

La Veta Fire Station  
100 Birch St  
La Veta, Colorado  
MINUTES

February 12, 2024 @ 6:00pm

Present: Directors Schmidt, Alt, and Lacy, Brunner were in attendance. Director Valdez was absent.

Staff: EMS Director Mower and Fire Chief Ron Jameson were in attendance.

Guests: Laura Jameson, Christina Guadagnoli, Eric Guadagnoli, Justin Jameson, Ron Jameson, Brian Jameson, were in attendance.

Call to Order – Pledge - Roll Call

Approval of Agenda

- Motion to add EMS Tuition Assistance Agreement to the agenda made by Alt. Seconded by Brunner. Motion Carried

Agenda

- **Kitchen Facility Modifications:** L. Jameson: We like the original plans, and our goal is to get the kitchen started and finished. Schmidt: Is the electrical part satisfactory with your plans? L. Jameson: That is one of our talks: along the wall, it's short of what we need. Schmidt: According to the plans more electrical will need to be put in. Is the number of plug-ins satisfactory to what you will need? To me it looks like it complies with code. The only thing is it does not have a plug in for an electric stove. The reason I am asking is will you have an electric stove or gas stove that will raise the cost of the project. Do you have electric or gas? R. Jameson: They are not going to put in a commercial stove. Brunner: Would you be ok with an electric stove? L. Jameson: My preference is gas, but we can do either. Brunner: We can look at the cost and then we will know better. Alt: How many circuits were dedicated to the kitchen? Brunner: There are 4 20's for the kitchen. The original stove was gas. The gas line is in. The added cost would be the hood and venting. Schmidt: We will have to get an electrical project. We just need to have an electrician bid and install and see what it will be cost wise. C. Guadagnoli: we have a licensed electrician who is willing to do it for free. Schmidt: If you have an in, that would be super so we can get it done timely. R. Jameson: A lot of this has already been worked on. We have figured out the arrangement so we wouldn't have the cost over runs and blow it out of proportion again. Try to do it one step at a time and make it affordable. To get something done. This building was built in 2016 and nothing has been done to this room since then. They have come up with funds to make this happen. C. Guadagnoli: The Spring Fire, we had all this food donated and people were bringing it to the firehouse, and we had nothing to store it or warm it. We would at least have a kitchen to supply that if there is another catastrophic event. Schmidt: Is the cabinet set up as drawn on the plans going to be functional? L. Jameson: The only thing we think that changes is the plans indicated a dishwasher. We all figured that was not necessary. Most of our functions use large pans and pots and most of it is throw away. We can use more counter space. Schmidt: If the plan has a dishwasher,



let's just do it. In the plans, it calls for commercial cabinets that have locking doors with key locks. Do you see a need for that? L. Jameson: We might want at least 1 lockable cabinet. I don't see any need. Brunner: The reason we wanted the locks was this space was supposed to be a community space for anyone who wanted to use it. If we have any other groups that would routinely use the room, you can keep your stuff locked. L. Jameson: I would like anyone who uses it to be able to find anything they may need to use. Brunner: We could have a few base cabinets to lock your stuff in.

Schmidt: What I'm hearing is, there is no need to make major revisions to the plans as they stand for the kitchen portion of this room. Is that accurate? L. Jameson: There were no plans to change anything to the original plans of the room. Lacy: Is there a permit policy that they must come back in and pull new permits? Brunner: Yes, they would have to come in and pull new permits and make sure they are up to code. Schmidt: I don't know if it would be necessary to have to send it out to bid if we have someone that is going to donate their time. First, we need to vote if we are going to put the electrical project out to bid. Brunner: We did a scope for the whole project. In that scope we can send the pieces out to bid. Then it's all together and moving along. Then we would know when the drywall is going to come in. Who's going to cut the drywall back and who's going to hang the cabinets. R. Jameson: That's where you are different than what we are working on. A lot of that is going to be done with volunteer help to do that to keep the cost overrun down. I guess if you want to go that route and keep the Auxiliary out of it they are probably more than happy to step back. Schmidt: Nobody is talking about taking the Auxiliary out of anything. What we are talking about is doing it the way it needs to be done. R. Jameson: None of us want it done wrong. Schmidt: You have to have a contractor that is responsible for pulling the permits and have the inspections done. If he wants volunteers to come in and do some of the work that's up to him. You are talking about bidding out parts of it? Brunner: There might be a contractor that will bid on the whole thing. We have to see who will pull the Town of La Veta Permit. R. Jameson: Jimmy Chambers said he would be the General Contractor for us. I hope we don't lose those free bees and the low cost that we were working with to get some of this done. Schmidt: Once the bids come in, we will know if we have enough money or not. I don't know how much it will end up costing if we get in-kind offers. It may not cost a lot of money for the actual project. A motion was made by Brunner to go forward. Schmidt and I (Brunner) can get together and figure that scope out and bring it to the board. Seconded by Alt. Motion Carried.

**Strategy Session for increasing annual revenues:**

- Schmidt: In the challenging atmosphere that we have going on, I think it would be wise to tie our mill levy to something tangible like our debt service. How many mills would we need to add to cover our debt service. In the first 3 years it would free up \$68 to \$70k a year because the money would be earmarked for debt service. I think if they saw what the money is being spent on. It would not be forever. I figured it would take about 2.5 mills to do our debt service. Let's say we ask for 3 mills. Earmark for debt services. Can't be spent on anything else. As soon as the debt obligation on this building is satisfied, that tax sunsets. That would free up what our debt service is to be used in our departments. Then when the mill levy sunsets, the board can go back to the electorate and say we would like to continue this tax(not an increase, just what you have been paying for the last 15yrs) in perpetuity to be used for whatever purpose that the board sees fit.



Brunner: We already use the taxpayer's money to pay down our debt. For me I think the most important thing moving forward is a full-time employee. To me that's what we can use to say they here is something tangible. With this mill levy increase we can hire someone who can be in the district full-time. Responding full time at the station full time. That would be the best way to say we are struggling with volunteers. We can show those numbers on how our force has dwindled. We can sell the idea that we are going to a paid service and having an employee. To me if we could detail that well to the community, I think they would take that up. If we talked about having somebody moving forward, then we will have a full-time employee. We would have to be able to sell that person that they are fulfilling trained and able to teach and able to hold trainings. That's more tangible to show how we are aging. To me it's easier to sell something like that because that's an actual position. We can show the need without a lot of effort. In this culture we have to be super specific. This mill levy is for this. We have to have a very specific amount. If you look at our force, we are all getting older. We need that position. Right now, we have part of that funding, but we don't have it all. We can go to the voters and say we have part of that funding, but we need your help. Right now, we only have part-time employees.

Schmidt: To the point about being precise and exact, you can't get any more precise and exact than our debt numbers. Everything with an employee is up in the air. Can you get one? If you do, what are you going to have to pay them? They can't work 24/7 so you are still relying on volunteers and part-time employees. I think it's a much harder sell than something you can nail down to dollars and cents and an exact timeline.

Brunner: I think we can disagree on that. On our debt service, right now we are paying. We are satisfying our debt service, and we have excess. Schmidt: Not much. That's the point because we don't have excess. If we did get the money for debt service and can only use it for debt service. That's an automatic freeing up 30k to 70k a year which we can use to try to make a case for an employee. Brunner: 2 questions are in my mind. You are already paying the debt? What are you going to use that money for? To me if I was a voter, which I am, that's the question I would ask. If we just say, well we are thinking about hiring somebody, but we really don't know. To me the more specific thing would be to say here's the money we need, and this is what we are going to use it for. Instead of you're going to free up some money, but what are you going to use it for. In the mill levy ballot question it has to have a specific language that it would be used for x amount of stuff. The greater need we have right now is a full-time employee going forward. Schmidt: My objective is to put something out there that I think the people would vote for and free up some money for the district to operate without being on the edge all the time. Brunner: If you as a board member right now had to choose different things that you have to earmark money for. What would you guarantee to pay right now and every month. No matter what, this building is not at risk. We know the mills we are at right now we have the money to service the debt. It's a struggle, but we will not go bankrupt. Schmidt: We are losing ground every year. Our reserves are getting smaller and smaller. How long before our debt service is the only thing we can do? Alt: It's what's going to sell. Brunner is talking about using an increase in mill levy for operational costs. For an operational employee. The other side is ridding ourselves



as soon as possible the boat anchor that prohibits us from spending and planning for operational and replacement needs. It's a tough choice. What's going to sell easier? Lacy: The mill levy to service the debt, would it pay the monthly mortgage on this building? Schmidt: Yes. We don't have to decide this tonight. We do have until June to decide and have in place what we want the language we want on whichever way we decide.

Brunner: I think we should poll the neighbors and the people and pose general questions to see what they will be willing to help with. Lacy: My suggestion would be to come up with the exact same wording on the polling. Alt: What do you think if we come up with a few more possibilities. On the polling, we should ask what they would be willing to see happen to the mill levy increase. Cut down the debt, hire an employee, or other. Brunner: We poll 50 people or so. We ask the same questions. Lacy: Can you write out the specifics on what we will poll. Brunner: I think we should keep it simple with a sentence or two. Schmidt: I'm not really excited on the polling. I think you are going to stir up a stink and speculation. The people elected this board to make these kinds of decisions. Now if you want to go out and talk to people, no problem. An organized polling effort by this board to discern the will of the public on a proposed tax increase will open a Pandora's box. Pretty soon you will not be able to get anything to pass because people will become suspicious. Brunner: I think it must be informal.

R. Jameson: I'm listening to all this, but I'm not hearing anything for capital improvements. We need improvements to both buildings. There is more to this operation than debt service and a full-time employee. Mower: to Jameson's comment, soon we are going to need a full-time employee to maintain our equipment. This department in total, I can't see a full-time employee for the next 10 years. We don't have the call volume for fire and EMS to support and to realistically make sense of having a full-time employee to do Fire and EMS. This department at this point can't afford to do that. You can't afford to hire somebody with the credentials to do that at a \$100k+ thousand dollars a year salary. Especially since there is no other industry or place for a spouse to work. The people with the credentials and the training to be that person is going to cost you well more than this department can afford. Schmidt: To Jameson's point to other needs of the district. That's what the money we would be saving from our debt service would go to. All the stuff we currently don't have the money to do. Mower: I can't see this department any time in the future needing a full-time employee to take care of everything that needs to be taken care of. Jameson and I don't spend full time here and I think we do a pretty good job of keeping on top of everything. You have 3 people here now. You are going to pull the accounting back in house, and she takes care of that. Jameson takes care of his part and I take care of my part. It's not costing you hardly anything. When you start putting all that under 1 hat, it's going to cost you a bunch. That person is going to have to have benefits also. They are not going to move here and bring their family and not have health and retirement benefits. Jameson: I don't see that person doing everything. I don't see them being bookkeeper. You are still going to have that expense on top of everything else. The other thing is, it's really challenging to find the right Fire Chief. Most of them come from paid fire departments and learning how to deal with volunteers creates an issue. They don't know what it is to have that employee who is not doing everything that they think that



they need to. It's hard to get after a volunteer. It takes a special person to manage a volunteer group. Mower: I believe we have tried this once. We brought in a fire chief from somewhere else who didn't live in the district. That didn't last very long, and it didn't go very well.

Alt: Didn't someone have an idea to finish out this building the way it was intended to be finished. Brunner: Capital expenses are grants. Alt: What do you mean those are grants? Brunner: That's where you get grant money. That's a job for the employee. They have to be out there searching for those grants. Writing for grants and defending grants. Looking at everything we have done in the past, without grants, we wouldn't even have this building. Schmidt: You are talking about a super employee. Nobody is going to do all that stuff. Brunner: They would be expected to do all that. We can say you can never find anybody, but right now we can't afford anybody. You are going to have to have the right employee. Mower is right, they must be able to work with volunteers, they must be able to write grants. The first part we have to do is be able to fund that. We are operating right now. It's not the best, but we are spending too much money. We are getting the job done. I am looking forward to the future.

Schmidt: This is a decision for the board to make on an employee later down the line. The only thing we disagree on is how to get more money for operations. Your scenario is to ask out right. My scenario is to ask for money to nail down to dollars and cents. Brunner: You are right, this is operational. If we are not specific and we are not saving or borrowing for specific things, the next board will come in and spend it on what ever they want. If we are specific enough that will tie it to the voters so they can say, this is what I'm voting for. That's how we will be able to get that passed. Jameson: What were the dollars generated before we got hit with Gallagher? Where were the dollars at before we did this building? Where we 300 to 400 thousand a year before we started losing money with Gallagher? IT went to the voters and asked to be de-gallagherized and locked it in at 192k to stop the bleed. Can we go to the voters and say, can you bring us back up to what we once were? Brunner: I don't believe it's a huge number. Alt: I think in 2018 when we de-gallagherized that was the high-water mark. The \$192k. Brunner: The revenue generated between the East Peak Fire, that was a great year. Jameson: I am talking just tax revenue. You can go back to the people and say it's affecting us the same. You are not trying to come up with new ideas. That is something that is real. Schmidt: We have to do a mill levy increase to get back to before Gallagher. Jameson: You have to come up with something that sells to the public. Inflation hits their pocket too. Schmidt: Our operational expenses have gone up, but our revenue has stayed the same. We want the public to help build it up to take care of the non-inflation part. The inflationary part there is nothing we can do, we have to live with it. But because of inflation our operational funds have dwindled and dwindled. If the public will take care of the debt it will help us raise up to another level. Alt: Do you believe at one point our revenue was greater than \$192k. Jameson: I don't know what they were, but for some reason there was a bleed that was happening. They de-gallagherized because they thought they were going to go broke. The mill levy was dropping. Alt: The county valuations were dropping. Brunner: There was a lag. I think we got it done before it dropped. We anticipated before that. I don't think there was a big dip.



- Jameson: you still got the inflation in there that you can go to the voters. Alt: Our revenue is flat, and the cost of inflation makes the wedge getting bigger. Schmidt: The reverse of Gallagher is what is happening now. The valuations are going up because the state re-did the percentage of how they calculate taxable valuation. So, the valuation is going up. Now the state is trying to get local taxing entity like ours to help bail their fat out of the fire by saying we will take a mill levy increase this time to make a soft landing for the tax bill to make up for the states revaluation fiasco. Alt: This is another component that needs to be decided at the legislation to resolve that problem. This is another option to tell the public our revenue stream is flat lined. Brunner: No matter what we go after this must be part of it. That has to be part of our argument. Lacy: That's an easy argument. Brunner: Do we want to put a 3<sup>rd</sup> question out there? We like to have a mill levy for just operations? Don't define anything on that. We have one for an employee, one for debt service and one for operations. Then the board can figure out what to do with it. Alt: I don't think that's a seller. I think the selling point is we have some capital equipment that's getting old and needs to be replaced. I think that is a better sell. Brunner: So, then those will be the general straws. Alt: we need to stack our vehicles; they go from this age to this age. At some point they have to be replaced. Mower: Along with that, the public needs to know that's dependent on being able to save lives. It's directly tied to what we are here to do. Jameson: At one time the boards wish was being able to update things every 20 years. At that time, the truck that was discussed at the board meeting is a 1984. It's 40yrs old. It's twice the life span that the board wanted to have. Brunner: To me that's where the grant money comes in. Jameson: You have to have seed money to help with that grant. You have to have a certain percentage to help with that. Mower: Every grant I have seen for those kinds of needs, you have to have matching money. Brunner: That's not necessary - Rescue 1 and 3 didn't have a matching grant out of district money. Jameson: They aren't red. Your first responsibility as a fire district is fire. Ambulances are secondary. Brunner: You just got a truck that is brand new. Jameson: That truck is not for structure fire. Your job is for structure fire. Wildland is something we do on the side. Structure fire for a Title 32 Special District, that is your number 1 job. Schmidt: We hit all the major issues. Now we need to go home and think about where we want to go.
- Review & Approve EMS Transport Billing Policy; Alt: We made changes. I removed any reference to a specific billing company. It is just a generic billing company now. I added section 4.4 The billing service company is the entity with which La Veta EMS contracts for providing medical transportation service billing. The biggest change was in sections 6.1 and 6.1.1. The Director will ensure all medical treatment and insurance information is available in Image Trend for each patient and can be accessed by the billing services company. Motion to accept the transport policy as read and presented at this meeting was made by Brunner. Seconded by Lacy. Motion Carried
- Review of Tuition Assistance Agreement for the district; Brunner: In the original agreement in the first paragraph has individuals. Right now, individuals would be somebody that is not a member of the district. We really can't hold an individual to this agreement, because they can't respond or take shift. They can never satisfy this agreement. The only person who can satisfy this agreement is a member. Schmidt: You have to be an individual to take the class before you can become a member. Brunner: They can stay individuals



and not become a member or not be a member. They can't respond for us. We don't allow just individuals to respond. Mower: They are not going to respond until they are a member. They can't become a member until they have completed the program. Brunner: So, you can see the problem. Mower: What you are missing is if you follow through the agreement, it tells you that you have to pass the class and you have to do all these things. If you don't, you have to reimburse this. The other part is you can't become a member until you have completed this. All I did was copy the information from the last meeting. Except in paragraph 9, I changed it to be more beneficial for the district. Any wording that needs to be changed; you need to tell me what wording you want. Brunner: Let's just talk about this just for a sec. I believe they are paying the district back. The QRT gave us some money and FCC gave us a scholarship. It's the district that sponsored the class. It's the district that paid for these students to be here. So, this agreement is between the district and these people. Now I understand where the struggle is here, and I get it. How do you hold this individual who wishes to attend the class accountable if they are not a member? See what I'm saying? Schmidt: Because this is a contract between that individual and the fire district. Alt: How would you fix this? DO you have a fix in mind? Brunner: I would just say these people need to become members. I understand we are just trying to get it done because we are short help. I don't know how to do it quickly. Mower: It has to be done quickly. We started the class because we thought we had this all wrapped up. Brunner: Those people if we are going to make an agreement and hold them accountable to responding, we put the cart before the horse. That's really what we got here because we're going to have them sign an agreement that they can't carry out unless they are a member. Alt: They will be able to carry out when they become a member. Am I missing something? It must be subtle Let's not play Philadelphia lawyer either. Brunner: I'm not trying to. In the past if they weren't a member of the district we didn't pay for their class. That's the subtlety of it. You had to be a member before the district would pay for a class. I could be wrong on that. I'm pretty sure that's the case because we wanted the people to say ok this is important, I become a member.

Mower: I get what you are saying here, but we are way down the road already. The agreement was explained to them prior to taking the class. It was all explained to them that once they pass and get their CPR, they will agree to become members. We will have them get drug tests and background tests. Those are in the process as we speak. They can't become members until that is completed. So, in the meantime they have agreed that they will be on the hook for any cost. Brunner: If they can't become a member, then they have to pay for the whole class? Alt: Yes Mower: Exactly Lacy: Yes, it's on the last line of the agreement. Mower: That is based on what Alt sent me to put on there. It's all in the agreement. Brunner: What if we put the 1st paragraph to say "you must become a member of the La Veta Fire Protection District. Because then it's a moot point. Mower: How about in the second paragraph I add "I (blank) agree to become a member of the La Veta Fire Protection District"? Brunner: I would be good with that. Schmidt: Are we going to make them pay back their meals and stuff? Brunner: That's the agreement if we send you to a class and you have to travel. I make a motion that we add that language to the EMS agreement. "I (blank) agree to become a member of the La Veta Fire Protection District and fulfill the obligations set forth in this agreement". Seconded by Lacy. Motion Carried.



\* MSA: The meeting adjourned at 8:01

Mike Lacy, Secretary

*Mike Lacy*