

**MINUTES OF THE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FOR A POTENTIAL SPECIAL BALLOT TAX MEASURE FOR FIRE
PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
TWENTYNINE PALMS WATER DISTRICT
72401 HATCH ROAD, TWENTYNINE PALMS, CA**

JUNE 12, 2013

The meeting convened at 6:04 p.m. Chairman Adam Lunn led the pledge of allegiance.

Committee Members Present:

Adam Lunn, Chairman
Larry Bowden, Vice Chairman
Antonio Jimenez
Randy Leazer - Tardy
Mary Reeves

Management

Fire Chief Jim Thompson
Tamara Alaniz, General Manager
Cindy Fowlkes, District Secretary

Committee Members Absent:

The following Agenda items were discussed.

Public Comment

None

Review of May Meeting Materials

- Mr. Lunn clarified that the only option the Water District has to fund the Fire Department is the special tax. Mr. Lunn inquired if it was possible to mix City funding with the special tax in order to split funding for both Fire Stations. City funds would be used to fund the Adobe Fire Station and the special tax could then be used to fund the Lear Fire Station. He also suggested a suicide clause, within the special tax, used to fund local service. Chief Thompson would have to seek legal counsel on the matter of a suicide clause.
- Mr. Lunn also asked if the Water District Board will be discussing tower revenue funds at the June Board Meeting.
- Mr. Jimenez questioned the use of the City's general tax levy funds to subsidize service costs for residents outside the city boundaries in Desert Heights, as well as charging service fees to non-residents and marines who do not pay property taxes.
- Mr. Bowden advised the Committee that it is the Committee's responsibility to come up with solutions within the control and funding mechanisms of the Water District. City and county subsidized funding mechanisms should not be the Committee's focus.
- Mary Reeves questioned the City attorney's memorandum regarding a JPA and the City's funding of fire protection within the City's boundaries.

Report on California Senate Constitutional Amendment 11 (SCA-11)

Chief Thompson informed the Committee that there are a number of bills in legislation to lower the 2/3 voter approval threshold down to 55%. Voter approval is still required for the amendments and they are not expected to be on the ballot until 2014.

Municipal Cost Index (MCI)

The Committee was provided with a description of what MCI takes into account when coming up with inflation adjusters.

- The Committee was presented with a spreadsheet of the Fire Department Revenue History with different inflation adjustor scenarios, illustrating the difference in CPI and MCI rate adjustors based on the various tax rates.
- MCI rate adjustors are the most comprehensive inflation adjustors.

- Mr. Bowden reminded the Committee that the perception of the community is that it expects the same services from the Fire Department regardless of whether they are volunteer or career firefighters.

Mr. Ed Vallerand, property owner and registered voter of Twentynine Palms, questioned the inflation adjustor scenarios.

Misssteps of Measure H

- Mr. Bowden informed the Committee that the following comments were made to him from members of the public: dislike for the Fire Chief; would have preferred someone else speaking in favor of the ballot measure; there wasn't enough signage for meetings; and there wasn't enough education/outreach on the matter. There needs to be a positive public relations spin on the ballot measure.
- Chief Thompson agreed that after the passing of the 2005 ballot measure Board meetings were empty and the community wasn't interested anymore. They let the community forget about the projected eight year deficit. Chief informed the Committee that approximately 20 people stopped and engaged him at the car show. The majority stopped by for their kids. If the District provides public information like a newsletter on a regular basis, and a tax measure is proposed, the newsletter can provide information but cannot ask the public to vote in support of the measure.
- Mr. Jimenez admitted that his first thought was to vote against the measure as he was not getting a raise through his retirement and thought the increase was to cover raises for Fire Department personnel. It wasn't until Chief Thompson knocked on his door and explained the reasons behind the measure that he decided to vote in favor of the ballot measure.
- The committee was in favor of adding bill stuffers, if legal, to water bills to keep the public informed and advised of the happenings at the Fire Department.
- Mr. Bowden asked for clarification on the basic tax amount for vacant lots. Vacant lots are 6/10 of a unit and are not charged at the full unit rate, over 5 acres there is an additional \$2.00 charge.

Projected Service Level Model Costs

Chief Thompson presented the Committee and the public with a visual on the white board of several different service level scenarios, including fire engines, illustrating the combination of career and volunteer personnel assigned to each Fire Station and engine.

- There would need to be a proposed \$108 ballot measure with a 3% inflation adjustor to retain the previous staffing levels at both Fire Stations in fiscal year 2014/2015.
- The majority of the reserve firefighters, with the exception of one, live outside of the community, some as far as Upland and surrounding areas.
- A Station Expenditure Comparison was illustrated to show the costs for operating the Lear and downtown Fire Stations. There was a \$108,140 shortfall for the downtown station and a \$131,562 shortfall for the Lear Station.
- The Gann Limit is based on per capita and population change, increasing/decreasing each year accordingly, and applies only to operation expenses. The current Gann Limit is set at \$1.7 million. If a tax measure exceeds the current Gann Limit there has to be a second measure on the ballot for approval, and that second measure has a four year sunset. Chief Thompson suggested the committee not recommend a measure that would exceed the Gann Limit, two ballot measures would confuse the public.

Chief Thompson would prefer the 8 personnel service level scenario at \$126 per year tax measure with a 3% MCI inflation adjustor with no sunset. The committee was in agreement.

Mr. Ed Vallerand, property owner and registered voter of Twentynine Palms, suggested the use of a CPI instead of a fixed percentage.

Future Tasks

The Committee asked Chief Thompson to provide them with the following information at the next meeting.

- Homeowner insurance requirements
- Numbers for staffing an eight person service level scenario

Mr. Bowden will not be at the next meeting.

- The committee tabled discussion on having two meetings per month until the next committee meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 10, 2013 at 6:00 p.m.