NORTH SAN JUAN FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, April 22, 2025
Final

PRESENT: Vice-Chair Samantha Hinrichs, Directors Pam Morey and Tim Tschantz.

Staff Present: Chief Tom Browning, Finance and Facilities Manager Lynn McGarva.
Absent: Chair Bruce Boyd and Treasurer Rhea Williamson.

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Vice-Chair Hinrichs called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM. Roll was taken, and a quorum was established. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. **APPROVAL OF April 22, 2025, REGULAR BOARD MEETING AGENDA**
   The board approved the agenda for the April 22, 2025, meeting with two changes:

   - Item 6F was removed.
   - The word "Action" was taken off Item 8B and added to Item 9F to better reflect the board's intent.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

No public comment.

4. **MINUTES:**
   Draft Minutes of March 25, 2025, Regular Board Meeting
   Director Pam Morey made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded by Director Tim Tschantz.
   The motion passed unanimously with a vote of 3-0-0-2.

   Rhea Williamson: Absent
   Pamela Morey: Aye
   Tim Tschantz: Aye
   Samantha Hinrichs: Aye
   Bruce Boyd: Absent

   Aye: 3 Noes: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 2

5. **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Director Tschantz reported that he had recently visited the Memorial Garden. He stated his intention to bring a proposal to the board in the near future for its cleanup and maintenance.

6. REPORTS

A. Board Chair Report – Bruce Boyd

No report was given.

i. Correspondence

No correspondence was presented or discussed.

B. Chief's Report –Tom Browning

i. **January 2025 Statistics :**

Chief Tom Browning provided a summary of the January 2024, Statistics

ii. **Current Department Activity:**

Chief Browning reported with enthusiasm that several new employees had joined the department, allowing for full coverage of all daytime shifts.

He acknowledged delays in preparing some departmental reports, citing overlapping personal and staff health issues, including his own surgery and family medical matters.

Department statistics were reviewed, and Browning highlighted that staff had completed a wide range of professional training, including vehicle operation certification.

He mentioned writing a recent article for Ridge Connection to share updates with the community.

The department received new sets of turnout gear and pagers. Vice-Chair Hinrichs relayed feedback from a firefighter who expressed satisfaction with the new gear, specifically noting improved comfort.

The Water Tender is still undergoing repairs from an earlier incident; the department will be responsible for a $5,000 deductible.

Chief Browning also reminded everyone that burn permits are not currently required and are available online through Cal Fire.

C. Treasurer's Report – Presented by Lynn McGarva

i. Financials- January 2025: Funds Summary, Disbursement Detail, Deposit Detail, Cal Card

Lynn McGarva reviewed the department's financials for March 2025.

A. Financial Overview (March 2025):

- General Fund:
  - Deposits: $290,052.03
  - Expenses: $205,664.25
  - Ending balance: $2,053,006.70
- Measure Q Fund received a deposit of $1,968.37, bringing the balance to $236,957.82.
- Mitigation Fund received $584.74 in combined deposits and interest, resulting in a balance of $24,835.90.

Warrant and Expenditures:

- Most of the expenditure was payroll-related.
- Revenue included Strike Team reimbursements and some tax distributions.
- Cal Card charges included items like new floor mats for the office, meals and lodging for Strike Team deployments, and monthly Microsoft license fees.
- Chief Browning confirmed that the Strike Team-related expenses (lodging and meals) are eligible for reimbursement.

Board Questions and Clarifications:

- Director Tschantz asked about the engine payment for Unit 6168. McGarva explained it is approximately $57,600, with two more payments pending.
- Director Hinrichs inquired about the Water Tender towing charge. Chief Browning clarified that it was tied to a January accident.
- Hinrichs also asked about the payment schedule for air station and radio expenses. McGarva said those payments are made quarterly.
- Tschantz asked why no funds were allocated for landscaping. Chief Browning explained that volunteers are currently maintaining the property.
- Hinrichs and Tschantz discussed whether volunteers can be paid for special projects. Browning noted the department has done this before, when a volunteer repaired a damaged door for a fraction of the estimated cost.
- When asked about a charge for “non-firefighting equipment,” McGarva confirmed it included the purchase of a washer, a dryer, and swift water rescue gear.
- Membership dues were clarified to include Nevada County Chiefs Association, the JPA, and LAFCO. Office 365 licenses are now categorized under subscriptions.
- Hinrichs thanked staff for the detailed financial reports, emphasizing how helpful they are for board oversight.

Approval of Financials:

- Motion made by Director Morey, seconded by Director Tschantz.
- Motion passed: 3-0-0-2.

Chief Browning explained that the department is 75% through the fiscal year, and he uses that benchmark to evaluate whether spending and revenues are on track.

Strike Team revenue and expenses have increased, with additional incidents still awaiting payment.

Hinrichs noted the clerical staff budget was under 75%, and Browning attributed this to a change in staffing structure.

Hinrichs inquired about US Bank refunds; Finance and Facilities Manager Lynn McGarva explained they are contractual, not based on a rewards system.

Landscaping was again discussed. Browning emphasized that volunteers are doing the work, reducing costs.

Tschantz asked if volunteers performing such duties could be compensated; Browning shared a prior case where it was cost-effective to pay a volunteer for a repair job.

Questions also arose regarding "non-firefighting equipment," and McGarva identified the items purchased.

Hinrichs asked about a $204,000 interfund transfer. Browning explained that $200,000 was allocated to a reserve for the planned Bay Extension.

ii. Preliminary Budget FY 2025-26 Review
Chief Browning reviewed the preliminary budget, which is due June 30, 2025.

He was pleased to present a balanced draft developed in collaboration with Lynn McGarva and the Finance Committee.

Yellow highlights in the draft indicate budget reductions, while green indicates increases.

Strike Team revenue is projected at $78,000, a cautious increase based on recent activity.

Browning introduced two new volunteers, Rob and Tammy Noxon. Both are experienced and will serve dual roles:

Tammy will manage INFRS reports (10 hours/month).

Rob, with a background in Forest Service fleet management, will take over department fleet duties.

The department will receive a 22% administrative fee for incidents involving their deployment.

Donations were reduced in the new budget, as last year's included a one-time gift from the Auxiliary.

Capital Outlay is focused on engine payments.

The Chief's stipend is now $24,000/year under a new contract that consolidates meeting, training, and call pay into one monthly rate.

Measure Q administrative costs were raised due to the fund's growth.

Hinrichs supported the proposed increase in fuel costs, noting that prices are rising.

McGarva concluded by stating that vehicle and liability insurance costs had increased 15% this year, with more increases likely.

D. Firefighters Association Report – Sambhava Burke

Chief Browning introduced Sambhava Burke to the board, noting that he has been with the department for four years and is a valued member of the team.

Sambhava shared an update on behalf of the Firefighter Association. He announced that the Association has committed to covering gym memberships for all department personnel at the Ananda Village fitness center.

He emphasized that this initiative provides a significant benefit to firefighters, particularly during preposition periods when personnel must remain within the district and cannot travel to town to access a gym.

The board expressed appreciation for the Association's support of firefighter health and readiness.

In addition to the gym membership program, Sambhava reported that the Firefighter Association has adopted a new policy to financially support firefighters in purchasing boots.

Under this policy, firefighters who have been with the department for two years will receive $200, and those who reach four years of service will receive $450.
He explained that the $450 amount is roughly equivalent to the cost of a quality pair of duty boots, helping to offset what is often a significant expense.

Sambhava clarified that while the funds are not exclusively restricted to boot purchases, the intended and encouraged use is to help ensure firefighters have proper, durable footwear for their work.

Shambhava shared that he and Sasha from the Auxiliary are collaborating on a community events calendar.

Shambava extended an invitation to the board for a lunch event on May 4th, organized by the department.

The event will celebrate Firefighters' Day.
It will also honor Rich Mead's retirement, recognizing his 27 years of service to the department.

All board members are invited to attend. The goal is to prevent scheduling conflicts with other community events.

E. Fire Safe Council /FireWise Coalition/Ridge FireWise Communities Report – Sam Hinrichs

Samantha expressed appreciation for the progress on the fuel break project by Cal Fire.

She emphasized that the project will significantly enhance fire safety, especially for students at Grizzly Hill School in the event of an evacuation.

She also noted the increased protection for residents living in the surrounding area during wildfire events.

Director Morey raised a question from a member of her Firewise community regarding water holding tanks on private property:

If a homeowner has a storage tank, are they obligated to allow the fire department to use it during a fire?

Chief Browning responded with the following clarifications:

The answer depends on why the tank exists:

Yes, if the tank was required due to a change in use permit.
No, if the tank was installed voluntarily by the homeowner for personal protection.

He emphasized that, while not always required, allowing use is advisable for those who want fire suppression assistance.
The department can refill the tanks after use, but cannot guarantee the water will be potable, especially if delivered via water tender.

Chief Browning provided technical clarification on firefighter access to private water tanks:

He shared the specific requirements for connecting to such tanks.
Standard household fittings are typically incompatible with fire department equipment due to differences in thread types.

Firefighters use national hose (NH) fittings, not standard iron pipe fittings.
The connection should ideally be at least a 2.5-inch NH fitting.
The pipe coming from the tank should be a minimum of 2.5 inches to accommodate fire equipment.

He addressed potential issues with tank collapse during water extraction:
Irrigation tanks are often not properly vented for rapid water withdrawal, leading to a risk of collapse.

Tanks meant for firefighting must include a large enough vent to allow air in as water is drawn out.
If a tank collapses, the department would assume responsibility for repairs.

- Tom noted that while collapsing a tank is unfortunate, the priority is preventing the house from burning down.

Vice-Chair Samantha Hinrichs announced the upcoming **San Juan Ridge Firewise and Community Fire Preparedness Town Hall**:
  - **Date:** Monday, **May 12th**
  - **Time:** 5:30–7:30 p.m.
  - **Location:** North Columbia Schoolhouse
  - Purpose: An **educational event** for Firewise Communities.
- The event will feature **three presenters**:
  1. **Joanne Price-Coffin** – Nevada County Coalition of Firewise Communities
  2. **Sean Ryan** – CAL FIRE Battalion Chief
  3. **Alex Keeble-Toll** – Nevada County Office of Emergency Services
- **Topics to be covered** include:
  - Home hardening
  - Defensible space requirements and inspections
  - Insurance discounts
  - Prescribed fire and burn permits
  - Fuel breaks
  - Fire season outlook
  - CAL FIRE operational update
  - Green waste programs
  - Evacuation routes

F. NCFA Report – Tim Tschantz

No Report

G. Auxiliary Report – Sasha St. John

No Report

7. OLD BUSINESS

A. Hydrant Committee Update – Chief Browning:
Discussion ongoing. No formal updates at this time.

B. Capital Improvement – Tim Tschantz
Chair Bruce Boyd, Chief Browning, and Director Tschantz met to discuss future capital improvement needs.

Tim Tschantz reported on the meeting and shared the following updates:

Topics discussed included the condition of current buildings and firefighting equipment (e.g., trucks).

The largest anticipated project is a future remodel of Station One, though planning has not yet begun.

The more immediate priority is the expansion of the current bay to accommodate two fire engines instead of just Engine 68, as the facility is being outgrown.

A budget estimate is needed to move forward.

An initial estimate exists, but a more refined figure is required.

The project is complex due to regulatory requirements, including:

Essential Services Act compliance

Enhanced earthquake protection and other engineering considerations

John Baker from Nevada City Engineering has been contacted and is willing to review Bruce's drawings to provide a preliminary cost estimate.

Further discussion on capital improvements and equipment needs:

The group reviewed both the current state of department vehicles and the future replacement schedule.

The goal is to develop a realistic and meaningful replacement plan, regardless of financial limitations.

Replacement timing should consider mileage and maintenance, not just age-based standards like those from NFPA.
For example, Engine 86 has only responded to one fire in 10 years, suggesting continued usability despite its age.

Immediate vehicle needs were identified:

- A utility vehicle is needed and will be discussed further under New Business.
- The current rescue rig handles most calls but lacks water storage, leaving crews with only extinguishers in emergencies.
- Proposal to acquire a Type 6 rescue vehicle:
- Would include 100 gallons of water and a small pump.
- Stored equipment would be internal, not in the open bed.

Plan to repurpose the existing rescue vehicle:

- Install a slide-in pump.
- Use as a patrol vehicle—potentially one that a driver can take home for rapid response.

A need was also noted for:

- A smaller water tender with dual axles, making it more accessible for more drivers.
- An additional Type 3 engine, which has been very effective and financially beneficial for the department.

- A more versatile engine, like the current Type 3, is better suited for wildland and rural responses

8. NEW BUSINESS

Fire Chief Job Description Review

- **Committee Review**:
  - Vice-Chair Hinrichs, Chief Browning, and Treasurer Williamson reviewed and revised the **existing Fire Chief job description** line by line.
  - Significant **reorganization and clarification** of responsibilities were made to reflect current expectations.
- **Key Updates to the Job Description**:
  - Emphasis that the Fire Chief holds **oversight** of tasks but **delegates much of the operations** to battalion chiefs.
  - **Clarified expectations** regarding participation in **strike teams and mutual aid** deployments:
    - The chief **must notify the board** if personnel or resources leave the district for more than **24 hours**.
    - **Board approval is required** for sending district resources outside the district, except in emergencies.
    - Fire Chief must ensure adequate **district coverage** before committing to outside support.
    - **Mutual aid participation is permitted**, but district responsibilities remain the top priority.
  - Updated to **remove residency requirement** — Fire Chief **does not need to reside in the district**.
  - Reaffirmed that **ultimate responsibility remains with the Chief**, even if operational duties are delegated.
- **Fire Plan Requirement**:
  - Fire Chief must **develop an annual fire plan** before each fire season.
  - Plan must address **availability of both personnel and equipment** and be presented to the board in a timely manner.
- **Operational Clarifications**:
  - Strike team involvement by the Chief must involve **communication with battalion chiefs and the board chair**, especially due to logistical challenges during emergencies.
- **Job Announcement**:
  - A draft **job announcement** was prepared and shared with the board.
  - While not requiring a formal vote, board input was invited before posting.
  - The announcement will be posted on:
    - **Department's social media**
    - **Local newspapers**
    - **LinkedIn and other hiring platforms**
- **Hiring Requirements and Notes**:
  - **$2,000/month stipend** for approximately **8 hours/week**, with flexibility based on seasonal workload.

- Candidates **without prior professional fire service** must serve **one year as a North San Juan Captain**.
- Ideal candidate is a **recently retired fire professional** who wants to remain involved.
- No geographic restriction, but candidate must live close enough to remain engaged.

- **Recruitment Update**:
  - Tom has been in contact with a potential candidate who is **still considering the position**.
  - Will follow up once the fire description is finalized and the current fire activity subsides.
- **Approval**:
  - Motion made and **approved unanimously (3-0-0-2)** to accept the revised Fire Chief Job Description.

B. Operations and Personnel Manager Merit Step Salary Increase

- **Amy's Six-Month Review**:
  - Amy has reached her six-month employment anniversary, qualifying her for a merit-based step increase as per policy.
  - Although the formal evaluation has not yet been completed, the Fire Chief recommended approving the step increase effective on her anniversary date based on consistent positive performance and contributions.
  - A formal evaluation is scheduled to be completed soon, with a portion of the evaluation to be completed by the board in closed session next month.
  - It was remarked that Amy may be paying her babysitter more than she earns, highlighting the urgency of addressing wage competitiveness.
  - Board members expressed strong support for retaining Amy, recognizing her dedication and performance.

  - The board reviewed and discussed the **step salary increase** for **Amy**, the Operations and Personnel Manager.
  - Clarification was provided that:
  - The first step increase occurs at **six months** of employment.
  - Subsequent increases occur **annually**.
  - Amy will move to **Step 2** on the salary schedule, increasing her monthly salary to **$2,556**, which represents a **5% raise**, in accordance with the **salary schedule adopted in 2023**.
  - The board expressed strong support for this increase and reaffirmed the importance of retaining skilled staff.

  - ***Motioned by**: Pamela Morey*
  - ***Seconded by**: Tim Tschantz*
  - ***Vote**: Motion passed unanimously. 3-0-0-2*

- **Next Steps**:
  - **Step increase to proceed** on Amy's employment anniversary.
  - **Closed session** next month for board's portion of the evaluation.

C. Cherry Festival Parade Permit
The board discussed the annual Cherry Festival Parade, traditionally held in early June (tentatively June 10th).

It was noted that the North San Juan Fire Department has historically acted as the official sponsor for the parade to facilitate the Caltrans road closure permit on the state highway. This sponsorship allows the permit fees to be waived and streamlines the application process.

The San Juan Community Center is understood to be the organizing entity for the event.

Although the formal application has not yet been received, the board agreed to continue their longstanding support by approving the sponsorship in advance.

When the application paperwork becomes available, it will be presented for signature by the appropriate board member (either Chair or Vice-Chair).

Motion:
To approve the sponsorship of the Cherry Festival Parade by North San Juan Fire Department for the purpose of obtaining the Caltrans parade permit.

Motioned by: Vice Chair Samantha Hinrichs

Seconded by: Director Pamela Morey

Vote: Motion passed unanimously (3-0-0)

9. Purchase New Utility Vehicle – Tom Browning.
Chief Browning presented the board with a proposal to purchase a new utility vehicle to support operations and potentially serve as a future chief's vehicle, as discussed with the Calver Improvements Committee.

Browning used the California State Bid Program to source competitive pricing.
The selected bid was awarded to Downtown Ford in Sacramento for a 2024 Ford F-250 Extended Cab, ¾-ton chassis, gas engine.

Total Cost: $55,041.28 (includes all taxes and fees)

The board discussed additional outfitting to follow purchase, including:
Vehicle radio installation
Slip-on water tank and pump for light firefighting/quick attack capabilities

Gasoline engine was selected over diesel due to:
Lower cost (diesel upgrade is $10–20K)
Reduced idling capability in modern diesel engines
Fleet consistency and lower risk of misfueling
Funding to come from equipment reserves.

Motion:
To approve the purchase of a new utility vehicle from Downtown Ford, Sacramento, at the price of $55,041.28.

Motioned by: Director Tschantz
Seconded by: Vice-Chair Hinrichs
Vote: Motion passed unanimously (3-0-0-2)

10. Electric Vehicle Charging Station, at Station 1

Chief Tom Browning informed the board that the fire district was approached by Capital Go, a group preparing a grant application to install EV charging stations along Highway 49.

The board discussed the potential installation of four EV chargers in the parking lot of Station 1, near the sand pile area.

The station is viewed as a strategic and underserved location for travelers heading from Grass Valley toward Tahoe.

Under the proposed grant:

District would pay 20% of the installation cost
Remaining 80% covered by the grant
All charging revenue would return to the fire district

The site would likely require minor infrastructure upgrades (power capacity, slabs, barricades)

Board discussed uncertainties regarding the total cost, which would be clarified during the grant process.

It was clarified that signing the letter of support does not commit the district to any expenses or contract. Full board approval would be required before execution of any agreement.

Board Direction:
By consensus, the board authorized staff to issue a letter of support for Capital Go's grant application to install EV chargers at Station 1, with no financial or legal commitment implied at this stage.

11. NEXT MEETING: May 27, 2025, at 6:00 PM.

10. ADJOURNMENT: Meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.

Amy Rodriguez
Amy Rodriguez, Board Secretary

Special thanks to Lynn McGarva for her assistance in recording and documenting the minutes.