSON for Adjournment @ 8:29 PM.