

Minutes

**VILLAGE FIRE
DEPARTMENT REGULAR
MONTHLY BOARD
MEETING**

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, 6:00 P.M.

1. CALL TO ORDER

A regular fire commission meeting of the Village Fire Department was held on Wednesday, February 26, 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
Commissioner Allen Carpenter, Treasurer

Present Were:

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

Alternate Clara Towsley
Alternate Patrick Breckon
Alternate John DeWitt
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 Hilshire Village

Mayor Robert (Bob) Buesinger

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

Mayor Jinks of Hedwig Village thanked his Village's Commissioner and Alternate, and the entire Fire Commission, for being diligent about the insurance coverage on the Department's vehicles, and for making sure the coverages were set at the proper amounts to ensure that the Villages did not incur costs due to greater losses in the accident in November that totaled the ladder truck.

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 January 22, 2025

B. Approval of Bills Paid – updated December 2024 and January 2025 (**removed until March**)

Motion (minutes only): Carpenter

Second: Henry

Unanimously approved

4. **REPORTS**

A. Treasurer's Financial Reports and possible action – updated December 2024 and January 2025

B. Administrator's Report and possible action – January 2025 (report attached)

C. Investment Report – January Report (report attached)

D. Budget Committee Meeting Report

E. Audit Committee Meeting Report

F. Fire Chief's Report and possible action – January 2025

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

The Administrator explained that much work was continuing the financial software conversion and the cleanup of accruals for 2024, and that the financials for January, as well as the revised financials for December, would not be available until the next meeting.

She advised the Board that the financials will be recorded in accrual method of accounting rather than cash as had been done previously. The accrual method is compliant with the Interlocal Agreement. Additionally, the new reports will show the credit cards on the balance sheet, all expenses, and credit card reconciliations.

There's approximately \$108,000 in payroll accruals for five days of pay as a result of the transition to the new UKG software, so that has been corrected in advance of the audit and won't be an issue going forward. There's approximately \$155,000 in AP accruals between January and February that will be booked back to December. The investment report was included in the packet and no questions were raised.

The Chief gave a medical update on various members of the Department who had injuries, as well as an update on hiring. There are three firefighters who went through the past entrance exam who have

done their medical screening and their drug screening. The background is being done and the Chief is hoping to have them on board by the end of March.

Engine 1 had annual pump testing done this month and failed. It was taken to Metro Fire for repairs. The valve that went out, and while it's there, it's getting preventative maintenance also.

There were 102 fire incidences, 77 EMS, 11 non-emergency service calls, for a total of 190 calls. Response time was 4 minutes, 18 seconds. The new deputy chief vehicle has been ordered and should be delivered in December of this year.

One of the Board members raised a question on the ambulance billing, asking if staff reviewed charges on an annual basis to ensure that charges are in line with the market rates. The chief explained that it behooves Emergicon to make sure they stay competitive for the price they're charging patients. The Chief also reminded the commissioners that if you live in the villages, you pay nothing for ambulance transport. We bill only insurance companies for people that live here. Another Commissioner asked if staff had ever considered a surcharge for medical facilities in the commercial areas. The issue is that they keep developing more medical facilities which are taking the ambulances from the villages because they're responding more and more to the commercial district. He questioned if you could do a tax or a surcharge on these medical facilities so that possibly in the future we could add an additional ambulance or other equipment.

Chief was asked if that has been a problem, servicing the medical facilities in lieu of our residents. He stated it has not, but there are two ambulances in service now, and that helps contribute because that's quite a few runs.

5. **DISCUSSION ITEMS/PRESENTATION OF SPECIAL REPORTS** – The Board will discuss and consider possible action on the following:
- A. Temporary Aerial Apparatus
 - B. Accident/Injury Report

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

There was much discussion about the possibility of leasing or purchasing a temporary truck as the Department awaits the construction of the new truck. The Commission overall supported leasing a truck over purchasing a temporary truck. The Chief advised the Commission that the cost of a leased truck is approximately \$300 per day. He explained that the complication is in finding an available truck, seeing what that rate is and what the market is. The Commission wanted clarification on where in the budget the lease funds were identified. Staff explained it was not budgeted yet. Once a truck is identified to lease, then we have three days to decide if we don't want to lease anymore. The Chair stated that a special meeting can be called if necessary; however, the Commission would need more solid numbers in order to take forward a budget amendment to the cities for a lease.

Chief Miller provided an overview of accidents and injuries as requested by the Board in January. He stated that he sent out to the Commission the Commission on Fire Protection's injury report that is published each year. The 2024 report isn't completed yet, but 2023 is the latest one. He provided this information because of Commissioner Woodruff's inquiry into accident rates. Chief explained that many

of the incidents are prevented as a result of a good blood-borne pathogen prevention program, and power load cots. Additionally, the Texas Commission on Fire Protection report records each exposure as an incident, so it looks like we've had quite a few injuries when in reality we haven't had that many injuries, but we have had some exposures. An example being the chemical fire down in Bellaire where we had four people exposed to a chemical. They had to destroy the gear and get new gear that our insurance ended up paying for that year. That was an exposure that looked like we had seven injuries, but in reality, we only had three injuries and an exposure.

The Chief went through each of these items to explain what some of these were for a little clearer understanding. For 2018 injuries, there was an ankle injury, a fracture, that's physical fitness. That's from a workout injury. The second one there is actually from back in the time when they were doing the ice baths for physical fitness. It was supposed to help the body, and one of the guys tried it here with a trash can filled with ice water, and it fell over, and he fractured his ribs from it.

The 2019 station duties, a firefighter was moving the boat trailer, and the trailer hitch just bumped him in the knee. That could have been prevented by being more careful. There was also a twisted knee with the fire hose. You don't have the ankle support that you do with normal shoes, but we do try to get the best boots that we can for it, give the most support. And shoulder injury, dislocation while picking up equipment, had a structure fire, sprain, back injury. The lifting technique may help with that. As for the electrical shock, sometimes there's an overhead with a second feed. You have to make sure every structure fire you go to, you secure the utilities, gas, electricity. This is one case where it wasn't, and in fact, it was in the city of Houston. Strain, sprain, physical fitness.

In 2022, physical fitness, crushed hand or lower arm. The next one was closing fire apparatus, it was crushed in the tray. Simple injury, dislocation in the knee: fire suppression activity, investigating a fire alarm and slipped on a patch of ice. Not much to prevent that one. Then 2023 was big; we had burn injuries. Firefighters that assisted Houston with a fire were doing a crawl to their search in an apartment and burned their hand on the molten material that went through the gloves. If it's enough to get to that glove, it takes a while to cool down. Chemical exposure, that was the four individuals that went to that Houston fire. The next was a penetrating injury, lower legs, for a nail protruding through a board. The boots have a metal flange going through the soles, but sometimes on the side, the nails will pop up. The next one was a back strain during a training.

In 2024, one firefighter got dehydrated in physical agility testing. He was off for a long time, not because of his injury, but because of workers' comp. It took so long for his evaluation to be approved by the doctor from workers' comp. So many of these long-term injuries we have could have returned to work quicker, but workers' comp is really slow in getting people back to work.

We're limited about the amount of fire training, driver training we can do here because the trucks are very heavy and can damage facilities or parking lots. Also needed is flexibility training, and we're going to change our guidelines to include a safety committee that's never been established. This committee will look at the injuries we have, the accidents we have, the guidelines that we currently have in place to make sure we have the best guidelines and safest guidelines and go from there. The Chief said that overall, he is never pleased with any injury, but at least a lot of the injuries are unique injuries that I think we be prevented with a little extra training.

Commissioner Woodruff thanked the Chief for putting together the accident and injury data and asked about the Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR). This calculation takes the numbers of injuries and divides it by 200,000-man hours to come up with a number, and that is a ratio that allows comparison of yourself to others. Commissioner DeWitt asked if the department had any data on days lost. He also stated that he spent 20 years at NASA training astronauts, and that he'd be happy to assist in developing a program with the Department.

6. **DISCUSSION OF AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING** – The Board will discuss and consider possible action on the following:
- A. Budget Amendment 2025-01
 - B. Purchase of the following:
 - 1. Ladder Truck
 - C. QuickBooks Conversion Update
 - D. Tipalti Service Agreement
 - E. ORW Accounting Services Engagement Letter

Motion: Kollenberg

Second: Carpenter

Unanimously approved

No action was necessary on items A, B, and C. Regarding item D, Tipalti is a program that utilizes AI to scan the emails in the accounts payable inbox and matches up the invoices with the bills, saving a lot of time in that manner and then prevents us from missing something that comes in to the AP inbox and doesn't get paid, as well as minimizing human error. It also allows staff to do credit cards in that application, tracking them in real time, whereas right now that is not an option. It allows for levels of approval on the POs so that staff can set parameters for the POs and then have it funneled up through the system digitally, instead of using the current paper system, where a number is assigned within an Excel sheet, and a paper document filled out in Word, and then they bring it to everybody for signature and go back and match it up the receipt after purchase. This software does all that on its own instantaneously. We don't have that ability just with QuickBooks on its own. It'll help internal controls because of the function of the rules that will be set up. Tipalti also assists with the Department's cash flow, as they schedule the bills to be paid right before they are due, maximizing cash flow. The Administrator explained that the cost was negotiated down by staff several thousand dollars, and would cost \$10,000 up front for eighteen months, and then once fully implemented, the Department would receive a rebate of \$2,300, bringing the total cost to \$7,700. It was proposed that the money be allocated from health insurance savings for this year, (1:07:25) and then we would build it into next year's budget for the \$7,700 for next year. It will take approximately 45 days to launch once staff has approval. The Commission agreed to fund Tipalti from the Office Software account for now and take forth a budget amendment to the cities at a later point in time to cover costs for the remaining budgeted items in that line item.

Item E is the updated service agreement from ORW with the requested changes by the Commission. The Commission was in agreement with the changes and no action was required.

7. **DISCUSSION OF AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING PAST FINANCIAL MATTERS** -
The Board of Commissioners will discuss and take any action necessary related to past

financial matters, the resulting forensic audit, and steps toward resolution.

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

8. **DISCUSSION OF AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING TIMING AND PAYMENT OF 2024 AUDIT** - The Board of Commissioners will discuss and take any action necessary related to past financial matters, the resulting forensic audit, and steps toward resolution.

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

Commissioner Kollenberg stated the Audit Committee met with Robert Belt a week ago, Friday, and asked if staff or the Department Attorney had heard back from him. No one had. He explained that Crowe, the Department's auditing firm, has some issues concerning potential additional costs in light of the fraud report submitted by Mark Schwartz. The Administrator stated that staff had not yet received the PBC list from Crowe. One of the issues is if they have to expand the scope of the audit, they don't have capacity right now if they have to expand it very much, so they'll have to move it to summer. Commissioner Ramey explained that even looking at 2024 and what we know from the Swartz report, it's only 0.5% of total budget, which is immaterial to an audit. Even if the whole thing is wrong, it's not material. He stated that if it waits until summer, there is a chance that the Department will not have audited financials by the end of May. The Commission asked the Administrator to tell Robert Belt to move as quickly as feasible. No further action was taken.

9. **FY 2026 BUDGET DISCUSSION #1** – The Board of Commissioners will conduct Budget Hearing #1 to include discussion and possible action.

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

The Administrator explained that overall 24 proposed actuals needed to be corrected prior to the next draft. Additionally, the personnel numbers did not include any type of cost-of-living raise, only step increases. None of the TMRS scenarios from last month were included in these numbers. Personnel costs do make up approximately 70% of the Department's budget, so making significant cuts to the operational line items would be necessary in order to see any type of savings. She stated that she would like to get direction on the future of the facility fund and whether that needed to be closed out.

Chairman Brown asked about the physical plant line item and what that included. It includes the 20-year-old generator, the tower, and the fuel system upgrades.

A Commissioner asked about the \$10,000 allocated for computer replacements, and how many office computers the department has. The Fire Marshal explained that the department replaces computers every three to five years, and this is the budgeted replacement for these end-of-life for the server equipment we have and our backup systems. Most of that cost is from the UPS replacements for each of the servers in the racks. Some of the machines are running on desk UPSs that were purchased when the station was built. Funds were low at that time and the department is running on \$100 UPSs as opposed to the industry standard the department should be running on.

The Chair questioned the 2% increase in base pay, and the Chief explained that it was a 2% overall increase, but not a raise; the increase was created by the step pay plan. The Chair told the Commission that they should probably decide on the adjusted service credits within TMRS quickly, and that would likely add a minimum quarter million dollars to the personnel category. He told the Commission that he voted for the full-service credit adjustment for the police department and his City's employees. He further questioned the overtime amount estimated and asked if it could be cut further. The Chief stated he would look into it. He also stated that the 457-plan compensation, the 2% given at the end of each year once employees complete their full year would go away if the Commission adopted the updated service credits. The Chair asked each Commissioner to talk to their respective cities and see where they stood on the issue of updated service credits. Bunker Hill and Hunter's Creek are both 100% updated service credit and 50% COLA, Memorial Villages Police Department. Piney Point is 50% updated service credit and 30% COLA, and Hedwig is 50% updated service credit and no COLA. Hillshire and Spring Valley do not have even one. If potential candidates go to Katy, they're 100% updated service credit and 70% COLA and Humble is 50% and 70%. If you go on the TMRS website and check any city, you're going to find that a lot of the people the Department is competing against for solid candidates have it. It's going to attract good people.

Questions were asked about the significant increase in IT services. Staff explained that we are currently using Accu Tek for IT service. The Chief was hacked in December, and it took three days to get that resolved. He explained that staff was looking at the possibility of moving to the system that Memorial Village PD uses, and they seemed leaps and bounds above the current service. This new company provides a high-level security clearance and does a great deal of government support, so they have to maintain a certain level of security. The reason the cost goes up so much is because the employees that they have are high-level engineers, computer engineers that work for the company. They don't employ the low-level desktop guys that work for the company. When they go out and do replacement computers or update security, it's being done by the top-level employees. It's a completely different playing field as far as the level of support. The Accu Tek company is going back and maybe revisiting their service agreement to see if they are providing the level of service that they're supposed to be providing, and if there is something that can be done to better that service level, with minimal cost.

The Chief explained that in the next iteration of the budget we'll be looking at priority and what's most important. He explained that he already cut the boat from the budget, as well as the gym equipment. The Chair told the Chief that he has the general idea of what the commission wants to do with the budget, and stated that he was very uncomfortable with anything above 4%. He stated that if the Department ends up doing the service credit adjustment, they are probably not going to do 3% a pay raise. The Chief stated that he had already talked to some of the personnel, and they told him they would much rather have a benefit increase in their paycheck than a raise this year if that would help do that.

10. **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 Texas Government Code Section 551.074 authorizing a governmental body to deliberate the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a public officer or employee; Fire Chief

B. Executive session pursuant to Section 551.071 consultation with attorney regarding pending or contemplated litigation

Motion: No Action Taken

Second:

The Commission went into Executive Session at 8:35 pm. The Commission reconvened in regular session at 9:21 pm and took no action.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:22 pm.

DRAFT