



McMullen Valley Fire District

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Governing Board Meeting/Public Hearing February 27, 2025

Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order: **At 6:00pm by Teena Conrad.**
2. Pledge of Allegiance: **All in attendance participated.**
3. Roll Call: **J. Walton, S. Rees, S. Sewell, Teena Conrad and Kenneth Montijo were present. K. Hess, staff present, multiple people from the public also attended.**
4. Discussion and Possible Action re: possible approval of Minutes from the 12/19/2024 joint special meeting, and the minutes from 1/23/2025. **Sam Rees made a motion to accept both sets of minuted, Jennifer Walton seconded and the motion carried unanimously.**
5. Discussion and Possible Action re: Possible appointment of Kenneth Montijo to continue his term as a Board Member. **J. Walton made a motion to approve the appointment of K. Montijo, Sam Rees seconded and the motion carried unanimously.**

Pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) Sam Rees made a motion to adjourn to executive session, J. Walton seconded and the board unanimously agreed for the purpose of advice from Attorney, Bill Whittington.

6. Call to the Public: **None**
7. Approve FY 2024 Annual Financial Review. **Tabled**
8. Discussion and Possible Action re: Public Hearing regarding the possible merger of the McMullen Valley Fire District and the Quartzsite Fire District.
 - A. Informational slide show pertaining to the proposed merger.
 - B. Public Hearing/Comments re: The Governing Board will hear those persons who appear for or against the proposed merger and to determine if the merger will promote the public safety, health, comfort, convenience, necessity or welfare of the McMullen Valley Fire District.

As the meeting opened for public opinion for or against the merger, a man from Wyoming asked if the MVFD had tried to bring in people from other fire departments to fill shifts in Salome. Chief Hess assured him that the Assistant Chief, Will Aaron places advertisements on platforms such as Indeed. An unknown lady asked if we had a web site. Chief Hess stated that we do have a website and informed the audience of such.

A lady who is the wife of a Grower's Oil employee stated that her shed burned down starting at 4:15pm, and then the fire department left. Another one of their sheds caught fire at 11:30 that night. She was upset because they called Dispatch and received a busy signal twice, ultimately calling Doug Wolfe, who made contact with the fire department. Chief Hess stated his sincere apology.

Man from Wyoming: Is the Fire Department in Salome Fulltime or part-time? If you only have one structural engine, how many FFs do you have? Hess explained that the Salome area has 7 responders and Quartzsite has 30. He said QFD is Fulltime and MVFD is paid on call. If a person is on duty in Salome, they are being paid.

Lynette Maynes: I don't understand what's broken? What other options are there? Could we do an IGA rather than a merger? Such as paying QFD to fill the shifts. Would that save tax dollars? She stated that she is worried long term. Chief Hess Followed up by stating that the board had been in joint meetings with Mr. Whittington, and that all of the options were explored, with the merger being the most feasible. He talked about all of the firefighter's serving here and the risks involved for them.

Ilene Wood: Why don't you leave Quartzsite and just stay in Salome? Chief Hess: I only make \$30,000 here and that's not enough for me to live on. For me the enticing thing is that I wouldn't need to work everyday. Wood: If you're so stressed out then hire another chief. You are going to pull our guys and send them out. Hess: That will not happen.

Unknown Man: How far along is the merger? Hess: The Merger is to the point where the board is going to vote on it tonight.

Unknown Man: What is the tax rate? Hess: MVFD 3.38, QFD 3.73. Man: they are building in Salome so the tax rate is going up. If you live on a fixed income, well you said you couldn't live on \$30,000, well I live on half of that! Hess: yes, that's true. I pay for all of the water etc on our place for our kids and I have a lot of outlay. I've also gone and received some education, but I do feel for you.

Ilene Wood: Take into consideration that we will only have two members on the board if we merge.

Blain Harold: So Kevin, I trust you, but look what happened when La Paz County was formed in 1983. How'd that work out? Hess: This is a lot different than that.

Lynette Maynes: I'm speaking to the board, we don't have to take action tonight. We can talk about an IGA or a contract for services.

Unknown Man: If I call the fire department, will they respond from Salome or Quartzsite? Or do they go to Quartzsite and then come to Salome? Hess: They would respond from Salome.

Louise Wolfe: If one of the problems is man power, then the Quartzsite people work in Salome, are we paying them? Hess: Yes MVFD pays them. Wolfe: So, that's misleading.

Wyoming Man: If you have Firefighters from here, once again, do you put this out to Buckeye or Peoria, etc.? Hess: When we go to hire, Assistant Chief Aaron puts it online on a site like Indeed. WY Man: I know when we tried to merge, it didn't work. And what happens when you go from part-time to full-time when you don't have a structural cert? Hess: We do have structural certs.

Man named Carl: If this is not economically stable can we back out, or will it just go away? Hess: Once merged, the old districts go away and it is permanent.

Jim Downing: Well, I've looked at the finances, the audits and the reviews and that's fine. But what happens when you get run over by a bus, then what? What will the FD do then, it will all change if you get hit by a bus. Hess: Jim are you planning to run me over with a bus? Downing: Well...

Doug Wolfe: I worked at this fire department for 48 years and I was asked to leave. This has nothing to do with the guys, it has to do with representation. God Bless these young men, because we need them, and if this thing goes away they will still work here because they need the money, when you're paying \$400-\$600, for 12 hours that's good money and they won't give that up. If we need more, let's check Congress and Parker. The chief and the district need to be separate. I've said we need to hire an admin, or a book keeper or whatever you want to call it. Hess: We have tried to hire an administrative assistant, and it didn't work. When we interviewed them, they could barely turn on the computer. I really don't mind doing the admin work, it is a necessary part of the fire district.

Unknown Lady: Is Quartzsite Solvent? Chief Hess: Yes. Lady: Are you sure? Hess: I know there are a lot of rumors and slander going on, but they are all false. I've come to understand that wise people don't believe gossip. Lady: I don't listen to gossip. So both districts are operating well? Hess: Yes. The assessed value of Quartzsite is up \$4,000,000 this year.

Blain Harold: How much dollars is this? Hess: Approximately .22%, Harold, no how much is it? Hess: What is the value of your property? You would pay \$2.20 per thousand. Harold: No, how much would it cost the MVFD for the entire district? Hess: I would need to figure that out, and we can do that. Harold: Well.... Assistant chief Aaron: It would be right at \$37,000 for the entire district.

Unknown Man: You're wanting to spread out the workers, so to increase the tax base you want to merge to pay for it?

Doug Wolfe: What's the rush? I don't understand the big push. Susan Sewell: I see the benefit, grants and employees. Why are the employees not staying at the station? Hess: It is the same as when you were there, the same rules. I personally think that anyone with less than ten years of tenure should stay at the station. Susan Sewell: We have sat down with Mr. Whittington and discussed all of the options. This is the most feasible.

Lynette Maynes: This is not something we want. Data is what we want.

Kari Avila: Is there any other fire departments that cover this area? **Hess:** No. **Kari:** If they work in one spot, can they work in another? **Hess:** Yes they can. They work 48 hours straight, then they get 5 days off. So there are plenty of opportunities for them to work, this is America, if they want to work, we let them work.

Doug Wolfe: Well you have to pay them overtime then. **Hess:** Federal Law says you don't need to pay a Firefighter overtime until after 106 hours.

Unknown Woman: If there is only one unit at the station, then why do they wait for the other person coming in? **Hess:** Safety primarily. But we have met each other on scene on many occasions.

Grower's Employee man: Why do the trucks just sit at the station and wait? When my sheds burned, dispatch didn't answer. I had to call Doug and he called the fire department. I had to get my hose and I almost had the fire out before the guys got into their little red fire truck and responded. Then when they got there, Riley was all over the place and he did a real good job, but he had to wait for Kyle! And then I asked four different Firefighters if I could get an investigator, but they just passed it along and nobody came. **Hess:** Well if they would have called me I would have come. I am a certified Fire Investigator and I would have helped you out. I am very sorry for your loss and how long the response was and I sincerely apologize.

Wyoming Man: If they work 48 hours can they still work here? **Hess:** Yes.

Teena Conrad: I've been on the board here for 7 years. I've been to the Arizona Fire District Association Meetings and I've learned a lot. From what I understand, many districts have done this and it has been a good thing.

Unknown Lady: Can QFD Employees work here? Do we have to pay overtime? Do they have to take five days off, and I've heard that they're not very well trained. **Hess:** Yes Ma'am, they can work here. We have to pay overtime if they exceed 106 hours. The training question is more gossip. We have been training Firefighters and EMTs since 2004. I am affiliate faculty with the AZ Center for Fire Service Excellence, and a member of the state training committee. We have helped many firefighters to succeed.

Man in a cowboy hat: When are we building the new fire station? **Hess:** Well recently we found out that we to pay \$35,000 for an architect, so we're looking into it. I had asked Jim Downing if he'd be interested, and he stated that he was retired.

Unknown Lady: So if we were bigger, we would get more grants? **Hess:** That's correct, the more runs you have and the larger your geological area is the more favor you receive from the grant committees.

Grower's Employee man: That's not true. What percentage do you get compared to Phoenix? They run a lot more calls than you. If what you are saying is true, you would never get a grant compared to Phoenix or someone bigger. **Hess:** During my tenure in Quartzsite we have been awarded over

\$5,000,000 in grant funding. When we expanded our district in fact, we received the SAFER Grant for nearly 2.2 million. Man: Yeah,yeah,yeah.

Wyoming Man: What is the comparison of medical vs. fire calls? Hess: We average around 85 to 90% medical with the balance being fires,etc.

Doug Wolfe: I still say we should take this to a vote of the people.

Lynette Maynes: Agreed, we need more info.

Teena Conrad: Okay, I am bringing the comments to a close. Thank you everyone.

C. Close Public Hearing.**The Public Hearing was closed at 7:57pm by Teena Conrad.**

D. Discussion and Possible Action re: possible adoption of Resolution 2025-02-27, approving the merger of the McMullen Valley Fire District and the Quartzsite Fire District.

S. Rees made a motion to table this agenda item until the next regular meeting. J. Walton seconded. S. Rees and J. Walton were in favor of this motion, Teena Conrad, Susan Sewell and Kenneth Montijo voted nay. Motion failed.

Jennifer Walton made a motion that the board take the matter of the District Merger to a vote of the people, S. Rees seconded. Susan Sewell, Teena Conrad and Kenneth Montijo voted nay. Motion failed.

Susan Sewell made a motion to approve the merger, Teena Conrad seconded. Susan Sewell and Kenneth Montijo voted aye, J. Walton, Sam Rees and Teena Conrad voted nay. Motion failed.

9. Adjourn Meeting: **Teena Conrad adjourned the meeting at 8:35pm**

Teena Conrad Chairperson

Susan Sewell Clerk

Jennifer Walton Member

Sam Rees Member

Kenneth Montijo