

Minutes
**VILLAGE FIRE DEPARTMENT
REGULAR MONTHLY BOARD
MEETING**
Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 6:00 P.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER

A regular fire commission meeting of the Village Fire Department was held on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, at 901 Corbindale, Houston, Texas 77024. It began at 6:03 p.m. and was presided over by Keith Brown. The secretary was present.

Present & Voting Were:

City of Bunker Hill Village
City of Hedwig Village
City of Hunters Creek
City of Piney Point Village
City of Hilshire Village
City of Spring Valley Village

Commissioner Keith Brown, Chair
Commissioner Matt Woodruff
Commissioner Rob Adams, Secretary
Commissioner Henry Kollenberg, Vice Chair
Commissioner Mike Garofalo
Alternate John Lisenby

Present Were:

City of Bunker Hill Village
City of Hunters Creek
City of Hilshire Village
City of Spring Valley Village
City of Piney Point Village

Alternate Clara Towsley
Alternate John DeWitt
Mayor Robert (Bob) Buesinger
Alternate John Lisenby
Alternate Dan Ramey

Village Fire Department
Administrative Staff

Fire Chief, Howard Miller
Amy Buckert, Administrator/Finance Director
Katherine Stuart, Administrative Specialist

Randle Law Firm

Attorney Brandon Morris

Not Present Were:

City of Hedwig Village
City of Spring Valley Village

Alternate Patrick Breckon
Commissioner Allen Carpenter, Treasurer

2. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC – Comments are limited to 3 minutes each.

None

3. CONSENT AGENDA – All Consent Agenda items listed are routine by the Board of Commissioners and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless a Board Member requests, in which event the item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and considered in its normal sequence on the agenda.

A. Approval of Minutes – Regular Monthly Board Meeting Minutes November 20, 2024

B. Approval of Bills Paid – November and December 2024

C. Approval of Annual Calendar

Motion: Mr. Kollenberg moved to take the annual calendar off the consent agenda and discuss it later during the budget process discussion.

Second: Buesinger

Unanimously approved

Motion: Buesinger

Second: Ramey
Unanimously approved

4. **DISCUSSION OF AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING PAST FINANCIAL MATTERS** - The Board of Commissioners will receive a report from Marc Schwartz and discuss and take any action necessary related to past financial matters, the resulting forensic audit, and steps toward resolution.

Marc Schwartz presented his findings from his forensic audit report. There was significant discussion about the remaining credit card statements the department did not have. Staff were directed to obtain the statements from Wells Fargo and review them for possible fraudulent charges. The Commission requested that Chief Miller ask Sergeant Collins to facilitate communication with the District Attorney assigned to the case.

No action was taken

5. **REPORTS**

- A. Treasurer's Financial Reports and possible action – November and December 2024
- B. Administrator's Report and possible action – November and December 2024 (report attached)
- C. Investment Report – December Report (report attached)
- D. Budget Committee Meeting Report
- E. Audit Committee Meeting Report
- F. Fire Chief's Report and possible action – Annual Report 2024

Motion: Kollenberg moved to take Item #6 out of order after 5E.

Second: Brown
Unanimously approved

Chief Miller provided a cost estimate of \$1.8 million for the rebuilding of a truck, which exceeds the expected threshold of 60%. The Department is awaiting a decision from VFIS regarding the vehicle damage, indicating ongoing communication with the adjuster and Sutphen for cost assessments. The Chief reported a total of 2,288 fire incidents and 1,040 non-emergency service calls for the year 2024, with a total incident count of 2,744 and an average response time of 4 minutes and 42 seconds.

FEMA reimbursements were received, totaling \$10,816.18 for Derecho and \$28,927 for Hurricane Beryl. The first three quarters of EMS revenue data are available, but the last quarter's data is still pending.

The Fire Department completed significant projects such as the annex and main roof, hired an Administrator/Finance Director and part-time dispatchers. Fire hydrant inspections are scheduled to begin as soon as the weather permits, with a completion target by June. The Department is focusing on pre-fire planning and training programs, particularly in driving and accident prevention. Fire Marshal Croft conducted final inspections for 102 houses with residential sprinklers installed, coinciding with the start of 102 new homes. Marshal Croft reported that there were eleven structure or near-structure fires investigated last year, with seven of those investigated by him. He noted that there was no trend in the causes of these fires, which were attributed to aging houses and issues with lithium batteries. The team is preparing for the drone program by undergoing training, with one member scheduled to take a test next week, while others will take more time to study before proceeding.

Member Woodruff raised concerns about the current injury rates within their department, noting that they have experienced multiple injuries, including finger injuries and knee surgeries, which seem excessive for the department's size. He also suggested benchmarking performance against other departments to better understand safety metrics and identify areas for improvement. The near misses are reported to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection, indicating a structured approach to safety reporting. The training budget was underutilized in 2024, raising questions about the adequacy of safety training provided. It was suggested the

training budget accommodate the safety training classes that were previously missed.

Motion: Woodruff

Second: Lisenby

Unanimously approved

6. **DISCUSSION ITEMS/PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL REPORTS** – The Board will discuss and consider possible action on the following:
- A. Presentation from Kenneth Oliver of TMRS regarding an adjustment to TMRS contributions (notes/slideshow attached)

The report includes information about the Memorial Villages retirement plans as related to Village Fire. The Memorial Villages Police Department adopted a 100% updated service credit with a 50% non-retroactive COLA effective January 1, 2024. Other villages like Bunker Hill and Hunter's Creek adopted similar provisions with slight variations. Piney Point adopted a 50% updated service credit with transfers and a 30% non-retroactive COLA, while Spring Valley Village did not adopt any changes. There is interest from the Chief in matching Memorial Villages PD's adoption, but it is noted as a significant jump in rates.

The plan requires active employees to contribute 7% of their paycheck, which grows at a guaranteed interest rate of 5%. Upon retirement, the contributions and interest are matched at a 2-to-1 ratio. The matching contributions have changed over time, with a historical match of 2-to-1 in 1996, an increase in employee deposit to 7% in 2000, and a reduction in the match to 1.5-to-1 in 2010, around the same time TMRS actuarial calculations were modified. **The last time updated service credits (USC) and cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) were fully adopted was 16 years ago in 2009**, which marked a notable change in how benefits were managed.

There is uncertainty regarding the future contribution rates, which could be influenced by several factors including asset returns and actuarial gains. **The recommendation is to adopt a lower contribution level initially and adjust as necessary, considering legislative impacts.**

Mr. Oliver committed to sending all prepared charts for distribution to participants, ensuring everyone has access to the necessary information.

No action was taken

7. **DISCUSSION OF AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING** – The Board will discuss and consider possible action on the following:
- A. QuickBooks Conversion Update (Report Attached)
 - B. ORW Engagement Letter, Contract Changes
 - C. Siddons Martin Invoices
 - D. Budget Process Presentation (Slides Attached)
 - E. Salary Survey
 - F. Discussion and possible action to purchase ladder truck, engine, and deputy chief vehicles

The team is currently entering data into QuickBooks, transitioning from the previous accounting system, Accounting CS, with a focus on ensuring accuracy through dual testing. Staff were tasked with exploring AI alternatives like Ramp and Tipalti, indicating an initiative-taking approach to improving expense management to enhance accountability in financial purchases. The current process for small purchases is seen as overly complicated and interrupts daily workflow. The team is looking for ways to streamline the purchase process while ensuring accountability.

It was decided to implement a fee limit for the engagement with ORW, suggesting a maximum amount each month to avoid excessive billing. There is a concern regarding the transition from a flat fee to an hourly rate, as

it may lead to unexpectedly high bills without proper oversight.

Regarding the Siddons Martin invoices, the total amount of work done that needs to be paid is \$127,000, with an additional \$11,000 from another source, leading to a total of \$138,000 that may be allocated from the budget. It was agreed that an end-of-year budget adjustment with the cities could be a way to manage the outstanding payments owed. It was agreed that the commission should pay invoices to the extent of their authority and capture any necessary adjustments in the year-end budget sent to the cities.

The discussion highlighted that if a ladder truck were ordered today, it would be expected to arrive in August 2026, indicating a significant lead time for procurement. Chief Miller mentioned that the replacement of the aerial was not due until 2032, but they are considering it now due to the need for a replacement after the November accident. There is a concern regarding the long delivery time of 48 months for the aerial apparatus, which is significantly longer than desired. The budget for the Deputy Chief Vehicle replacement is set at \$150,000, with an estimated cost of \$145,000 including additional mobile radios. The approval process for the deputy chief's vehicle requires further approval from the commission before proceeding with the purchase.

The projected delivery date for the engine is May 2027. Preparation of a budget amendment is needed to present to the cities for approval, ensuring it aligns with the capital replacement plan and insurance proceeds. The agreed value for the insurance proceeds is two million dollars, which will impact the budget for the ladder truck purchase. It was agreed that the pumper truck should be ordered now to take advantage of multi-truck discounts, despite the funding not being fully secured yet. The next step involves finalizing the amendment to the city's budget before their February meeting to ensure funding is in place for the pumper truck. The approved budget for the pumper truck is \$1.950 million as part of the 2025 budget, with a delivery time of 890 days. The Commission decided to request the cities to approve a budget amendment to allow for the expenditure of up to \$300,000 for the purchase of an aerial ladder truck to replace ladder one, contingent upon city approval.

Motion: Woodruff

Second: Kollenberg

Unanimously approved

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION - The Board of Commissioners will retire into Executive Session as authorized by Chapter 551; Texas Government Code, to seek legal advice related to the following matters:

A. Executive session pursuant to Section 551.071 authorizing a governmental body to seek legal advice about pending or contemplated litigation.

No action was taken

9. FUTURE TOPICS

- Chief's Retirement
- Budget Amendment
- Forensic Audit Update
- TMRS

Mr. Lisenby expressed gratitude for the hard work and dedication of the Administrative team, Amy Buckert, and Katherine Stuart. He stated that the changes made in the last three months were notable and significant compared to the two years that he has been on the Commission. Their work with the entire process has made things operate much more smoothly, with a lot more confidence. Staff thanked him for the recognition.

NEXT MEETING DATE

February 26, 2025

10. ADJOURNMENT

Time: 9:22 pm