

**MORONGO VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
11207 OCOTILLO STREET. MORONGO VALLEY, CA 92256

**SPECIAL BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

7:30 p.m. Regular Business

**NOVEMBER 30, 2021**

Conference via "Zoom"

Call: 1 (669) 900-6833 Meeting ID: 847 3235 6647 Password: 413940

<https://morongocsd.specialdistrict.org/>

*Public input/questions will be conducted through Microsoft Forms which can be found on our website under the "Board Meetings" tab. The Morongo Valley CSD is in alignment with the Order of the Health Officer of the County of San Bernardino for the Control of COVID-19 dated April 23, 2020, and still in effect.*

*The Morongo Valley Community Services District complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you require special assistance to attend or participate in this meeting, please call (760) 363-6454. Materials related to any items on this agenda submitted to the Board after distribution of the agenda packet are available for public inspection during normal business hours at the CSD Main Office, 11207 Ocotillo Street, Morongo Valley, CA 92256.*

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

The Special Board Meeting of November 30, 2021, was called to order at 7:32 PM.

**B. ROLL CALL**

1. Gayl Swarat, President, **Present**
2. Kristina Brook, Vice President, **Present**
3. Laurie Klimowicz, Director, **Present**
4. Johnny Tolbert, Director, **Present**
5. Christina Gorke, Director, **Present**

**C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director Klimowicz.

**D. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The Board of Directors now takes time to consider your comments on items which are on the agenda. The President will recognize you at the appropriate time to assist in the orderly and timely conduct of the meeting. When called upon to speak, please state your name and residence. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes or less. If you wish to comment on an agenda item or non-agenda items during Public Comment, fill out the form on our website, or raise your hand. There will also be a one (1) minute Public Comment period before each agenda item.

Director of Operations Yearsley – this all depends on what the board action is tonight, these are just things I have researched so the board can make their decision. Questions came up about our supplemental tax money whether it would still be given to us if we were to close between 30 and 90 days or if we close permanently, whatever happens. So, I did give a call to them and over the last three days I've been working with the lady that is in charge of our program, she researched it with her boss and another person, they have come to a point after reading

resolutions that a temporary close from 30 to 90 days would not result in us losing any money from the tax assessment. If it were a permanent closure, it would be a different story. With that being said if it was voted on by the board to do a temporary closure, I have contacted county and talk to Scott Tuttle the Fire Chief and he's working on finishing up the contract for the board to look at. The contract should be finished after tonight. They would be able to cover our district with an engine or an ambulance. The engine would come on all car accidents, highway fires, wildland fires, residential fires, even smoke checks. The medical charge for those comes out to \$623 for the engine and \$161 for the ambulance. We have an average call volume of 1 1/2 calls a day. So, they came up with a price of \$18,000 for up to 50 calls anything over 50 calls would be charged at an hourly rate regardless of if this is temporary or permanent.

Scott Tuttle – for those of you that don't know my name is Scott Tuttle I am the assistant Fire Chief in charge of the Morongo Basin. Chief Yearsley and I have been talking for a couple of days and what he said did summarize what we talked about. The only change or difference I would say is the number of calls a week doesn't matter we will provide service regardless of the number. However, any calls that lasts longer than four hours we will charge at the hourly rates he mentioned. I also just want to make sure it is clear that this is not a long-term solution for this does not reflect the true cost of providing fire service, Fire Rescue or EMS service. This is basically just to recoup some of the costs that we would incur by running those calls in Morongo Valley. Just to note this is just a temporary emergency plan so that we can continue services to the residents of Morongo Valley.

Jacob Samu – so will County be responding from the Yucca valley fire station? Or Will County be responding from station 42 in Landers? I also don't agree with what's going to happen with the current employees, to not only remove them even if it's temporary, I think there needs to be some kind of compensation. These men and women have been working for your department and are now going to be possibly temporarily laid off with no pay and may be able to seek unemployment as Chief Yearsley stated. I feel like the people who've been working for three weeks straight and then out of nowhere for you guys to say go home, counties taking over is wrong. I am very disappointed that it's even an option you guys are really considering doing. Especially when you have been thanking them the last two meetings for all their hard work and effort. I think that's very poor. I'm responding from Yucca valley to Morongo Valley I think they're going to have a 5-minute jump on MBA. I just don't see the benefit in closing your guy's fire station. You may talk about rebuilding your staff but that needs to start with hiring people who have already applied. I'm just kind of shocked at this. Even if it's just a temporary solution. I have nothing wrong with County Fire as themselves but the response time within itself is almost shocking it's very upsetting that you guys are even considering laying our guys off with no pay and going to county.

Firefighter Paramedic Jonny Williams – I agree we love this community and I do think it's highly disrespectful for you guys to even consider county when we have been working tirelessly to keep this department open. The reason we don't have people it's not a staffing issue it's a chief issue. We have so many people that want to work here as soon as he leaves. but there's no staffing issue chief just wants to shut the station down. We've had plenty of Morongo Valley citizens who we love, who have told us they don't want this place shut down, that county is just too long of a wait. Just recently we had an accident involving Pediatrics period now do you want to wait 15 to 20 minutes for someone to respond to a child when we are 6 minutes down the road? Also, you cannot shut the station down with out working with us. Our Union Rep said that since we are Union members, if you did shut the station down that would be considered Union busting, which is highly illegal.

Sean Miller – just a brief summary of that letter I sent to you guys, it's just stating that I am one of those individuals who is willing to help out and work period I am fully qualified, and I have worked for Morongo Valley fire in the past period that letter also is saying why I currently do not work for the department. So, I'll let you guys read it. I'm willing and able to work but not until the chief steps down from his current position I don't feel comfortable working for him.

Matthew Campos – good evening. I am very disappointed that this is even under consideration we have a fire department that is busting their butts saving lives here in our valley. They respond quickly and the idea that our board of directors is even entertaining the idea of closing our fire department down they keep saying that it's temporary, but you know I I can't help but feel that you guys want to do it permanent and it's very distressing.

Don't do this, you're hurting your community. Nothing against County Fire officer Tuttle and the fire department from the county offer tremendous help they're always here when we need them, but this is our fire department this is our community, and they respond to taking care of our people and the idea that you're even entertaining close down is absolutely appalling. I can't believe that you would even consider jeopardizing the lives of this community, the property of this community, when you've got people that are willing to take over and step in. You know, we've had general managers and fire chiefs before, and we will have general managers and fire chiefs afterwards and there's absolutely no reason to even consider shutting us down thank you.

Buddy Stogner – Okay, I think that's a very bad idea, we need our community we need our little fire department we cannot risk waiting for Yucca Valley to get down on here the traffic that just it's insane. So, I mean, I don't know what needs to happen but whatever needs to happen we need to keep our local fire department up and rolling. That's about all I have to say, just come on guys figure this out for the community, thank you.

Meg Foley – I agree with everything that Matthew Campos said. I want to just point at things, like we're talking about one thing, just closure whether it be temporary or permanent. You know citizens met on Sunday and presented some ideas that could be put into motion pretty quickly and I hope no matter what route we wind up taking that the guys that are currently on staff, they're kept on staff because they can certainly be occupied helping rebuild the program even if they're not going on calls. If that's too onerous to do with the county but I hope you consider and discuss some of the options that were presented this weekend because I agree, we really need to maintain local control like we have for 60 years.

Brain – my name is Brian I have been a resident Morongo Valley for the last year and a half and I absolutely love it here. Gayl, has there been an investigation as to why the partner morale or the employee morale is down at the fire station would be my first question. Who is the responsible party to hire and train? If the Chief is not able to do his job, don't you think it's time for him to step down? As the president of the board, I find it rather interesting that you have a very strong personal opinion for someone who is in question of their leadership, the ability to run a department, hire, training staff. So, it sounds to me like there's some bias going on here. You're supporting him because of how you personally feel unfortunately, I'm just telling you what I'm hearing and what I see in here. In this meeting, the fact that we have employees who are upset now if they haven't filed a formal grievance then that's what I would recommend they do with whoever they need to do it. The chief has to be held accountable. I hear you loud and clear, you support the chief. So let me ask the chief. I don't think I have anything more else to say I think I've made my point. I think that Chief Yearsley has done a great job at doing his leadership up until this point and it might be time for him to retire and I think the board strongly needs to look into that and keep this fire department going whether it be staffed at 2/2 and a half or three or four.

Robert – yeah one thing that everybody seems to overlook is the station is the closest point to the grade. So many accidents happen, and I've seen so many of them you imagine adding five to 10 minutes to the respond time. No other station can respond as quickly as they can.

Chuck Osborne – I personally think this management is wrong. Any kind of a manager that sues the company more than once, should not be here. I understand how they could be steered wrong part of that with everything that I've heard tonight. We need to keep the fire department we cannot take the chance it going dormant for 30 days 90 days or whatever. We need to release the chief bringing a temporary chief and hire up the staff right now.

## **E. NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. FIRE DEPARTMENT STAFFING CONCERNS AND OPTIONS**

Director Tolbert gives a report from the community meeting that was held at the park. He stated that himself and Director Gorke had 7 citizens come to the meeting and voice their opinions. Some suggestions were to talk to a former fire chief, ask Deputy Chief Brakebill to

come in as interim Fire Chief, ask administrative assistant Brittany Chavez to act as interim General Manager, and allow Chief Yearsley to retire immediately.

**MOTION:** Director Tolbert motioned that Board accepts Chief Yearsley immediate retirement, allowing Chief Brakebill as the Interim Fire Chief.

**SECOND:** Director Gorke seconds

**ROLE CALL:** President Swarat, nay, Vice President Brook abstain, Director Klimowicz absent, Director Tolbert aye, Director Gorke aye.

**RESULT:** Motion does not pass.

**MOTION:** President Swarat motioned to close the Fire Department temporarily for 30 -90 days with the county taking over while the Morongo Valley CSD and Fire Department re-corporates.

**SECOND:** No second

**RESULT:** Motion does not pass

**MOTION:** Director Gorke motioned for the Board to allow Brittany Chavez into the position of Interim General Manager.

**SECOND:** Director Tolbert seconds

**ROLE CALL:** President Swarat, nay, Vice President Brook abstain, Director Klimowicz absent, Director Tolbert aye, Director Gorke aye.

**RESULT:** Motion does not pass

It was stated that for more information another special meeting would be held. A closed session would be held to evaluate Chief Yearsley's performance. It was asked that administrative assistant Brittany Chavez be present during the closed session.

2. FORMING A COMMITTEE TO FIND A GENERAL MANAGER

This item was not discussed.

**F. INDIVIDUAL DIRECTOR REPORTS**

1. President Swarat – I also want to thank the two-fire paramedic working tirelessly for the district and everyone here appreciates your hard work and we're just trying to find a way to keep service here somehow in Morongo Valley and keep it safe for you and for the people of Morongo Valley. Thank you, Steve Kennedy, for being here for the whole meeting and Chief Tuttle and our own Fire Chief.
2. Vice President Brook – basically I really appreciate everybody who came out to the meeting tonight to give us input this is not an easy job that we do as volunteers. Luckily, we've been here a long-time lot of us have worked together for a long time. We mutually respect each other, and I know that we will make a good decision because that's what we have done for the past decade. At least that I've been here my last year. I'm in my 9th year, I hope that it'll be people in the community that want to come forward because last time I was ready to stop having my shift, there was nobody that came forward that wanted to be a director. So, the Board of Supervisors appointed me and Laurie again to be directors. It's kind of thankless at times and but it's a community

I live in, and I love and love working here with the students at our school and so I'm confident that we can make a good decision once we have the information that we need. So, thank you for bearing with us thank you firefighters who or getting as much rest as you can so that you can perform your duties in this best of a manner as you can. I look forward to our meeting on Friday and then being able to make our decision.

3. Director Klimowicz – not present
4. Director Tolbert – I'd like to thank everybody that are here tonight, I heard a lot of good suggestions, a lot of good comments. Thank you very much. We will be holding another committee meeting this Sunday to MPR at 1:00 PM. We have asked you to come down and give ideas so we can bring them back to the board. To the two of you who worked all the hours, thank you, I can't thank you enough. Brittany, I know all the exit extra work you've been doing lately and for the last few years I can't thank you enough. You've kept us going and I know you wanted to keep us going now. I do believe that we have options on the table to keep this fire department operating and running smoothly and I do believe it's time for the board to step up and do what's best for the citizens of this district and not for one individual. Thank you.
5. Director Gorke – I appreciate everyone that was willing to join the meeting and stick with us for as long as they did. I know it's probably one of the bigger turnouts that we've had in a meeting at one time, so I think it's important that the community gets involved and hopefully now that we have some additional special meetings going we can keep community engagement going through this with the overall goal of keeping the Fire department going and hopefully making it robust staffing and coverage for the community thank you

**G. ADJOURNMENT – 10:12 PM**

Moved: Director Brook      Second: Director Tolbert      Vote: 4-0