



Staff report for meeting date 6/14/2023

Prepared by Secretary/Treasurer Rae Bell Arbogast– *disclaimer: any opinions expressed in this document belong to the author and do not represent the official stance of the district.*

Agenda item 4. a) Correspondence since last meeting

**Incoming:** Certificate of appreciation to all first responders from NORCAL EMS,

**Outgoing:** Pam Davis oath of office papers sent to the Sierra County Clerk Recorders Office, Thank you letter and receipt for tax purposes sent to JK Jennings foundation for \$3,000 donation for Pike City FD

**Agenda item 4. b) 5 Board member/Staff reports**

- The radio license for call sign KD27938 used for the repeater in Alleghany was renewed and is now current through 5/27/2033.
- The SAM.GOV account was renewed for another year.

**Agenda item 4. b) 7 Firehouse Projects and ADA compliance**

- The Planning Committee met again on Tuesday May 30, 2023. The purpose of the meeting was to fine-tune some of the options to be considered in the alternatives analysis for adding larger engine bays and creating an ADA compliant meeting/community space at the Pike City Firehouse. In attendance: Ned Cusato, Bruce Coons, Roland Robertson, Denise Ruane, David and Rae Bell Arbogast. Denise & Roland will be working with architect Bruce Boyd to have the alternatives analysis done. We anticipate lots of questions once Bruce Boyd gets started.

**Agenda item 4. b) 8 Pending Grants**

- ❖ Nothing actively pending at this time.

**COMMENTARY ON A FEW THINGS:**

At the May 2023 Board Meeting, a comment was made that the 2022 CAL OES Stand-by assignments were in Pike. To clarify: both of the 2022 CAL OES stand-by assignments were district-wide. The only stipulation for the staging was for them to be on stand-by for Pliocene Ridge CSD. The crew opted to remain mostly at the Pike City Firehouse to work on cleaning it up and because there is cell coverage there. They did not stay at the firehouse the entire time nor were they required to.

There was also a comment about the \$13,000 in rent revenue that the Sierra County board of supervisors (BOS) allocated to Station 2 in Alleghany for the PG&E Community Resource Center usage. When the money was received, I suggested that the Pliocene Ridge CSD board of directors ask the BOS to let it be allocated to either firehouse in Alleghany. The main reason for that was two-fold: 1. Having the money allocated separately to Station 2 would have required the creation of yet another reserve fund. 2. Fire Station 1 in Alleghany is still in need of critical repairs. At that time, it did not occur to me to ask the BOS if they could allocate the money to be used for ANY firehouse. That also would have required the creation of yet another reserve fund. Possibly this is something that should be considered: the creation of a “Capital Improvement Fund” that is not linked to a specific Fire Dept. However, in all my years of serving our fire departments, more and more I am realizing that attaching strings to our own money is not always smart.

Regarding the March 2023 changes to the Fund Policy eliminating the sections about splitting mutual aid revenue between fire departments. It recently occurred to me that the simplest way to explain the stance of those of us who supported that change is to point out that there is NO MONEY earned by the individual fire departments. If the fire departments paid their own expenses separately then you could come up with a “net earnings” figure but that is not the case.

Most important in my opinion, is the fact that the district is finally looking at long-term planning on a district-wide level. Both the Board and Staff of Pliocene Ridge CSD all agree that the highest major expense (capital expenditure) priority for the district is to determine the best way to add two large engine bays in Pike and to provide an ADA compliant community space, and then to build it! The alternatives analysis that is in the works, is the first step. This is a long-term project. The highest priority for the vehicle fleet has been identified as upgrading the Pike City FD Water Tender.

Another thing that I want to say about the reserve funds is this: last summer, after the first surplus firetruck was sold, I got a phone call from Roland wanting to know why the money had not been put into the Pike City FD Vehicle Reserve Fund yet. I was tired when he called, and his manner was very assertive. All I said was: “It takes time” or something like that and I wasn’t very nice about it either. In hindsight, I wish that I would have explained that I was waiting for the final advertising bill from the Mountain Messenger so that I could determine the total advertising expense which was being split 3 ways between all three surplus vehicles. As soon as I got that final advertising bill, the money was moved.

There is nothing complicated about how the reserve funds are updated. Currently a few policies deal with this: Policy #2070 Disposition of Assets states that the net income from vehicle and equipment sales shall be allocated to the reserve funds of the department that utilized the equipment, Policy 2120 Donations to the District states that donations that are earmarked for a specific fire department shall be placed in the “unallocated” reserve fund for the specified department, Policy # 4000 Streetlights details the procedures for updating the streetlight fund annually and of course, there is Policy #2010 Reserve Funds which was simplified at the March 2023 BOD meeting.

What is hard to follow and that needs to be cleaned up is the reserve fund tracking sheet. That sheet was developed over the years by adding to it each time that a new policy involving the reserve funds was adopted. Hopefully a new sheet will be created in time for final budget adoption this year.

Another complication is the fact that the streetlight fund cannot be updated until after the final tax income check arrives for each fiscal year. This is because the formula for arriving at the streetlight portion of the County Management fee is based on the actual percentage charged on all the tax income for the year. The final check usually arrives in July but sometimes does not arrive until August. The total fund balances on the treasurer’s report cannot be caught up to the June 30<sup>th</sup> (fiscal year-end) actual balance until after the final check arrives from the County.

#### **Response to information published by the Pike Community Support Foundation in November of 2022**

Note: I was advised not to respond directly to this article when it first came out, but I feel an ever-increasing responsibility to do so. I think it is important to address these things when they come up.

In the Pike Community Support Foundation’s November newsletter there was an article with no title or author listed that starts out on a positive note, documenting the Foundation’s contributions to the Pike City Fire Dept. since 2015. This shows that the donations, grants and fundraising proceeds were used for their intended purpose. This should be a “win-win”.

However, the next paragraph states in part that *“Our local district, the Pliocene Ridge Community Services District (PRCSD) receives local property tax revenue to serve, among others ....emergency medical and fire needs. Since 2015 ....PRCSD has purchased \$7,410 in equipment for the Pike Firefighters and has reimbursed the Foundation \$7,000 for the stairs at the Pike Firehouse.* It goes on to compare that \$14,410 spent on Pike to the \$45,705 spent by the district on equipment and vehicles for Alleghany for the same period. No mention is made about the fact that the district is responsible for ALL expenses related to running both fire departments. The dollar figures being compared between Pike and Alleghany are not an “apple to apple” comparison. The figure for Alleghany INCLUDES grants and donations, but the figure for Pike does not. The five-year history included on the district’s budget sheets represents audited figures.

It ends with the statement that: *“At the time of District Formation Pike’s Tax rate area generated 68% of local property tax revenue while Alleghany’s Tax rate area generated 15%”* These numbers are correct but taken out of context. Please see the draft Board Members handbook included in the June meeting documents for more information about the district’s formation and funding stream.

More importantly, these are not worthwhile comparisons. Some years, more will be spent on one department or the other. Donations from the non-profit corporations help all the district’s money go further. As stated above, this should be a win-win.

The whole gist of the article seems to be geared towards turning the communities against each other and/or the district! The Foundation is supposed to support the district, and this is clearly stated in the MOU between the district and the Foundation as a condition for the district to provide insurance coverage to the Foundation.

There is ALWAYS room for improvement on the part of the district. Constructive criticism is one thing, but slanted information taken out of context is not constructive in any shape or form. The good work of the Foundation is overshadowed by this negativity. The repercussions of that newsletter article continue to be felt.

There is still a huge amount of misunderstanding about the structure of the district. There are many people who still think that the non-profits are the fire departments. From my perspective all we can do is keep trying to educate ourselves and the public about what is what. To this end I have started working on a Board Member handbook.

Those of us who are involved with the district did not choose the formation of Pliocene Ridge CSD, but we have chosen to make the best of the situation. We did not invent the State Laws that govern us. We are doing our best to keep emergency services available for the benefit of our communities. Keeping the fire departments going, with ever-increasing administrative requirements and dwindling volunteerism is a gargantuan task. We need everyone pulling together. We need to support the first responders who are on call 24/7 and willing to put their lives on the line at a moment’s notice. This is what all this work is about!

I want to point out that the competitive tension felt at the PRCSD board meetings does not exist amongst the “boots on the ground” first responders. The first responders train together weekly and respond to emergencies together. They (we) fully understand that we are stronger together. If only that attitude could carry over to the board meetings and out into our communities. That is the needed medicine.

Pending items not addressed on this month's agenda:

(Staff needs more time to work on them before presenting to the board, more info needed, or conditions not right to proceed)

- Water Tender Upgrade
- Fund Policy revision (need to create simplified tracking sheet)
- MOU with non-profits (name changes) We are waiting on documentation from the AVFD non-profit corporation.
- Engine Bay conversion to ADA friendly space Pike firehouse (need cost estimate).
- Signage for firehouses (Need signs with updated department names and updated district logo)
- Long-term plan for adding two larger engine bays in Pike (defined as highest capital improvement priority first by the Chief(s) then the board in Sept. 2022 with letter to USDA Rural Development)
- **Repair to west wall of Station 1 in Alleghany. The metal siding was purchased last April, arrived last summer and is sitting in the County Yard.**
- Proposed changes to Ordinance #1 discussed in Feb. 2023 – Larry Allen found additional code that would allow us to bill for environmental spills & clean-up. More legal research is needed before a new draft will be ready for the first reading.
- ISO survey done in 2019 ~ I have not been able to get a copy of our survey docs from 2019. Every time that I contact them, they tell me to create a user account on their website, which I do, and get a message that a confirmation email will be generated but it never happens. I have contacted the person who did the survey and he said that I am not the only one having problems and that he would get back to me, but he never has. **The ISO survey will be due again next year.** It is a very involved process that I spent well over 40 hours on last time, but we did manage to get a better ISO rating for the district as a result of the work.
- Free attorney consult: I was authorized a long time ago, to inquire about the borrowing limits for CSD's to see if there is any additional information (legal precedence) besides the code but haven't done it.
- Additional Siren for Alleghany, a considerable amount of time was spent on this in conjunction with Sierra County OES and district staff (we had to get two quotes, provide information for the historical building inventory paperwork and did some sound tests). The original idea was to apply via the Homeland Security Grant Program, but for some reason Sierra County OES changed their mind about it.