

# **LOCKWOOD FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

23141 Shake Ridge Road Volcano, CA 95689

## **Meeting of the Board of Directors Minutes - August 28, 2023 - 6:00 p.m.**

**1. Board Meeting:** 6:00pm

**2. Board Attendees:** Kelly McGee, JoAnne McLachlan, Cookie Stevens, Don Dowell and Jan Hewitt

**3. Closed Session:** none

**4. Public Comment (public matters not on the Agenda):**

John Paul Soares- Previous Board Member and Executive Director with LFPD. Wanted to push back against vicious rumors that have circulated regarding financial improprieties taking place while serving on the board. No such thing occurred and he wanted to make that clear.

**5.** July 24, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes approved as amended by Don Dowell (“**Q: Don Dowell** - Is there a mechanism for BOS on the LAFCO commission to excuse themselves from voting. **A: Yes** *(if they choose to do so, they don't have to)*.”) - JoAnne McLachlan motioned / Cookie Stevens seconded (All in)

**6.** *(no item)*

**7. Action Items:**

- a. Intent to move forward to initiate a change of organization for LFPD, requesting LFPD’s Fire Chief to draft a resolution for a vote for adoption at 9/25/23 LFPD Board Meeting.

**Opening statement from Board President Jan Hewitt:**

Voting to express intent is not a final vote. It is looking at one of the options (consolidation) utilizing LAFCO, which is a long process, involving public participation, and is an analysis of whether this is even feasible. LAFCO is well positioned as a neutral third party to analyze whether the plan and financials are feasible. This could be beneficial for LFPD. There may be other options to discuss, however, this action item is simply to decide whether or not to move forward regarding this particular option. It is not irreversible or a decision to dissolve LFPD now.

**Katherine Evatt** - resident since 1980. Husband was the first Fire Chief of LFPD. Thanks to Chief Withrow and volunteers for rebuilding the department from where it was a few years ago. Not opposed outright to consolidation as a potential option, but has some concerns about how the suggestion is moving forward. Believes the process is being rushed by the Board, without due analysis, and without adequate district landowner and fee payer involvement or public information. No newsletter or townhall meetings. Personal suggestion is to slow down and develop a strategic plan engaging your residents and fee payers, including surveys, townhall meetings, stakeholder interviews, and get a handle on what is the level of service people want and expect; what is the level of service the department plans to deliver. Plan should lay out what is needed to provide adequate services, now and in the future, from that point, do a full analysis of alternatives. Suggests utilizing services of an Ad Hoc committee, including residents and not only Board members, and an independent consultant (not affiliated with any Amador County departments). This type of analysis is necessary for informed decision-making. Wants LAFCO to host a meeting at LFPD.

**Andrea Macon** - board member for 12-13 years. Chief Withrow has done an incredible job with the department. Appreciates the job the Board members and the job they are doing. Agrees with

Katharine on everything she said. Wants answers for the community to a few questions: How would consolidation be handled through LAFCO?; How would documentation be archived?; Tax Assessment increase vote via mail- how that increase extrapolates to LFPD; How to ensure the money our district pays comes back to us and stays in this district, what control?; How will funds be impacted (Mutual Aid, Measure M, etc.)? Will the Auxiliary still exist? Would like to see the data and the numbers based on this information; How would Lockwood be staffed, apparatus be staffed, do our volunteers support the consolidation? Known cost saving in consolidation? Total value of assets, debts? Guarantee LFPD will remain open and operating, at what level? Probationary period allowing LFPD to leave AFPD; Consideration for quasi-consolidation; Can LFPD retain its Board of Directors? LFPD holds the community together, how do we keep that if combining with AFPD? Happy to help with outreach. Formal request: all residents receive mailed communication with details and answers to the questions posed this evening, as well as the total for their taxes if consolidated with AFPD; at least 2 public hearings be held here at LFPD.

**Jan Hewitt** - In answer to some of Andrea's questions - recommends reading the minutes from last Board meeting and the presentation by LAFCO, very good information that answers some of these questions (i.e. building a structure which would allow assessments from Lockwood to keep dedicated funds; Auxiliary would continue to support the community, etc.)

**Chief Withrow** - Addressed staffing and apparatus. As AFPD Fire Chief, he would be just as responsible for keeping Lockwood staffed and covered as every other community in the county. Challenge with Lockwood is this will be done mostly with volunteers, not career-staff. Goal is to maintain the current staffing level. Apparatus assigned to LFPD, LFPD needs to start planning on purchasing new equipment. Newest apparatus is almost 20 years old. Front line apparatus needs to be adequate. Equipment will not be taken away from LFPD. Auxiliary will continue to exist.

**Byron Damiani** - LAFCO is a long process, lots of detail involved. Finances with LFPD as well as AFPD will be examined. Transparency is critical and we urge public involvement. Want to see workshops to include folks at the local level. The vote tonight is for a resolution for LAFCO to start the process of examining the best possible options for LFPD, that is all at this point. This process takes approximately 5-6 months until a possible decision is made. Now we are helping the dept put together an application for LAFCO to gather data to see if this makes sense. We want to keep people informed every step of the way. It is possible for LFPD to preserve the Measure M funding and local structure, as the LFPD of the AFPD, such as being a subsidiary. Want to hear from the public on this. LAFCO can impose certain conditions to be met.

**Don Dowell** - is the process different between consolidation and reorganization, dissolution and annexation?

**Byron Damiani** - Mostly different for dissolution, but most other options have the same application process.

**Jan Hewitt** - we can stop the process at any time.

**Byron Damiani** - the process becomes the "project" - the work has to be completed in order to move forward, if not, it ends. There is a lot of flexibility with how this gets designed, won't get locked into anything. Details will be decided on through the process and thorough analysis. Including input from each organization and the public.

**Ron Huff** - very confusing, no idea what is going on. The article in the Ledger Dispatch implied that the LFPD would just go away, and indicated there would be a vote on that tonight. Confirmation that no hard decisions will be made tonight? Wants clarification on what exactly is happening. How fast is this going? Who makes the decisions? Who is LAFCO?

**Byron Damiani** - Decision makers are LFPD and AFPD. LAFCO is focused on provision of municipal services, fire departments being one of them.

**Ron Huff** - agrees with giving the volunteers and department money to run adequately.

Jan Hewitt explained the Measure M vote in the past. Also explained the property tax assessment money. It is possible to poll the community to see if they want a raise in property taxes if that is what is decided upon.

**JoAnne** - is the link available to the public on the LAFCO website referring to consolidation?

**Jan Hewitt** - it is on the LFPD website.

**JoAnne** - encourages people to read this document to understand further.

**Katherine** - explained more about the structure of the LAFCO board. None have ever functioned as an Emergency Responder- who will do the analysis of what is needed for Fire Protection? Chief Withrow will not be here forever, the future Chief. Need independent analysis (i.e. City Gate). Would gladly pay a lot more for emergency services. Doesn't think the LAFCO organization is the appropriate expertise.

**Byron Damiani** - LAFCO utilizes outside consultants to utilize their expertise where we do not have it, in regard to complex financials and structure, etc. This happens frequently.

**Andrea Macon** - what would be approx. cost for LAFCO's assistance?

**Byron Damiani** - in the thousands, not tens of thousands.

**Stephanie Grimes** - questions regarding staffing - confirming one paid staff member and the rest would be volunteer.

**Robert Withrow** - Correct, we would maintain the current staffing structure which is exactly that.

**Jan Hewitt** - what is our average call volume?

**Robert Withrow** - 30, some busier some slower. Potential for many calls. Bulk of our calls are Medical Emergencies.

**Stephanie Grimes** - during a wildfire event, if LFPD was not here, where would they respond from?

**Robert Withrow** - Pine Grove Station. Assuming they are in quarters. Pine Grove is quick to respond.

**Stephanie Grimes** - Like Katharine and Jackie, would prefer to see the data and analysis also.

Andrea Macon explained income brought in by Strike Teams, followed by further explanation by Chief Withrow.

**Jan Hewitt** - mentioned the paid staff member is on call 24/7, and the rest of the response is from volunteers, so we want to have a deep roster to draw from in regard to volunteers. Our current response time is 10 minutes, an average is 14 minutes.

**Gene Cox** - an object in motion stays in motion, you want to look into what is best and as long as the ability has the ability to use it's voice and say we don't want to go any further.

**Sharon Dowell** - Thanks Chief Withrow for everything. What is the harm of getting information before going down the consolidation route? Should we look at other processes before LAFCO?

**Kayla Dale** - Wanted to explain about the relationship between AFPD and LFPD. It is amazing. Wanted to disagree with certain statements on social media. Encourage the people in this room to speak with the volunteers about how they feel and how they work together. Core part is what do the men and women of this department want, the people who are actually doing the job day in and day out.

**Christine Cox** - Will 152 be closed?

**Robert Withrow** - Absolutely not.

**Andrew Keating** - new to the community. Appreciate the Chief and Board and what they do for the community. Encourage a slow down, possibly send out a mailer explaining what the options are and what is going on. Give the community time to digest and take it all in.

**Ron Huff** - 15-year resident. Getting information out to the community is crucial. This is all about money and the people who can give more money will, those who can't won't. Going to try to be more involved from now on.

**Jan Hewitt** - explained our 2 revenue streams. 70k a year from property tax assessments, with not much increase each year. Measure M, half cent sales tax from business done in Amador County, this funds our volunteers. Recently, our insurance has almost quadrupled, and will keep going up. Auditor rates have increased. Gas, utilities, everything is getting more expensive.

**Tim Worny** - we are not bringing in enough revenue. Don't have a stable source of revenue. Three out of the last four years we have lost money.

**Jan Hewitt** - Investing in our apparatus' future is critical. Chief Withrow explained further regarding money put into the apparatus. Firming up what we have, not purchasing anything or selling anything. This is always a big cost, but it is absolutely vital to our response and service. The apparatus needs to be safe and functional.

**Jackie Vaughn** - will LAFCO be investigating whether a tax increase is possible. Will they look at other options of bringing in money, or just reorganizing or consolidating.

**Byron Damiani** - investigating reorganizing or consolidating, not outside options.

**JoAnne McLachlan** - last October, the Board began to keep a very serious eye on finances. Decided to talk about possibly exploring options for LFPD. The thought has been in the back of our minds to keep an eye on the budget report for a while.

**Robin Bell** - Amador Pines - does Pioneer pay more assessments than Volcano? Chief Withrow said it is a case-by-case basis. Robin came wanting more information. If LFPD consolidates, will the Board of Supervisors make all the decisions moving forward? How honest of a review will we get from LAFCO?

**Chief Withrow** - we are asking these questions to answer whether there is sustainability and room for growth. Will we meet the demand for growing service, as it surely will do in the future? Will consolidation help us be sustainable. Explained that AFPD is a dependent special district which has a lot more oversight, than LFPD who is an independent special district. Extra oversight is a good thing.

**Jan Hewitt** - LFPD pays the County to provide accounting services. Great way to prevent embezzlement, etc.

**Robin Bell** - Is AFPD in good standing financially?

**Chief Withrow** - AFPD is fiscally solvent, has a healthy reserve. From AFPD's standpoint, LFPD might be a liability for AFPD and that's not fair to the residents living in AFPD. LAFCO will call this out. Different funding mechanisms will be investigated. If a raise in assessment were to happen in LFPD, the process would be similar to what AFPD went through.

**Aaron Watkins, Battalion Chief, AFPD** - described successful partnerships between LFPD and AFPD (i.e. Training Plans, Chief Officer Services, etc.)

**Megan Watts** - read letter received from Tommienne Ray and Terry Bolyard (see attached).

5-minute break

Jan Hewitt recommends reading our 2022 Operating Report

**Andrea Macon** - consider the demographic when speaking about a tax assessment increase, some would be willing to do this, however, not *everyone* would be able to or agree to.

**Cookie Stevens** - to Jackie Vaughn: how much would it cost to do a campaign for something like a proposed tax increase, get it on the ballot, etc.?

**Jackie Vaughn** - maybe about \$5k. Depends on election cycles.

**Cookie Stevens** - how long would this take?

**Jackie Vaughn** - would say around at least a year. Not something that can be done quickly.

**Cookie Stevens** - regarding raising taxes vs. consolidation. Short-term solution vs. a long-term solution. We need to think about what is best for protecting our community in the long term.

**Kelly McGee** - how much exactly would we have to increase taxes? Heard from the community that they aren't happy with increases every year.

**Tim Worny** - depends on what kind of department we want to have.

**Jan Hewitt** - these decisions need to be made sooner than later, while LFPD is in good standing, not when we are in the red and desperate for assistance.

Chief Withrow explained how he was appointed Fire Chief with AFPD. He is in an at-will position.

**Jan Hewitt** - Chief Withrow is committed to maintaining LFPD at our current level and is the best for the position, in her opinion.

**Cookie Stevens** - Chief Withrow is an excellent Fire Chief and would do anything for us and we would do anything for him.

**Don Dowell** - Chief has done a great job. Consolidation has to be justified before implementation. Increasing the revenue and decreasing cost is what it comes down to, regardless of relationship with AFPD. Think the consolidation option is premature and other options should be investigated. We should delay this at least a month or two, at least, and showed we looked at something besides the easy decision to consolidate. Don't see consolidation to be the answer. Raising our revenue is what we should be doing. Not fast-tracking the process, but looking at all the options. Hasn't seen anything or any data to support consolidation.

**Tim Worny** - we are not voting for consolidation, but exploring consolidation.

**Don Dowell** - Chief should not be the one drafting the resolution to explore consolidation.

**Jan Hewitt** - we are voting on initiating analysis for options, one being consolidation. What are the other options? We don't have grants, only so many Pancake Breakfasts- the only other option would be raising the taxes. Suggests Don Dowell heading the option of polling the community to see what their thoughts are on paying more. Have concurrent activities: LAFCO looking into consolidation *and* polling the community and finding out how much more we would have to increase the tax.

**Robert Withrow** - consolidation doesn't increase our revenue, rather gives us economy of scale.

**JoAnne McLachlan** - look at our budget to see data that supports consolidation.

**Jan Hewitt** - utilizing LAFCO makes sense because they do all the investigative leg work for that option. We shouldn't wait around in making these decisions.

**Robert Withrow** - Community is going to have a chance to voice their opinions on these matters, here at LFPD. Agree that we need to explore all options.

**Joanne** - unless we can raise four times the income, we are only delaying the eventual outcome.

**Byron Damiani** - tonight is strictly voting on the Chief drafting a resolution to submit an application to LAFCO to investigate if consolidation is an appropriate direction for LFPD to take.

**Don Dowell** - the requirement of that application is a decision of whether we go towards dissolution, annexation, reorganization, or consolidation.

**JoAnne McLachlan** - after reviewing the budget, I think we should move forward and start the process.

**Public** - how has the MOU been working, and how long?

**Robert Withrow** - a couple years and it's been working very well.

**Robert Withrow** - clarified the process of drafting the resolution to work with LAFCO to submit an application to investigate which direction LFPD should go - dissolution, annexation, reorganization, or consolidation.

Board decided that the Board will draft the resolution, not the Chief. Amending Action Item 'A'.

Cookie Stevens motioned    JoAnne McLachlan seconded    All in favor (4)    Not in favor (1)

**b. Approve and Sign the 2023 Volunteer Fire Capacity grant packet.**

Joann McLachlan motioned    Don Dowell seconded    All in favor (5)    Not in favor (0)

**c. Approve the Independent Audit Proposal from Blomburg and Griffin for the audit of FY 2023 in the amount not to exceed \$4,925.00.**

Cookie Stevens motioned    Don Dowell seconded    All in favor (5)    Not in favor (0)

**7. Treasurer's Report:** Latest info is from June.

**8. Chief's Report:**

- Ice machine installed in app bay donated by Mark and Tracy Berkner
- Finished Emergency Medical Responder class at 151 - thanks to FF Steve Clark for instructing
- New stripes on app bay - thank you Tom
- Cleaned up walnut tree at 151
- 19 calls for July (3 veg fire, 1 other, 12 medical, 3 pub assists)
- Chief transitioning to AFD email, no more LFPD email
- Chief does not receive any extra payment regarding the MOU between LFPD and AFD

**Grants** - none

**Fiscal/Planning** - none

**Policy/Procedures** - update needed in OPM

**Building** - none

**Comm/Outreach** - Upcountry Newsletter still being published. Will put more information on Facebook, as well as the website. Will continue to be diligent in publishing as much information that comes from LFPD in the future. Auxiliary has applied for a grant from the Amador Community Foundation/Jackson Rancheria for \$2000.

**Auxiliary Report** - see Board Packet

**Adjourn @ 8:35pm** - Cookie Stevens motioned / Don Dowell seconded    All in (5)    Not in favor (0)

**Next Meeting: Sept 25, 2023**

**From:** Tommiette Rey <[tommietter@yahoo.com](mailto:tommietter@yahoo.com)>

**Date:** August 27, 2023 at 10:53:34 AM PDT

**To:** [jhewittlfpd@volcano.net](mailto:jhewittlfpd@volcano.net)

**Subject: Public Comment Section at the BOD meeting on Monday, 8/28/23**

Jan,

Thank you for all your hard work and dedication. I have a prior commitment and cannot attend the LFPD Board meeting on Monday, 8/28/23; however, it is an important meeting and I would like my comments to you noted if possible in the public comment section for the record.

Tommiette Rey, 17070 Louise Lane, SC 95685

Please note that I would vote for a tax assessment increase for the continued and dedicated, service of the LFPD as it has been enhanced and evolved.



August 28, 2023

Board of Directors for Lockwood Fire Protection District  
Chief Rob Withrow

Dear LFPD Board Members and Chief Withrow:

I am writing this letter because I cannot attend this Board meeting personally as I will be out-of-town.

I have heard so much about a reorganization/partnership of Lockwood Fire Protection District with AFPD and just wanted to share my thoughts and feelings.

First I want to thank the Board for your commitment and dedication to serving on the Board – voluntarily. I also want to thank Chief Withrow for his continued dedication to Lockwood and bringing it up to the high standard that it is today.

I have been involved with LFPD for over 16 years. I've served with the Auxiliary and have been the treasurer and secretary/treasurer for the majority of that time. I also served as the Board secretary for ten plus years and have seen LFPD go through many changes. I have seen LFPD go through some really bad times; a Board that argued amongst themselves, a dwindling number of volunteers, no leadership, no professional training for volunteers, antiquated equipment, etc. I hope to never see LFPD in those situations again.

I'm not sure what the argument is regarding a partnership/reorganization between LFPD and AFPD. Is the argument: LFPD will lose their identity? LFPD will lose their equipment and close Stations 151 and 152? I attended the last Board meeting with a representative of LAFCO speaking regarding those issues. The representative went over several options of how a reorganization of LFPD could be set-up wherein LFPD does not lose their identity, their equipment, or their stations. So – now what is the argument against partnering up with AFPD. If a reorganization helps LFPD financially, gives LFPD back-up support in personnel and equipment, what is the downside?

To be honest, I just want the reassurance that if I have an emergency, a trained first responder with adequate equipment shows up to help me. I don't care what fire department their blue shirt says they are from.

I want what's best for our community to keep us protected and safe. If a reorganization of LFPD is what we need, I am in total support of reorganization/partnering with AFPD. I feel confident this proposal has been well thought out and researched and thank Chief Withrow and Board members for their diligence in doing so. Thank you.

Sincerely

Terry Bolyard