

**BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS  
TRUCKEE MEADOWS FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT**

MONDAY

9:00 A.M.

MAY 5, 2025

PRESENT:

**Alexis Hill, Chair**  
**Jeanne Herman, Vice Chair**  
**Michael Clark, Commissioner**  
**Mariluz Garcia, Commissioner**  
**Clara Andriola, Commissioner**  
  
**Janis Galassini, County Clerk**  
**Chris Ketring, Deputy Fire Chief**  
**Michael Large, Deputy District Attorney**

The Board convened at 9:02 a.m. in special session in the Commission Chambers of the Washoe County Administration Complex, 1001 East Ninth Street, Reno, Nevada. Following the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our Country, County Clerk Jan Galassini called roll and the Board conducted the following business:

**25-065F      AGENDA ITEM 3 Public Comment.**

On the call for public comment, Mr. Tom Daly provided a document, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. He opined that candidates for the Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) fire chief position who had already served as a chief officer for the TMFPD had an inherent advantage due to their knowledge of current budgets, interlocal agreements, operations, the command staff, capital projects, and their relationships with members of the Board of Fire Commissioners (BOFC). He surmised that outsiders would experience a learning curve. He felt that because the new fire chief would be tasked with studying the potential for Countywide fire services consolidation in the coming months, it was a lot to ask of an outsider to learn enough to defend the interests of the TMFPD and County taxpayers in that timeframe. He did not think it was a good time for on-the-job training, and he cautioned that considering a candidate who had already expressed views in support of the consolidation of fire services would be a betrayal of constituents, taxpayers, and voters, who he claimed overwhelmingly opposed consolidation. He noted that Senate Bill 319 (SB319) was being heard by the State Assembly. He said that interim Chief Dale Way had the credentials, experience, a record of success, and the desire to serve the TMFPD. He concluded that interim Chief Way was the right man at the right time with the right skill set to serve as the next TMFPD fire chief. He urged Commissioners to select interim Chief Way for the role.

Ms. Nancy Carlson provided a document, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. She remarked that of the five candidates for TMFPD fire chief, only two had experience in Nevada. She reported that she reviewed the resumes of all five

candidates and thought they were all strong, but she surmised that the best candidate was interim Chief Way. She predicted that his local experience would allow him to begin work immediately. She outlined that he held the position at that time and was open-minded about consolidating the three local fire departments into one entity, unlike his competition. She said that SB319 had been reduced to a study, but she pointed out that the intent of SB319 was to consolidate all three departments into one. She recalled that the originator of the Bill stated several times during his presentation of SB319 to the Senate Committee on Government Affairs that the cost to the taxpayer would not be a tax, but an assessment. She determined that SB319 put the responsibility for the vote on the tax with the Board of County Commissioners (BCC), not with taxpayers. She thought taxpayers would be better served by a candidate who was open-minded and receptive to the outcome of the study, and the resulting vote by the BCC would be more palatable to constituents. She summarized that interim Chief Way was a competent and experienced fire chief, and there was no need to replace him. She strongly urged Commissioners to select interim Chief Way as the next TMFPD chief.

Ms. Penny Brock displayed a document, a copy of which was placed on file with the Clerk. She stated her support for interim Chief Way to become the permanent TMFPD fire chief. She expressed her agreement with comments from the two previous speakers. She was impressed with the interview book of candidates, and said she wished there had been something similar when Registrar of Voters (ROV) candidates were considered. She spoke about the consolidation and regionalization of fire services. She viewed the initiative as a move towards centralization of government, which she objected to. She understood that the form of government outlined in the United States Constitution retained local control, and she remarked that the framers of the Constitution intended for government to always be as close to the people as possible, not centralized. She opined that the centralization of anything was bad for Washoe County. Ms. Brock said she was appalled that the measure was taken to the State Legislature, and she theorized that Washoe County voters would never have supported it. She reported that she researched other counties in America in which centralization of fire services was considered, and she said the initiatives were always defeated by voters. She thought the BOFC was afraid to put the measure to voters, so they took it to the State Legislature. She did not understand why Clark County should decide what would happen in Washoe County, and she did not want the State to mandate matters that she felt were better determined at the County level. She asked the BOFC to not centralize fire services. She spoke about rumors of centralization of local law enforcement, which she also objected to.

Mr. Tom Dunn introduced himself as a County resident since 1968 and a paid professional firefighter in the area for the past 25 years. He remarked that the Commissioners had a great opportunity that day to select a new fire chief. He commented that it was time to move forward as a region and as a County, and he suggested that the next fire chief should build bridges and look toward the next 20 years, not back at the past 20 years. He encouraged the Commissioners to be bold and move forward.

County Clerk Jan Galassini advised the Board that she received an emailed public comment, which was placed on file.

**25-066F**      **AGENDA ITEM 4** Announcements/Reports.

There were no announcements or reports from the Board.

**25-067F**      **AGENDA ITEM 5** Recommendation, discussion and action to consider the following top candidates, Loren Dale Way, Michael Despain, Timothy Soule, Richard J. Edwards, and Walt W. White for the vacant Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District Fire Chief position, and possible selection of a Fire Chief, including making an offer of employment, and delegate the negotiation of an employment contract to Washoe County's Human Resources Director and Deputy District Attorney to be brought back at a later date for appointment and Board approval. (All Commission Districts)

Chair Hill invited the recruiter and a representative from Human Resources (HR) to provide background information about the process and what the Board of Fire Commissioners (BOFC) should expect.

HR Manager Julie Paholke spoke about the history and process leading up to the matter before the BOFC. She revealed that former Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) Chief Charles Moore started the process before he retired to ensure an efficient transition. He requested proposals from executive search agencies, which he then reviewed in collaboration with Chair Hill. Top executive search firms were identified and interviewed, and Bob Murray and Associates was selected. Ms. Paholke described that Commissioners all had the interview questions in front of them at the dais that day. She noted that each candidate was given the questions 15 minutes prior to their interview. She explained that each candidate would have 5 minutes to provide an initial overview, then 40 minutes to answer the questions posed by the Commissioners. She specified that, pursuant to Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS), consideration of the applicants was held in an open session. She encouraged the Commissioners to ask candidates follow-up questions if there was anything they needed to know that candidates did not cover in their responses. She advised that those follow-up questions could be from either their own questions or from questions asked by other Commissioners.

Bob Murray and Associates Executive Recruiter Stephanie Dietz provided an overview of the TMFPD fire chief recruitment process. She explained that the TMFPD engaged Bob Murray and Associates in late 2024 to conduct a national search to identify and recruit the next fire chief. She said that, since then, Bob Murray and Associates had taken a comprehensive and strategic approach to ensure they found the right leader for the role. She recounted a visit she made to the County on January 24, 2025, during which she met with executive board members from the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) Local 2487, TMFPD management, and TMFPD line staff. She shared that those conversations were vital in helping her understand the culture, priorities, and leadership needs of the TMFPD. She informed that those conversations, along with a public survey and a separate survey conducted of TMFPD line staff, brought insights into the type of leader the TMFPD was looking for. Bob Murray and Associates subsequently developed a detailed candidate profile that reflected the expectations and aspirations of the TMFPD.

They created a recruitment brochure, which was reviewed and approved by TMFPD leadership and County HR. She conveyed that the brochure served as the foundation of the nationwide outreach effort. She reported that 69 individuals from 16 states expressed interest in the position. Of those, 29 candidates completed and submitted full applications for evaluation. She noted that the TMFPD was a premier organization with high leadership standards. To be considered, candidates were required to hold a bachelor's degree, possess multiple leadership and specialty certifications, and have over 15 years of experience managing a complex public safety organization. She said that after careful review, 11 applicants were identified as fully qualified and were invited to the initial screening process. The results of that screening were presented to a subcommittee of the BOFC on April 10. The subcommittee reviewed the candidates and selected a group of finalists to participate in interviews. She said it was a thorough and thoughtful process designed to ensure that the next TMFPD fire chief would be a strong leader, capable manager, and someone who embodied the values of the TMFPD. She alerted Commissioners to a forced ranking sheet at the end of their packet. She encouraged them to use the ranking sheet to keep track of candidates throughout the day. She informed that after the interviews concluded, Commissioners would receive a ballot to identify their top candidate. She expressed appreciation for the support she received through the process and offered to answer any questions the Commissioners had.

Chair Hill thanked Ms. Dietz and said that she and Ms. Paholke had both been wonderful to work with. She expressed excitement about the level of candidates produced by the search.

Ms. Paholke noted that candidates were told that the five minutes of their introduction would be included in the 45 total minutes allotted for their interviews.

Mr. Loren Dale Way thanked the BOFC for their leadership and commitment to the people of the County. He said it was an honor to serve, and he was grateful for the opportunity to interview. He expressed that he had the privilege to serve as the TMFPD interim Fire Chief and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the past three months. He added that he had been a TMFPD employee for the past five years. He thanked Deputy Fire Chief Chris Ketrang, the division chiefs, and all of the TMFPD for their hard work during the interim period. He shared that he was a native Nevadan and a member of the fire service in Nevada for more than 30 years. He spoke about numerous members of his family who were part of the Clark County fire service. He described that his lineage and experience gave him knowledge, skills, and abilities directly related to the State. He cited examples of taxation, funding, purchasing, the landscape, and the importance of protecting the citizenry and property from the devastating effects of fire. He recalled an economic forum the prior week that revealed the State would have less than \$191 million to work with. He suggested that local government needed strong leadership that was willing to weather the economic storm that the State was entering and to steer agencies through to better times ahead. He remarked that he would provide that leadership because he had previously navigated similar times in Nevada. He said he would create the fiscal sustainability that the TMFPD needed to not only continue its mission, but also improve and stabilize the organization to continue service delivery and meet citizen needs in the

future. He established that the overwhelming majority of his fire service career was spent in fire prevention and administration, and he had served as a chief officer for nearly 20 years, the last 5 of which were with the TMFPD. He viewed prevention as a primary focus of the fire service with the goal of having as few fires within the community as possible.

Mr. Way shared that he was able to remember the names and interests of most TMFPD employees. He said it was important to him, and he disclosed that many people told him his recognition was meaningful to them. He related that during his tenure with the TMFPD, he applied provisions of the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) code that made defensible space requirements more applicable to the landscape in the County. He remarked that those proactive code applications had already yielded results as recently as during the Davis Fire. He predicted that even greater results would be seen over time with a more fire-resistant and resilient community through the increased use of fire-resistant building materials and methods, education, and outreach. He declared that after five years as the fire marshal, he knew the District well and had seen and worked in every part of its more than one thousand square miles. He spoke about the diversity of the area and observed that, in addition to the many Spanish-speaking households served by TMFPD, there was also significant geographic and socioeconomic diversity. He outlined that he had established strong positive relationships with many community leaders, including partners and fire professionals in Sparks, Reno, the United States Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF). He added that he also established positive relationships with State and local government leaders, local engineers, designers, builders, business owners, and most importantly, the dedicated staff of the TMFPD. He reported that he was currently the chairperson of the Governor's Board of Fire Services. He summarized that he knew the community and resided within the area served by the TMFPD. He divulged that when he and his wife relocated their family to Northern Nevada for his position with the TMFPD, they wanted to ensure that they were part of the community he would be serving. They did not even look at houses in Reno or Sparks. He disclosed that the rest of his family also resided in the area served by the TMFPD. He said he knew the BOFC and had met and worked with them for years. He commented that over the last three months, he had worked with the BOFC on many important topics, including a potential Senate Bill, operational regionalization issues, and the budget. He concluded that the Commissioners all knew him and knew what they would get from him based on his work over the past three months. He stated that because of his time with the TMFPD, he had a great deal of institutional knowledge, though he did not consider himself to be institutionalized. He affirmed that he remained open to possibilities that were in the best interest of County citizens, the organization, and employees. He specified that he had significant institutional and historical knowledge of the complex regional operational issues that TMFPD leadership was working to resolve to provide improved service delivery. He concluded that in the short time he had served as interim chief, he had navigated important legislation that could impact how fire services could be delivered in the region, settled the labor association contract, and created a budget that better reflected the economic times the County was entering.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *What is your understanding of current trends and best practices in fire suppression, emergency*

*medical services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations. How would you ensure the TMFPD remains current and adaptable? How would you integrate data and technology into the TMFPD emergency response strategy?*

Mr. Way responded that increased focus on training was a current trend in fire suppression. He reasoned that as people mastered the basics, they became more proficient. He emphasized the importance of fire-based EMS and reported that the TMFPD was the first fire service in the region to have Advanced Life Support (ALS) on all fire trucks. He added that the initiative was expanded with fire-based EMS transport beginning in 2020. He said the TMFPD had a great public-private partnership (P3) with the local ambulance company, Regional Emergency Medical Services Authority (REMSA). Regarding specialized rescue operations, Mr. Way reported that the TMFPD had and maintained a Water Extraction Team (WET) and a hazardous material (hazmat) team. He added that the TMFPD hazmat team was part of a regional hazmat response team, called TRIAD, in collaboration with the Cities of Reno and Sparks. He said the TMFPD strove to remain current and adaptable by staying engaged with teams and partners at meetings and between meetings. He explained that the WET was starting their training because it was the right time of year to do so. He informed that the hazmat team had undergone more training since the prior year, when a regional hazmat coordinator was added. He noted that training records had improved and included information about when people trained, what they trained on, and what their training needs were. He wanted to ensure that the teams were well-trained and ready to respond to whatever needs arose. He remarked that part of the job of leaders was to remain open to new ideas and adapt to current situations. He shared that the TMFPD had done a lot to integrate data and technology into their emergency response strategy. He stated that a lot of technology was purchased, though he did not know if it was being used to its fullest extent at that time. He said it was something that he had to more fully analyze. He reported that the TMFPD had obtained a subscription to FirstWatch, which provided information about the time, location, and frequency of calls and responses. He said the analysis of that data could be incorporated into the TMFPD's strategy.

Commissioner Andriola noted that she updated some of the questions that she had been assigned, had consulted with the Board's legal representative, and would ask the same questions to each candidate. She affirmed that her adjustments did not veer away from the spirit of the questions provided by HR. She asked: *How would you describe your leadership style and how has it evolved over your career? Can you give an example of a significant leadership challenge you faced in your career? How did you handle the situation, and what was the outcome?*

Mr. Way responded that his leadership style was that of a collaborative servant-leader who focused on partnerships. He said that he sought internal and external partnerships that fit the needs of the TMFPD with businesses, development, and other private entities. He conveyed that he fostered an inclusive team atmosphere with staff, clearly stated expectations, provided and ensured the necessary training for staff to perform their duties, and developed systems to hold all members, including himself, accountable. He described developing people at all organizational levels, which included collaboration

with boards at both the State and local levels. He believed in resolving conflict by listening, understanding, and analyzing the facts so that he could make reasonable and sound decisions that were best for the community and the organization. He said he strove to do right rather than be right. He supposed that conflict arose at times because people wanted to be right rather than just do the right thing. He encouraged people to focus on doing the right thing. He said that at times in a leadership role, a person had to do what was right for others, not what they thought was right or wanted to be right. He restated his earlier remark that he made it a point to know everybody within the organization and understand their professional goals and wants. Knowing that, he tried to make individualized plans for each team member. He acknowledged that many people in similar roles had similar plans, and he provided them with a roadmap to get to where they wanted to be. He said that he encouraged employees to pursue formal education, which he noted there was not a lot of in the fire service. He mentioned that formal education was increasingly important for higher positions in the fire service. He explained that he sought to form relationships where they did not currently exist but were needed in the organization. He asserted that under his leadership, the TMFPD would continue to nurture and strengthen its established relationships. He theorized that the goal of any organization was to accomplish its mission, and the TMFPD would not only do that but would also assist neighboring agencies in accomplishing their mission. He reasoned that it was the right thing to do and that assistance benefited the entire citizenry. He suggested that the TMFPD needed to reach out more to representatives and senators in Congress. He predicted that federal funding would be low for a time, but he conveyed that congressional representatives still had access to funds and were the people who could obtain that funding for the TMFPD. He added that because the TMFPD was next to USFS land and BLM land, the TMFPD was the initial responder for those areas and needed access to some USFS and BLM funding. He said he would also look to establish better and deeper relationships with the Governor's Office. He noted that the TMFPD also adjoined NDF lands and worked closely with the NDF during wildland season because the TMFPD was typically the initial responder for NDF lands. He described that his leadership style had evolved over his career. He surmised that over time, people came to understand, especially in public service, that the focus needed to be on the work, not on the person doing the work. He said he truly valued that or he would not be standing before the BOFC that day. He disclosed that creating the TMFPD budget was a recent leadership challenge for him. He revealed that he had the option to move forward without holding an all-District staff meeting prior to his interview. He thought delaying the meeting would have been better for him personally, but knew that choice would have come at an expense to other people in the organization. He chose to hold the meeting and let everybody know the truth of what was going on in the organization.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What strategies do you use to build trust and morale within your department? How do you approach succession planning and leadership development within the department?*

Mr. Way responded that one of his primary strategies to build trust and morale was to be an open, honest, and transparent leader. He observed that, aside from personnel issues that could be encountered in any organization, the work of TMFPD leaders was not secret. He advocated for collaboration with TMFPD employees and the

IAFF Local 2487. He said there were approximately 205 TMFPD employees, and he reasoned that better ideas would be generated by 204 people than just one person. He communicated that he tried to be with the employees as much as he could and asked a lot of questions when he was with them. He said he sometimes stayed at a station for hours, but more recently had not been there as much. He conveyed that succession planning was critically important to him. He stated that for the 20 years that he had been a chief officer, he had worked to prepare people for his role starting immediately. He supposed that many people did that as protection for themselves, but he thought it was in the best interests of leaders to train not one or two, but as many people as they could, especially within the senior leadership, because those were the people who would most likely move up. He added that it was crucial to train junior leadership and impart the same information because they would eventually move up into senior leadership positions. He thought people had to be encouraged, even from the start of their career, to remember that they could one day be the fire chief and CEO of the TMFPD. He disclosed that people were often scared when he said that to them because they were just starting their careers. He thought he had been given a gift in this life of the ability to sit and talk with people and realize their potential before they realized it, then outline the steps they needed to take to start making that happen.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *How do you handle interagency coordination, particularly during large-scale or multijurisdictional incidents?*

Mr. Way answered that he believed the TMFPD had a great interagency coordination and cooperation history. He recounted that the Sierra Front Cooperators Agreement was developed many years ago in the region because agencies realized that there was a significant wildland issue that they would all deal with at some point. He affirmed that the agreement was still in place and was strong. He said it encompassed all agencies across the Sierra front, and they met to map out situations well ahead of time. He said partners, including the USFS, the BLM, and the NDF, were involved. He thought that the response to the Davis Fire proved the effectiveness of the work that had been done, and he reported that much more property could have been lost without those advance planning efforts. He conveyed that the staff of the TMFPD and all cooperating agencies did a fantastic job. Mr. Way recalled the initial projections about the Davis Fire and a briefing that suggested the fire could involve property from Mt. Rose Highway to the McCarran loop, which he explained would have been analogous to the levels of devastation seen in the 2025 fires in Southern California or worse. He recounted that fire crews worked tirelessly through Monday and Tuesday in anticipation of approaching weather that was projected to worsen conditions. Ultimately, the fire lines held, and the devastation was minimized. He thought that exemplified interagency coordination on a large-scale incident. He noted that he and senior leaders in the TMFPD were not afraid to ask for help when needed.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *TMFPD has its own budget. Please describe your experience in developing, managing, and overseeing a significant budget. What are your key principles for fiscal responsibility and transparency?*



Mr. Way responded that he had almost two decades of experience with budget development, including five years of experience directly with the TMFPD. He said he was well aware of budgeting and the process employed by the TMFPD. He stated that proper understanding and oversight of the budget was a key principle. He acknowledged that spending was required to meet the objectives of the TMFPD, and he suggested that wants sometimes had to be restricted in favor of needs. He thought that approach would be necessary for the TMFPD to continue to accomplish its mission in the near future. He revealed that the cost to complete Station 37 was higher than initially projected, and recent projections for the Washoe Valley Consolidated Fire Station that TMFPD wanted to build were significantly increased from the estimate given 4 years prior. He was not sure when it would be possible to construct that station, but he said ideas were being reviewed. He shared that the immediate priority for the TMFPD was fiscal sustainability, and he spoke about the responsibility to be open and transparent. He reported that he recently, for the first time in TMFPD history, brought a member of the IAFF 2487 into the budget process. He said it was eye-opening, and the IAFF member assisted the TMFPD in identifying budget cuts that would be needed to get approval of the tentative budget. He added that there was still time to make changes before the date when the budget needed to be finalized, and he planned to continue looking at it in the next week and a half. He thought bringing in a union representative to help evaluate needs and priorities exhibited his openness and transparency in budgeting.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Can you share your philosophy about consolidation versus operational regionalization as it pertains to our area and as it relates to our current budget constraints? What is your position regarding unrestricted mutual aid if crew sizes are different? What experience do you have with grants, alternative funding sources, and/or public-private partnerships, like our relationship with REMSA?*

Mr. Way summarized Commissioner Andriola's questions to ensure his understanding. He observed that the comparative merits of consolidation and regionalization had been discussed a lot in the County recently. He thought an important part of the consideration was to clearly define the different terms. He informed that consolidation meant an actual joining together of entities, whereas regionalization and, more specifically, operational regionalization, meant that agencies would all work together. He explained that with operational regionalization, agencies would all cooperate and collaborate to get the best end result for citizens, which generally included some amount of unrestricted automatic aid. He said unrestricted automatic aid would be key, and was a concept used in most other metropolitan areas and even some smaller areas. He communicated that no entity had enough resources to respond alone to major incidents. He said an entity the size of Las Vegas Fire & Rescue was lucky if, as a single department, they could take on one big incident alone before calling for any kind of aid. He provided an example of unrestricted automatic aid from Southern Nevada, which he mentioned had unrestricted automatic aid for years. He said he would send everybody a social media post from 2019 in which North Las Vegas had a very large fire and touted the importance of the unrestricted automatic aid that had been in place for decades. He determined that Northern

Nevada was behind in that area, and he viewed operational regionalization as the goal. He surmised that every entity in the area had financial issues of some kind. He referenced a diagram that he displayed at the February 6, 2025, concurrent meeting of the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) and BOFC. He described that the diagram depicted results from a 2010 study initiated by the State Legislature. Cooperation was determined to be the lowest level to start, and consolidation the highest. The diagram also outlined intermediary steps, including a service contract and shared services. Mr. Way noted that he gained experience with those intermediary steps during the economic downturn in Southern Nevada. He reported there was a serious evaluation of the potential for shared services, but no agreement was reached. He clarified that the training divisions of Las Vegas Fire & Rescue and the North Las Vegas Fire Department worked together for a short while. He observed that those shared services sometimes stopped under more favorable economic conditions, which he disagreed with from a training perspective. He advocated for working towards shared services, which he thought aligned with the larger goal of unrestricted automatic aid in the area. He said that training for fire personnel was crucial because everybody had to act in a synchronized way to avoid creating future problems. He did not view unrestricted aid among agencies with different crew sizes as the challenge some people saw. He said everyone paid for the services they felt they could afford.

Mr. Way spoke about the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, which he believed was comprised of 42 stations and utilized three-person crews with a four-person truck. In comparison, the City of Sacramento had 24 stations and utilized 4-person crews. He reported that those agencies responded across each other's borders every day to their respective citizens, despite different crew sizes. He divulged that the majority of calls received by the TMFPD were for EMS, and the TMFPD was a primary ALS provider in the region. He thought those were core components of the services provided to citizens by TMFPD and needed to be kept. He said that was important to TMFPD and to the citizens they served. He appreciated that, because he lived in an area served by the TMFPD, it was likely that if something happened to him or his family, the crew of the first engine to respond would have two or three paramedics. He specified that there would be paramedics, not just EMTs, and noted that was the highest level of pre-hospital emergency response available. He added that the TMFPD provided the same service outside of their boundaries, but that provision was not always reciprocated. He thought the most important thing to focus on was getting help to the location of the emergency quickly. He said that had not always been the priority in the region, but he intended to make it the priority. He wanted the closest unit to respond to the incident. He viewed other factors as policy issues that could be worked on collaboratively to best prioritize calls through dispatch. He said structure fires, wildland fires, cardiac arrest, stroke, or difficulty breathing were all urgent issues that could be prioritized on the phone, and a more consolidated fire and EMS dispatch in the region would help with rapid response.

Mr. Way said the TMFPD had recently received significant grant funding. He recognized that federal funding policies were uncertain, but he shared that many TMFPD staff members were familiar with grants and would continue to seek grant funding in every possible area. He spoke about P3 and cited REMSA as a great partnership. He said REMSA had been dispatching for TMFPD for four years. He acknowledged that there were

issues at the beginning of that partnership that were since improved. He reported that REMSA had been extremely responsive to the needs and requests of TMFPD. He disclosed a two-year contract renegotiation and re-signing process of the agreement with REMSA as a transport agency that he was involved in during his time as interim Chief. He said the TMFPD appreciated the contract because it kept several people employed. He supported the expansion of P3 opportunities.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What role does a fire department play in community outreach and education? What is your strategy for addressing community concerns about wildfire risks, emergency services, or department visibility?*

Mr. Way felt that the TMFPD had been a very visible agency in the community. He said that was a priority of his predecessor, former Fire Chief Charles Moore, who made sure that, through social media, regular attendance of a chief officer at Community Advisory Boards (CABs) and Homeowners Association (HOA) meetings, the TMFPD prioritized community outreach. Mr. Way expressed his commitment to communication about the importance of home hardening. He explained that there were many older homes throughout the area served by the TMFPD, and there were methods to help prevent or minimize wildfire damage to them. He emphasized the importance of taking preventative measures and provided some examples, including the selection of an appropriate roof and adding screens over vents to prevent embers from getting into a home. He highlighted the importance of people ensuring defensible space in their landscape planning. He disclosed that public education efforts were sometimes reduced, especially during economic downturns. He acknowledged the efforts of Fire Communications Manager Adam Mayberry, who he said assisted a lot. Mr. Way described that fire inspectors went to schools for future recruitment efforts and to impart the TMFPD message of fire prevention in the home and from wildland fires. He conveyed that the TMFPD outreach initiatives were more targeted and structured than those of many other fire districts, who sometimes communicated an overly simplified message of fire prevention. He explained that a manual was developed and given to TMFPD crews to enable them to provide age-appropriate content during outreach efforts. He surmised that the community was engaged, but he mentioned that some people erroneously believed that the Fire District was able to take care of all of their problems. He stated that was very difficult to do financially. He relayed that, for several years, the TMFPD was fortunate to be able to work through an NV Energy program to take preventative action on private property near power lines. He revealed that, due to Public Utilities Commission (PUC) regulation changes, that was no longer possible. He said that the infrastructure improvement work the TMFPD was able to do had been restricted because it impacted the NV Energy budget. He speculated that there was no longer a wildfire season in the manner the County experienced many years ago. He advised that wildfires could now happen anytime, which meant people had to be more aware of risks and more responsive to fire restrictions. He concluded that he preferred education to enforcement.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *Where do you see the TMFPD in five years, and how would you lead it there?*

Mr. Way responded that he saw a bright future for TMFPD. He predicted that the TMFPD would be similar to how it was at that time, but it would be improving continually. He theorized that there would be a few key differences. He spoke about debt the TMFPD had taken on to accomplish their objectives with buildings and apparatus over the last six to seven years. He conveyed that capital needs needed to be more closely analyzed to achieve fiscal sustainability as outlined in the Strategic Plan. He said the TMFPD needed to develop a five-year Capital Plan and follow it strictly. He revealed that he was already taking steps to ensure fiscal sustainability through appropriate Capital and Extraordinary Repairs and Maintenance Funds. He cautioned against leaving those items unresolved until the end of the fiscal year to see what was left. He stated that the need for repairs and maintenance started at the beginning of the fiscal year, and he suggested that those expenses be paid for by using dedicated funds. He acknowledged that the Nevada Economic Forum did not forecast strong economic performance for the next couple of years, and he noted that the TMFPD would have to adjust accordingly. Mr. Way drew a comparison to household finances, in which a person might choose to forgo some services as a response to income reduction. He advocated for the TMFPD to make the adjustments necessary to remain a fiscally sound emergency operation that could continue to provide the services citizens needed. He reasoned that with the news from the Nevada Economic Forum and the negative impacts of new tariffs that were already evident, the future of the economy depended on federal policy, which left the TMFPD in a position of needing to watch and wait. He added that did not mean waiting without taking action, but instead indicated that appropriate measures should be taken immediately so the TMFPD would be in a secure position in five years.

Mr. Way wanted the TMFPD to operate seamlessly with neighboring jurisdictions through unrestricted automatic aid. Following that, he advised consideration of a consolidated fire and EMS dispatch center, which he recalled was a recommendation from a study done by Federal Engineering, Inc. He stated that the TMFPD was moving towards augmented cooperative efforts with the regional Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD), Hexagon. He disclosed that unrestricted automatic aid was one of the things he most looked forward to in the future of the TMFPD. He summarized that it was part of the strategic goals of the TMFPD and would help response personnel in all agencies. He emphasized that crews were in less danger when they traveled fewer miles. If the closest unit responded to a call, fewer miles were traveled. He revealed that most accidents occurred when going to or returning from a call, so reducing travel was a great mitigation tool. He concluded that consolidated fire and EMS dispatch would require a lot of political effort to realize, but he believed it was worth the effort for responders and citizens. He outlined that it came at little to no cost, gave fiscal accountability, and would positively impact service delivery to people.

Mr. Way envisioned the TMFPD maturing as an agency. He said that reforming only 13 years prior left the TMFPD young as an independent agency in the region. He felt that some history and culture had been lost over the past decade, and they were still working to restore that. He stated that the TMFPD had always been known as an innovator in the region and needed to inculcate that into their newest and youngest members because they were the future. Mr. Way thought it was important to harness the

most cherished portions of the TMFPD culture and solidify those during the teen years of the agency. He remarked that the TMFPD was the premier fire-based EMS provider in the region, and he intended to preserve that and help the agency to continually improve. He wanted to give the TMFPD a more permanent identity, better recognition as a separate organization within the region, and lead it towards being more reflective of the community it served. He noted the importance of succession planning and preparing people for future leadership. He predicted that some people currently in leadership roles would be lost over the next few years.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Way for his time. She expressed appreciation for the thoughtful responses he provided to the questions posed by the BOFC.

**10:04 a.m.**     **The Board recessed.**

**10:15 a.m.**     **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Michael Despain provided a document, copies of which were distributed to the Board and placed on file with the Clerk. He thanked the BOFC for the opportunity to speak and appreciated their hospitality. He noted that his fire experience originated in the 1980s as a volunteer firefighter in Central Valley, California. He worked in several agencies, but explained that most of his career as a Chief Officer was in the Cities of Fresno and Clovis, California which he indicated had complex districts, contracts for service, and airports. He mentioned that during his time with the Cities of Fresno and Clovis he was involved with fire service accreditation. He recalled that he was involved in the accreditation process for about 20 years, which he thought was a great experience because he was able to be a Peer Assessor who researched agencies to confirm processes and data.

Mr. Despain received his consulting experience 18 years ago and finished his career in California to become the Fire Chief in Lincoln, Nebraska. He enjoyed moving to another state to experience other ways of doing his job. He finished his Nebraskan career in 2020 and moved back to California to assist his elderly parents with end-of-life issues. He indicated that he had been an interim Fire Chief and interim Chief Officer since leaving Nebraska. He said he helped agencies with their data, deployment, analysis, and recruitment. He explained that he had been with the City of Redmond, Washington, for the last four years as an interim Deputy Chief and was now involved with long-range planning, standards of cover, deployment analysis, negotiating contracts, and multimillion-dollar grants. He mentioned that he wanted to finish his career with stability and less travel. He expressed that he loved his work and had seen hundreds of different examples of fire agencies. He asserted that travel took a toll on him and that focusing on one community was appealing. He said that he and his wife wanted to make Washoe County their home long after he retired. He wanted to be engaged as a Fire Officer but also as a community member. He noted that the document he submitted mentioned about 20 items of importance.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *What is your understanding of current trends and best practices in fire suppression, emergency medical*

*services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations. How would you ensure the TMFPD remains current and adaptable? How would you integrate data and technology into the TMFPD emergency response strategy?*

Mr. Despain mentioned that it was his job to be on the leading edge of fire services. He said that he was a part of a small group of fire chiefs, city managers, and mayors who wrote the 21st Century Fire and Emergency Services developed by the Center of Public Safety and Excellence (CPSE) and the International City County Managers Association (ICMA). He noted that the 21st Century Fire and Emergency Services White Paper was written explicitly for the fire service to address 21st-century issues. He indicated that he tried to stay prepared for the future and position agencies correctly. He said that many agencies followed the Insurance Services Office (ISO), which he said created the ISO rating. He explained that the rating dictated part of fire insurance premiums, but was an old model that the ISO attempted to update a few times to no avail. He reported that the American Association of Insurance Services (AAIS) developed a new model. He believed that many 21st Century Fire and Emergency Services and accreditation agencies would likely survive, but those who did not follow may struggle when the transition occurred. He reported that the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on fire services was interesting. He felt that fire services were not in crisis and were performing well, but there would always be blind spots pointed out by new Fire Chiefs. He opined that constant improvement and data conversions were important for the community.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved over your career? Can you give an example of a significant leadership challenge you faced in your career? How did you handle the situation, and what was the outcome?*

Mr. Despain reported that his leadership style was collaborative and that when he witnessed a problem, he felt giving the organization a chance to answer gave it the opportunity to grow organically. He noted that he discussed most problems with stakeholders and mentioned that he was authoritative when an emergency crisis or significant event occurred. He indicated that he dealt with significant events such as firefighter line-of-duty deaths, many economic downturns, the dot-com bubble, September 11th, the housing crisis, COVID-19 (C19), and layoffs. He said that he would never want to put an agency through those situations again, but sometimes people made mistakes that the agency had to fix. He stated that he was conservative in nature due to those situations.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What strategies do you use to build trust and morale within your department? How do you approach succession planning and leadership development within the department?*

Mr. Despain indicated that morale was one of the most critical aspects of fire agency success. He noted that the bigger the agency, the wider the separation between the Fire Chief and the entry-level staff members. He mentioned that he had strategies that worked well to combat the separation, so there was no loss of communication. He believed that public meetings and video conferencing were great ways to bridge the gap; however,

person-to-person experience created a sense that leadership cared about the staff as people and not just as a number. He felt that communication, personal integrity, leadership, and professional development were important. He recalled that he was lucky to have mentors who changed the course of his life. He admired what the mentors did for him and felt personal satisfaction when other people experienced the joy of work. He explained that good morale was essential for day-to-day work and enabled staff to see their own potential. He recounted that in every agency he led as fire chief, an internal candidate filled his position upon his departure from the organization. He noted that outside recruitment was not even deemed necessary in some instances because an internal candidate was determined as the clear winner. He opined that those determinations were not always the case on the first day he began as fire chief in those agencies. He explained that he developed strengths for many positions over time to ensure future leadership in the next fire chief, deputy chief, and other roles. He noted that those efforts created a cycle that generated energy and personnel morale, which provided the momentum needed for additional morale to be produced, thus repeating the pattern.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *How do you handle interagency coordination, particularly during large-scale or multijurisdictional incidents?*

Mr. Despain recalled that he spent nine years on a type one incident management team that entailed performing across California and occasionally other states. He noted that the team assisted with large-scale incidents such as flooding, earthquakes, and wildland fires. He mentioned that he was in command of the general staff, and an incident commander. He indicated that he spent most of his career in the California fire agencies, which he said had comprehensive mutual automatic aid systems with boundary drops and the ability to call aircraft and resources when needed. He explained that he had worked with any kind of weird equipment that could be imagined. He recounted an incident where he had to contact a company based in Wyoming, which brought a special device that produced a specific type of mud with a unique composition that could coat debris and prevent a high volume of smoke from being generated out of burning material that would otherwise smolder for many years. He commented that mutual aid was days away when he worked at Nebraska fire agencies. He believed that the County was less complex, but had good interagency abilities.

Chair Hill asked the following pre-approved questions: *TMFPD has its own budget. Please describe your experience in developing, managing, and overseeing a significant budget. What are your key principles for fiscal responsibility and transparency?*

Mr. Despain noted that he had been involved with budget processes for about 20 years with different fire agencies. He mentioned that the budgets were never easy and he had dealt with larger and smaller budgets as compared to the TMFPD. He indicated that he dealt with complexities such as having to answer to seven different city council members, a city manager, a mayor, two boards, two commissioners, and an airport authority at the same time. He explained that he spent a lot of time at council and board meetings, but it was his job and it needed to be done to provide service. He believed that the Fire Chief needed to own the budget to the end, and he was proud to say that in his

years as the Chief Officer or Fire Chief, he never had a red budget, even during C19 and the housing crisis. He said that it was not easy and that austerity measures were implemented. He recalled that as a consultant, he needed to review budgets with every agency he worked with, and every standard cover of a strategic plan required an in-depth look at finances, including operational, long-term, and capital. As a consultant, he wanted to ensure the Fire Chiefs were supported. He communicated that his personal philosophy regarding the budget included being conservative and that he did not want to see the agency struggle. He wanted good service, to ensure employees were paid fairly, and longevity for staff without layoffs.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Can you share your philosophy about consolidation versus operational regionalization as it pertains to our area and as it relates to our current budget constraints? What is your position regarding unrestricted mutual aid if crew sizes are different? What experience do you have with grants, alternative funding sources, and/or public-private partnerships, like our relationship with REMSA?*

Mr. Despain believed that the term *regionalization* was broad, with multiple aspects that he wanted to be cautious about. He noted that the first step in any regionalization research was that it needed to be customer-centric. He indicated that the customer perspective was essential, and if regionalization offset costs for only one agency, there would be consequences. He mentioned that regionalization needed to have a tangible benefit for the customer and the agency, and that deployment and staffing were a small part of the service. He said that the fire room of origin or the patient surviving a health crisis needed to be discussed, regardless of the staffing involved, so that people were not displaced. He said that an outcome-based approach was required to know whether the benefit would be mutual. He recalled that he worked with agencies that used others to make up resources they did not have, which he speculated was another way to consider regionalization if it was not completely mutual. He asserted that the community needed an equal or better level of service if regionalization was considered.

Commissioner Andriola restated the grants component of the question.

Mr. Despain reported that he brought about \$1.5 million on average in grants per year, and about \$13 million in grants while working in Redmond, Washington. He noted that he negotiated P3 with ambulance providers, energy companies, and private industries that benefited local taxpayers. He believed there were many different alternative funding and grants available but cautioned that it was essential to ensure the grant had a good return on investment. He mentioned that he helped obtain the first electric fire truck for the State of Washington, which he felt was notable because he did it with enough grants that the agency would only need to spend between \$0 and \$300,000 for a \$2 million apparatus. He indicated that he would use caution when determining where an electric unit made sense, but for an agency to get an engine for no money was a good deal.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What role does a fire department play in community outreach and education? What is your*



*strategy for addressing community concerns about wildfire risks, emergency services, or department visibility?*

Mr. Despain said that he was very pleased with what he witnessed from the TMFPD and believed that they did a better-than-average job performing outreach to the community and providing public education. He noted that the TMFPD was able to provide community members with more than anecdotal reasons, which he believed were valuable. He reported that when he ran the analysis for the TMFPD's cost versus other agencies, the cost was comparable. He opined that some in the community might believe that the TMFPD paid too much, but if the residents were shown the cost in other areas, it would show competitiveness.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *Where do you see the TMFPD in five years, and how would you lead it there?*

Mr. Despain explained that he left every agency he worked at better than when he arrived. He said that doing a better job of explaining cost outcomes would hopefully provide a better experience. He discussed agency report cards with supportive data for the community to understand why the TMFPD was doing a good job. He hoped to bring the TMFPD into a better financial position by finding funding opportunities and through P3. He expressed that he could not guarantee the outcome of an abundance of additional funding because he felt the TMFPD was already doing a great job bringing in funds. He mentioned that there were always more options, and it took time to sort through them. He believed that there were aspects that would direct where the TMFPD could go long after he retired, regarding strategic planning and morale, and to create an environment that was universal. He indicated the foundation of the TMFPD would not need to change but smaller aspects could be improved. He recalled agencies he worked for that were 15 years into their strategic plans and were recycling options because those plans were still a core component of the fire service goals.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Despain for his time and careful consideration of the BOFC's questions.

Mr. Despain thanked the BOFC for the opportunity.

**10:43 a.m.**     **The Board recessed.**

**10:57 a.m.**     **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Mr. Soule thanked the BOFC for the process and consideration. He reported that he started as a volunteer firefighter outside of Cleveland, Ohio, and had been a social worker prior to that. He noted that he received a graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) to work with troubled children. He mentioned that he moved to Montana and worked in outward-bound programming for troubled teens before returning to Cleveland, Ohio, after the end of a personal relationship. He indicated that he joined a volunteer fire department after seeking to become part of the community. He said that he

found he preferred to be on fire calls than go to work, which led him to understand that most employers did not want to lose their employees in the middle of the day to respond to fire calls. He commented that he began testing to become a firefighter and entered the workforce in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, 30 years ago. He believed that it had been a fantastic career and that he considered himself a fire geek. He explained that he loved every aspect of working in the fire service. He recalled that his wife used to work at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center (MCMWTC) in Pickel Meadow, California. He said that he had two children, four grandchildren, and two Jack Russell puppies and that he was very excited to be a part of the TMFPD's future.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *What is your understanding of current trends and best practices in fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations. How would you ensure the TMFPD remains current and adaptable? How would you integrate data and technology into the TMFPD emergency response strategy?*

Mr. Soule noted that the best practices for structural firefighting pertained to fire flow and path. He mentioned that aggressive firefighters used to handle everything in the interior and attacked from the unburned to the burned areas. He reported that understanding the flow path allowed the ability to perform a transitional fire attack and knock down fires from the burn side for safety and protection. He believed that firefighter mental health and cancer prevention were important because there were many occupational cancers and carcinogens related to the career. He divulged that he had lost friends after retirement to cancer. He thought that suicide was the most extreme example of mental health concerns for firefighters due to exposure to trauma and occupational stressors. He indicated that there were other mental illnesses and family disruptions that came with being a firefighter and felt that being able to mitigate and build resilience in firefighters was an ongoing and rapidly increasing area of discussion that would help with behavioral health consequences. He mentioned that he was in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program and was working on a dissertation related to the mental health of firefighters.

Mr. Soule explained that climate change had an impact on wildlands and there would not be a decrease in wildland and urban interface fires in the future. He thought that prevention and defensible space were the keys to fire-safe communities to minimize damage and consequences for large-scale events. He pointed out that forest management was important and fire suppression worked against the agency because it created more fuel for catastrophic fires. He said that seasonal drought conditions were not helping and believed that there were fire seasons year-round. He noted that specialized rescue services relied on data-driven decision-making and that there was no need for certain types of specialty rescue services if there was no need in the community. He mentioned that the TMFPD did not have a real need for high-angle rescues, and that they may be able to utilize other resources with those capacities. He asserted that different kinds of rescues could be trained but felt the technician level would require a needs assessment based on the data

from the district. He indicated that the community decided the level of service needed through representation and the level of taxes the community was willing to pay and support.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved over your career? Can you give an example of a significant leadership challenge you faced in your career? How did you handle the situation, and what was the outcome?*

Mr. Soule believed that his leadership style had evolved significantly over the years. He recalled that he would have been viewed as arrogant when he was a line officer 20 years ago. That assumption was probably correct because at the time, he felt he had his affairs in order. He indicated that the personality trait was due to some of the leadership styles of the time, with laissez-faire, democratic, and authoritarian leadership styles. He noted that his humility had evolved over the past 15 years because of the hard situations he experienced. He mentioned that those experiences taught him to rely on his team rather than his own ability. He explained that over time, servant and intent-based leadership became his management style because he wanted to be able to communicate the leader's intent and effectively assess the level of competence involved in the team to be successful. He opined that unsuccessful projects were likely due to a lack of communication or assessment and that he owned failures while allowing the team to celebrate successes together.

Mr. Soule reported that he had been through two shift schedule changes that involved changing culture and being the person between governance and membership to balance needs. He mentioned that the agency was successfully able to negotiate the change and work through the challenges related to fatigue management to keep everyone safe on the new schedule. He noted that the desire for change was due to the transition time on the road. He indicated that the agency recently had lost its transport capacity because the State of Arizona ran on a communication, coordination, and control (CON) process. American Medical Response Inc. (AMR) kept the CON for the 250,000 people the agency protected. He recalled that he had to figure out how to take care of the 30 personnel associated with the rescues. He believed that he was fortunate to be able to place those personnel on engines by adjusting the budget to allow for four-member teams instead of three.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What strategies do you use to build trust and morale within your department? How do you approach succession planning and leadership development within the department?*

Mr. Soule pointed out that he preferred challenges over a smooth environment. He said that working through challenges allowed him to build relationships and trust with staff. He noted that the TMFPD did not have many challenges but assessing the budget and finding opportunities for line and administration personnel to work together was necessary. He did not want to disparage anything that happened in the past, but difficulties happened; otherwise, there would be no need for chiefs or leaders. He recalled the creation of the Union Management Advisory Committee (UMAC) that met with administration monthly, which he continued as Fire Chief to involve membership because

it had a vested interest in how the department ran and produced success. He indicated that delegating decision-making empowered others by communicating the leader's intent.

Mr. Soule mentioned that he mentored five fire chiefs, including the first female Rural Metro Fire Department chief, and had been involved with training. He believed that the key to succession planning was to get to know the personnel, their aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses to build their skills and abilities to be successful fire chiefs.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *How do you handle interagency coordination, particularly during large-scale or multijurisdictional incidents?*

Mr. Soule mentioned that interagency coordination was best when implemented before the incident occurred. He noted that he was part of a field generals' meeting and that most large-scale incidents were caused by wildfires. He indicated that the field generals' meeting included walking fields to research past fires, sand table exercises, and evaluating capacity, and needs for the upcoming season. He said that the current year showed funding and resources were potentially impacted by the federal government. He noted that while acting as one of the initial incident commanders in a unified command, several discussions would occur on the scene while relatively close to an active incident before being able to move to a designated location. He asked where the TMFPD's Incident Command Post (ICP) was.

Chair Hill asked if he meant the incident command center.

Mr. Soule indicated that he was referring to the ICP, which must be similar to the incident command center. He said that there were cost-share agreements, and initiating the Fire Management Assistance Grant (FMAG) needed to be done quickly for the best outcome to occur. He reiterated that the key was building relationships early on outside of the fire season.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *TMFPD has its own budget. Please describe your experience in developing, managing, and overseeing a significant budget. What are your key principles for fiscal responsibility and transparency?*

Mr. Soule noted that his key principles were fiscal responsibility and transparency. He mentioned that staying within the budget and involving individuals in the process was a big deal. He recalled that in Douglas County, the budget process was a year-long. He said the agency formed a budget committee in January in collaboration with volunteer, union, and county commissioner representatives. He indicated that priorities were determined by the committee. He said that the revenue projections were not provided until March or April, but a lot of discussion occurred in the process, which provided transparency. He believed there was an opportunity to build relationships on a common theme and mentioned that building relationships and trust was essential to the budget

process because it could be a contentious topic. He felt that without communication and transparency, it was easy for individuals to feel like there were other agendas or suspicious motives. He speculated that taking care of the physical, emotional, and safety needs of personnel was important when dealing with the budget because good morale was a result of a positive culture and meeting basic needs. He said that when he was a part of the East Fork Fire Protection District (EFFPD), he was involved with State law pertaining to the protection of capital accounts. He stated it was a big deal for the EFFPD to be able to protect capital reserves so that fleet management, station upgrades, and leasehold improvements were in a protected account. He said that he also worked with the NDF to deal with the emergency fund for the insurance program. He believed that the TMFPD had bought into the program so they would not have to rely on the \$1 million emergency fund to pay for large-scale wildfires. He commented that his fundamental values and budgetary standards relied on transparency, staying within the budget, and providing good service for the taxpayer's money.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Can you share your philosophy about consolidation versus operational regionalization as it pertains to our area and as it relates to our current budget constraints? What is your position regarding unrestricted mutual aid if crew sizes are different? What experience do you have with grants, alternative funding sources, and/or public-private partnerships, like our relationship with REMSA?*

Mr. Soule communicated that he was aware that regionalization and automatic aid were in the forefront of discussions and referred to Senator Skip Daly's proposal to the Legislature. He reported that he worked with the Cadillac system during his time with the Arizona Chapter National Safety Council (ACNSC), which he said was one of the oldest and leading models. He felt there was a lot of bad involved in the system, and he was not a fan of regionalization or consolidation as a district. He said that strip annexation occurred in Phoenix, Arizona, and that noncontiguous annexation was no longer allowed in the area. He noted that the municipalities tended to do strip annexation, and the resources dispatched to newly annexed strip portions were not the municipalities that annexed the area, but instead the fire district. He said that when an area was annexed, it was the supportive area of the district that caused unfairness. He believed that governance was a concern in Phoenix because the largest agencies had the most voting power. He reported that Phoenix had 86 percent of the voting power for automatic aid and the regional dispatch center. He pointed out that everything had a cost, including common staffing, training, standard operating guidelines (SOGs), and apparatuses. He expressed that if Phoenix had the majority voting power to determine the level of cost, then all other districts turned over their accountability to their citizens to manage their budgets to Phoenix. He felt positive pressure ventilation (PPV) was a wonderful tactic in certain demographics, but in Phoenix, it was prohibited. He commented that there were different tactics in a 5-minute response zone compared to a 45-minute response zone. He communicated that rural areas would be impacted if automatic aid or regionalization occurred. He asserted that regional CAD was the second-best option. He recalled that he was a part of supervising regional dispatch in Montana and that a separate governing board was created for the dispatch center.

He explained that during his time in Kalispell, Montana, he brought the city more money in grants and specialized funding than they ever paid him in his salary over 11 years. He noted that he built relationships with insurance companies and energy companies for P3 that allowed for growth opportunities since there were communities having trouble with insurance policies in the wildland fire interface.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What role does a fire department play in community outreach and education? What is your strategy for addressing community concerns about wildfire risks, emergency services, or department visibility?*

Mr. Soule noted that community development was critical because it paid the District's bills. He mentioned that the community was investing in their area with trust in the fire department and the governing board. He explained that if there was a lack of effective communication or outreach to manage the relationship, it created difficulties when needs arose. He said that the only good preventative measure in the wildland urban interface was to create defensible spaces and a fire space community. He commented that the TMFPD was a leader in green waste and defensible space initiatives, which he felt was important. He communicated that he was saddened to hear the green waste program would be paused due to a lack of funding this year. He reported that Douglas County collected green waste for individuals and sent seasonal staff and suppression personnel to create defensible spaces for those who could not do it on their own. He recalled his home burning down as a child shortly before Christmas in Baltimore, Maryland. He indicated that the volunteer fire department hosted a collection for his family and brought clothing and presents on Christmas Day to make up for what they lost. He said that he had been a part of the same measures since joining the Union. He pointed out that the Union collected toys and adopted several families to deliver gifts to, and that the agency built handicap ramps and bought air conditioners for individuals in need. He believed that there were many things to look out for when on an EMS call, including fire alarms and ensuring people had their basic needs met. He asserted that the Rural Metro Fire Department had a community connect program for gatekeeping systems that allowed the Fire Department to connect needs with individuals. He said that he met with three individuals from Commissioner Herman's district who expressed concern over the lack of communication from the BOFC and the TMFPD, which he felt was valid if a resident did not feel heard. He believed that communication and availability were essential to the community.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *Where do you see the TMFPD in five years, and how would you lead it there?*

Mr. Soule thought that keeping up with population growth, complex wildland incidents, and preparations over the next five years was important. He was not aware of any opportunity for townships or interagency agreements with the TMFPD to provide services, and he did not believe regionalization was prosperous. He said that addressing the automatic aid system and governance to ensure that protection was in place for the TMFPD was important. He speculated that if a city annexed a district in Montana, there would be financial compensation to the district for the loss of revenue. He thought

statutory efforts were needed for financial sustainability while addressing the increasing needs of the wildland community, and said climate change was an equally important factor. He referred to heart saver communities and developing a relationship with REMSA to enhance EMS rapid response and the survivability of constituents. He explained that there were many opportunities available by building depth in personnel, so the staff did not work in only one category. He indicated that firefighter paramedics were the best option because they provided a wide range of skills and abilities to meet the greatest needs of the department and community.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Soule for his time and consideration of the questions.

Mr. Soule appreciated the opportunity.

**11:42 a.m.**     **The Board recessed.**

**12:45 p.m.**     **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Richard J. Edwards provided an introduction with highlights from his resume. He submitted documents, copies of which were placed on file with the Clerk and distributed to the BOFC.

Mr. Edwards greeted the Board and stated that he brought more than 30 years of experience as a firefighter in California to the TMFPD. He recounted that he had served the City of Stockton Fire Department (Stockton FD) for the previous 25 years, beginning as a firefighter paramedic before being promoted up through the ranks and holding every role within the Stockton FD over that time.

Mr. Edwards described some of his most notable points in his career. He recounted that he spent approximately seven years in the Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) company, was familiar with technical rescues, and worked in busy downtown fire companies. He noted that he spent three years as a battalion chief, commanding fires within a busy battalion, not just in the City of Stockton, but at all magnitudes while responding to some of the largest wildland fires throughout California. He explained that he helped mitigate and extinguish those wildland fires, served on incident management teams, and conducted other duties. He reported having served as the fire marshal for approximately three years and noted that he had a good understanding and knowledge of the International Fire Code (IFC). He explained that he conducted a complete overhaul of Stockton FD's Fire Prevention Bureau by increasing staffing from 8 to 25 members and bringing plan review services back to that bureau. He expressed that the aspect of those achievements that he was most proud of was that he did so without any increase in cost to the community and with no General Fund subsidy, as that had all been done through a fee-for-service model. He stated that as a deputy fire chief of administration he oversaw a program for fire dispatch services and worked with the state legislation to change California law regarding how calls were dispatched, who could decide what calls were responded to, and ensured the ability to Emergency Medical Dispatch (EMD) the agency's own calls. He noted that

those efforts were successful, as the measures were signed into California law in 2019 and implemented into the Stockton FD's regional dispatch center in 2020.

Mr. Edwards explained that he had served as the fire chief for the previous five years. He recounted that the time in that position was very tumultuous, as his first two months in that role coincided with the C19 pandemic, which he noted had a profound effect on the fire department. He explained that the firefighters responded to calls throughout the day without knowing how the pandemic would impact them. He expressed pride in working with the city manager and making C19 a presumptive illness before California instituted that into state law. He explained that those efforts were done to ensure that their firefighters were taken care of should they contract C19 without knowing how that would impact them. He emphasized that those efforts were instrumental and helped to set his career as fire chief on the right track by developing relationships with the community and the firefighters. He elaborated that during that same time, he developed a strategic plan for the Stockton FD, which he indicated was outlined in the document he distributed to the Board through the Clerk. He described that the strategic plan was one page and included metrics, and he noted that he would discuss it in more detail as the Board asked him their questions. He stated that everyone was held accountable by the strategic plan. So, staff knew when they went to the firehouse or attended community events what was being worked toward, what the organization's vision was, and where the organization was being led in the future. He explained that the data and everything they collected for the strategic plan were reported through a data portal open for all of the community members to see and to provide transparency. He noted that during his tenure, he had the opportunity to reopen closed companies, as the City of Stockton reached bankruptcy in 2012 in one of the largest municipal bankruptcies at that time. He elaborated that 36 firefighters were laid off during bankruptcy, and an engine and truck company were closed. He recounted that over the previous three years, he was able to reopen that engine and truck company full-time with some funding assistance from federal grants, a partnership between labor and management, and the local city manager's office.

Mr. Edwards described that a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) was created for ambulance services in San Joaquin County by partnering with American Medical Response (AMR) under an alliance-type model. He opined that those efforts would help revolutionize how ambulance services were provided in San Joaquin County and create an ongoing revenue stream for the fire department that could be reinvested into fire protection services and EMS. He stated that he was most proud of having created an incredible leadership team around himself. He noted that the successes he had mentioned were not his alone, as they resulted from the entire leadership team. He reiterated that trying to grow that team from within was what he was most proud of as the fire chief at that time, as he was preparing to retire from that position in the following months, and provide an opportunity for those leaders to continue to rise within the organization. He stated that during his tenure, he had four employees become fire chiefs in other organizations who had first risen from the ranks



within his agency. He opined that his agency had a very good recipe for success, which was a factor he wanted to bring to the TMFPD.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *What is your understanding of current trends and best practices in fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations. How would you ensure the TMFPD remains current and adaptable? How would you integrate data and technology into the TMFPD emergency response strategy?*

Mr. Edwards thanked Commissioner Clark for his question and stated that the fire service was ever-evolving, like any other profession at that time. He explained that the amount of technology accessible to make jobs more effective, efficient, and safer was very present in fire suppression through technology, safety equipment, and personal protective equipment (PPE) worn by staff. He stated that the field of EMS was evolving at that time, especially as discussions about varying EMS response models continued and questions were asked about when paramedics were and were not needed, nurse navigation, and different types of services that reduced the impacts on the 911 system. He noted that those things were done to ensure people received the correct level of service. He stated that specialized rescue operations were also considered, as significant technology was involved and evolved constantly. He explained that the way to stay current with all of those changes was by having staff within the organization be involved with different committees, such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), by attending various trade and training conferences, and by being involved in building a network with vendors and others. He opined that having that level of involvement, empowering staff members to be a part of different committees, and researching different items to be brought back for the organization to evaluate whether they applied to the agency as a whole, were significant components in keeping the district informed of ongoing changes and what was adaptable at that time. He emphasized that integrating data had to be a key factor in the present fire service when discussing response times, response districts, and the need for growth as communities continued to expand to identify the most effective and efficient way to operate.

Mr. Edwards noted that those factors could be related to the data and metrics incorporated into the strategic plan in the document distributed to the Board. He stated that the strategic plan was reviewed by his organization monthly, including response times, turnout times, and call volume, to ensure the fire department was very agile and met the needs of the community by investigating the data. He noted that the data in the strategic plan drove all of Stockton FD's future decisions, as the statistics supported and proved the organization's needs for additional stations or staffing inefficiencies while providing good talking points with the community, rather than operating under reasons such as being backed up or assumptions of what was needed.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved over your career? Can*

*you give an example of a significant leadership challenge you faced in your career? How did you handle the situation, and what was the outcome?*

Mr. Edwards thanked Commissioner Andriola. He stated that he had a very inclusive leadership style. He opined that so much of what staff did at the fire service throughout the day was related to relationships. He noted that those aspects began early in their careers through tasks such as working with others in a firehouse and learning how to have those interactions, which continued as they were promoted through different ranks. He emphasized the importance of staff having good trust-based relationships. He recounted that his leadership style had changed as he grew in the organization and matured within the fire service. He opined that he had always been very authentic in how he approached situations and how he came across. He stated that he was a person of high moral standards and ethics. He described his personality as outgoing, which he noted was a factor that lent itself to having trust-based relationships. He emphasized that facilitating a positive outcome relied on those relationships when things became very difficult. He noted that as an individual moved up in the organization, they became more of a servant-leader by helping those around them and assisting the crews in becoming successful, feeling empowered, and ensuring they had the opportunity to be involved in voicing their thoughts on decisions and how they were made.

Mr. Edwards opined that transformational leadership was his biggest consideration as a fire chief. He stated that real transformational change could come as visions, alterations, and organizational modifications driven by data and future outlook. He provided the example of adopting the JPA, which changed how the Stockton FD delivered EMS services as a transformational component. He emphasized the importance of having a vision for the future bigger than himself or the organization, which instead focused on considering how to best serve the community as a whole. He believed that one of the biggest challenges he faced as a leader was the formation of the JPA for ambulance services. He recalled three different fire departments involved in the JPA, with three varying labor groups. He noted that, as could be imagined, everyone involved in that JPA had a different idea of how that should look, how it should be formed, and what outcomes they desired to see. He opined that the challenge in that effort was to bring all of those involved together because the formation of the JPA needed to be successful in order to generate the revenue necessary for continued investments into fire protection and EMS services. He recounted that some parties involved had very different perspectives on how that JPA would form. Still, he was able to bring everyone together and put their differences aside to collaboratively establish a direction for where those involved wanted the organization to go and how they could reach that. He described that he achieved that collaboration by considering and respecting all participants' differing perspectives to find the workarounds that brought inclusivity to the JPA and enabled a product to be delivered in the end that everyone could support. He expressed pride that they were able to accomplish that goal.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What strategies do you use to build trust and morale within your department? How do you approach succession planning and leadership development within the department?*

Mr. Edwards responded that the answer was entirely related back to relationships. He noted that being an authentic leader led his staff to know who he was when he showed up at a firehouse, and they could trust his words. He described himself as a person of action and stated that his words matched his actions. He thought being a good communicator helped ensure everyone remained in agreement. He noted that when staff at the department understood the organization's direction, it became easier for everyone to support those efforts so long as they could be involved and have a voice. He reiterated the importance of staff being given the opportunity to be included in decisions. He stated that when decisions were made at the Stockton FD, all chief officers and labor representatives were brought together and allowed to have a say on those rulings. He elaborated that one person did not have more say in those decisions than the other, as the system allowed the organization to understand the issues and how they could accomplish their goals, incorporate everyone's input, and ultimately eliminate oversights. He explained that as individuals, everyone had natural blind spots they might fail to identify, consider a perspective on, or think about. He opined that the more people were involved in determining those lapses on the front end, the more they could eliminate those oversights and assist each other in being more successful in what they would be trying to accomplish.

Mr. Edwards referred to Commissioner Garcia's mention of succession planning within the organization. He noted that having a formal succession plan was something he strove to achieve as fire chief at the department. He explained that during his second year as fire chief, a formal succession plan was implemented to identify every position within the fire department. He acknowledged that while he liked to think there were no job silos within the fire service, there were very many of them. He provided the example that when everyone in the fire service was brought together, those working in fire prevention would not necessarily know what dispatch was doing, nor would those dispatch workers understand precisely what was being undergone by administrative staff, and administrative staff might not be aware of what fire operations employees were doing.

Mr. Edwards explained that an employee engagement committee was established with representation from each of Stockton FD's divisions as part of the succession plan development. He noted that those involved had all become mentors from establishing that committee. He elaborated that as a result, if the agency had a dispatcher who wanted to learn how to become a fire inspector, someone would be available to help guide that individual. He stated that Stockton FD had a document that outlined what an individual would need to do to be successful in a role, what training was required, and what the ideal characteristics were for a person in that position. He opined that those efforts revolutionized Stockton FD's recruitment and retention because the department often saw employees moving to different positions within the agency, no longer leaving the city, and trying to attain higher-level leadership positions in job fields they might have never been exposed to before. He stated that those efforts for the formal succession plan had been extremely successful for Stockton FD and helped the organization grow future leaders. He explained that in addition to those achievements, all of the ranks within Stockton FD's suppression roles had a formal academy at the beginning of their position before testing occurred to set expectations and better prepare them for success within the organization. He reiterated that all of those efforts had revolutionized how things were done within the

Stockton FD and helped to create future leaders, which was part of the success of four other chief officers within the organization, who had left to become fire chiefs at different agencies. He opined that those achievements were related to having that succession plan in place and breaking down job silos to have a better understanding of what the personnel did as a fire department.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *How do you handle interagency coordination, particularly during large-scale or multijurisdictional incidents?*

Mr. Edwards complimented Vice Chair Herman's question regarding interagency coordination and noted that the process started before any incident occurred. He stated that those efforts began with training and communication on the front end for partnerships by ensuring similar standard operating procedures and guidelines existed. He elaborated that the training process involved having neighboring resources come together in the Stockton FD's training division. He specified that Stockton FD invited all of the organizations' neighboring fire districts to form training evolutions collaboratively so everyone could understand each other's capabilities, apparatus, and limitations to ensure they could all utilize each other's resources effectively and mitigate any emergency. He noted that conducting multi-agency drills was another significant component of that coordination. He explained that San Joaquin County was regionally divided into three separate areas. Those areas coordinated multi-agency drills every three months to bring all of Stockton FD's partners together with common communications, drilling, apparatus, and deployment. He opined that those efforts contributed to helping the agencies become more effective when larger incidents occurred. He noted that if those incidents were multi-jurisdictional and the agencies had a lot of resources or were located on the border of jurisdictions, then a unified command system would be utilized, but if the incident were under Stockton FD's jurisdiction that agency would serve as the incident commander and deploy the resources most effectively to mitigate the emergencies.

Mr. Edwards noted that critiques or after-action reports were conducted once an incident was over, where everyone would be brought together with their egos put aside to investigate how the agencies were successful in their response model for the event, what could be done better to help drive future training evolutions, or to identify other changes within the organization. He noted that those changes could be seen through additional communications, increased incident command training, and different tactical worksheets. He explained that those actions were taken to ensure the command and control component or strategy and tactics of emergencies could be better managed and to identify strengths and weaknesses. He added that bringing everyone back together also presented an opportunity to commend those who were due recognition and to honor them for whatever the case might have been, whether an incident was mitigated, a fire had been extinguished, or somebody had been rescued. He opined that when that action was taken, a new perspective was brought to those large-scale incidents, and fear was removed about disagreements between smaller and larger districts and between cities and districts regarding their ability to operate together. He stated that ultimately, those agencies existed for the communities they represented, not for individuals, fire chiefs, or companies. He

reiterated that the fire departments or fire districts existed only to serve their communities. He opined that they could do that much more effectively, with better results, improved customer satisfaction, and confidence from their community that the agencies would be able to respond when needed.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *TMFPD has its own budget. Please describe your experience in developing, managing, and overseeing a significant budget. What are your key principles for fiscal responsibility and transparency?*

Mr. Edwards acknowledged and responded to Commissioner Clark's question by noting that he had a unique background with budgets, which was forced on him as a member of the Stockton FD and the City of Stockton. He referred to his previous mention of the City of Stockton being one of the largest municipalities to declare bankruptcy in 2012. He recounted that the day bankruptcy was declared had been very sad for the City of Stockton as a whole, but particularly for the Stockton FD, as they lost 36 firefighters, closed two companies, and forever changed the department's response model. He stated that the Stockton FD still felt the effects of those recruitment and emergency response decisions almost 13 years after the bankruptcy. He elaborated that as a fire chief, the event gave him a different perspective regarding his approach to budgeting, with much more hypervigilance in monitoring operations regularly. He explained that Stockton FD had a municipal budget, and he worked collaboratively with a budget officer in an office directly next to his, as everything the department did was involved with money on some level and required constant communication. He stated that the department developed budgets annually for the Fiscal Year (FY) from July to June.

Mr. Edwards described the decision process for the annual budget, which involved all of the program and division managers as well as the labor leaders being brought together to ensure everyone understood what the organization was looking for, what was needed in the budget, and what would be nice to include so they could identify what could be afforded. He noted that the administrative services and the budget officer for the City of Stockton would communicate the fire department's allocation, and the department would then decide how it wanted to distribute and utilize the allocated funding. He elaborated that as department personnel went through that process, they also considered the capital improvement budget. He noted that there were firehouses in the City of Stockton that were 80 years old, which presented the need to prioritize where improvement funds would go to ensure those firehouses remained open with heaters, hot water, and all the basic necessities. He reiterated that when extra money was available, staff knew to prioritize older firehouses that needed additional amenities.

Mr. Edwards opined that a long-range financial plan guided the fiscal mindset of the Stockton FD staff as a fire department. He explained that the financial plan spanned 25 years and was considered a living document which came together as one graph that staff added to annually with information regarding the tax rates and revenues of sales and property taxes, franchise fees, generated enterprise funds for the City of Stockton, what the departments long-term Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) would cost for

retirements, and whether anything changed with the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) rates. He provided an example to explain that because the financial plan was a living document, staff could add a fire engine for \$2.3 million or purchase new fire apparatus as needed to that plan, and know what the impacts would be on the long-term plan. He opined that the process helped drive staff decisions because they could see how spending money at that time could impact the plan in five to twenty years from that point, so they could better plan for long-term fiscal commitments. He noted that once the department's budget was approved they held a meeting every other month where chief officers and labor personnel discussed topics such as expenditures, whether they were on track, whether they were tracking the right areas, whether they needed to make modifications, whether their overtime costs were too high after sending too many resources out for wildland assignments, and whether they had to cut back in certain areas for some time to ensure there would be enough funding to last the rest of the fiscal year. He added that those discussions provided the opportunity to mention whether something would need to be done in the following budget year if there was not enough funding for a particular item at that time, as they would meet six times before the next budget was prepared to prioritize a list of those items and develop a plan as they approached the next budget cycle.

Mr. Edwards described himself as a fiscally conservative fire chief who focused on ensuring the department did not exceed its means. He explained that if the organization exceeded its means, that action would lead to budget cuts to the biggest cost in the fire department, which he stated was labor. He noted that a cut to labor ultimately caused the community to suffer due to subsequent increased response times due to reductions in areas such as firehouses. He emphasized that being hypervigilant to the budget helped prevent those cuts. He explained that while Stockton FD had certain funding sources, the department heavily relied on grants. He stated that many grant opportunities were available at the state level, the federal level, and even amongst community partners. He opined that spending federal funding was much easier as a fire chief than spending money from the fire district. He noted that the federal government seemed to be very supportive of fire protection services at that time and reiterated that there were many available grants. He hoped that his response answered Commissioner Clark's questions.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Can you share your philosophy about consolidation versus operational regionalization as it pertains to our area and as it relates to our current budget constraints? What is your position regarding unrestricted mutual aid if crew sizes are different? What experience do you have with grants, alternative funding sources, and/or public-private partnerships, like our relationship with REMSA?*

Mr. Edwards asked Commissioner Andriola to repeat her questions and thanked her when she did so. He opined that, given the budget constraints at that time, there was a lot to analyze when comparing consolidation and regionalization. He informed the Board that he had substantial experience with automatic aid agreements where agencies could share resources back and forth without conducting a full consolidation or implementing a regionalization plan. He noted that his experience was related to certain aspects of the regionalization of fire services. He explained that when agencies were more

efficient in deploying their resources to be used most effectively, the availability of those resources to be utilized for other calls or community members would increase. He reiterated his belief that he had significant experience under automatic aid, which he noted was used substantially within the Stockton FD and San Joaquin County and it was where they often saw boundaries drop. He stated that the automatic aid between those organizations allowed for resources to be shared back and forth and ensured the closest unit was dispatched to emergencies.

Mr. Edwards opined that regionalization was a distinct issue. He described trying to address it in areas like Stockton, California, which he explained was in a county with over 16 different fire districts. He noted that there were efficiencies of scale within those regionalization efforts. He believed there were also additional political challenges to consider, such as differing governing boards or opposing philosophical mindsets on how fire services should be delivered. He noted that those areas demonstrated the effectiveness of automatic aid agreements, as they did not necessarily impact any single board but affected how the fire districts helped the entire region and improved the deployment of resources. He recounted having done a lot of studying on the local regionalization conversations, such as the discussions regarding SB319. He knew that SB319 was one of the bills that aimed to help drive regionalization efforts. He recalled seeing that SB319 was reduced to a study to investigate regionalization further. He opined that the conversation regarding regionalization would ultimately come down to all parties agreeing on their desire for something bigger than what existed at that time and considering the true needs of the jurisdictions to enable a large, singular fire protection agency. He emphasized that things became very complicated when the Standards of Cover (SOC), preferred resource locations, apparatus and firehouse needs, response time models, and potential firehouse relocations were looked at. He noted that while regionalization might look cheaper on the surface, there could be considerable costs that would not be known without a study. He believed that future growth and where development might occur were factors that had to be considered with regionalization in order to be very strategic for future firehouse locations, resource sharing, and response models. He hoped that he had answered that point of Commissioner Andriola's question.

Mr. Edwards referred to Commissioner Andriola's second question and agreed that unrestricted mutual aid with different crew sizes was a challenge. He explained that as a fire chief, he was firm in his position that he would not do automatic aid on a day-to-day basis with those who did not have the same level of crew service or crew size. He noted that the community paid for a certain number of firefighters on an apparatus and for paramedics. He elaborated that if his department sent services to others on a regular basis, those services could be given to another agency that might not be willing to pay for them, and the community would subsequently receive a different level of service. He emphasized that the situation would be completely different if there were a major incident, such as a building fire, involving a life safety component. He stressed that in such cases, they would go forward and help the agency, as that was the right thing to do because the fire service existed to help others. He opined that mutual aid was ultimately set up so there would be

an exchange of like-for-like resources, which he stressed was the entire idea philosophy behind mutual aid.

Mr. Edwards described his experience with grants. He expressed pride in the Stockton FD having received approximately \$25 million in grants over the previous five years, sourced primarily from federal grants given by the Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program (AFGP) and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Grants (SAFER). He recounted that Stockton FD received grants from SAFER two times for more than 16 positions, and AFGP grants were given for apparatus, Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA), covering the schooling and time for over 10 paramedics to be trained, and purchasing gas monitors. He explained that through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, Stockton FD was able to leverage almost \$9 million to purchase new Type 1 fire engines, ladder trucks, brush trucks, and chief officer vehicles. He noted that the Stockton FD also received smaller grants through the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to purchase extrication equipment, including two sets of electronic eDRAULIC extrication tools. He reiterated that he was well-versed in the federal grant process and was very familiar with the audit process. He opined that the audit process was not fun and recounted that the SAFER grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) included a tremendous amount of audits due to the significant amount of personnel movement involved in each of those grants.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What role does a fire department play in community outreach and education? What is your strategy for addressing community concerns about wildfire risks, emergency services, or department visibility?*

Mr. Edwards responded to Commissioner Garcia's question, noting that the fire department played a huge role in community outreach. He emphasized that department personnel were always out in the community, and community members saw firefighters every day, from training emergency scenes to shopping at the grocery store. He emphasized the importance of community outreach as an opportunity to interact with the community, prevent fires, and communicate with community members. He explained that the idea behind education was that if the department could teach the community, fires could be prevented, wildfire risk could be reduced, and slips and falls could be prevented, which would reduce the calls for service to the fire district and provide a higher level of safety to community members. He noted that the educational component was seen in regular town hall meetings where the fire chief, fire prevention bureau, and companies regularly attended community events. He stressed the necessity of those efforts, as very many of those in the community knew nothing about the fire district. He recounted speaking to many people during his career who thought firefighters sat at a firehouse in a recliner and only were out working when the alarm rang, after seeing something similar on television. He explained that many knew nothing about the training involved in keeping personnel prepared, the administrative tasks like completing inspections of fire hydrants and buildings, or the community outreach with neighboring agencies. He noted that the Stockton FD's firefighters were extremely busy, and their environment required them to be highly trained, responsive, and knowledgeable about the exposures and risks present in



the community. He opined that the more staff could reach out to the community, the more they could change their mindsets about things, which he emphasized was especially important in a wildfire-prone area such as the one overseen by the TMFPD. He stated that regular meetings had tremendous value to increase understanding of building construction, how vegetation was managed through shaded fuel breaks, and different kinds of fuels programs. He explained that the value was added back to the fire district and the community, so everyone could know what department personnel were doing to help protect them when staff were not responding to 911 calls.

Mr. Edwards acknowledged that there were many concerns regarding wildfires and noted that those would continue, especially after having major fires such as the Davis Fire. He suggested that the TMFPD could get ahead of those feelings and further increase the chance to reduce risk by holding town hall events to give the citizenry the tools to protect their own property successfully should a major wildfire impact neighborhoods in the community. He emphasized that providing those events contributed a huge service to the community members. He noted that more public education provided on emergency services, as a whole, made community members safer, which subsequently kept them from needing to call 911 and reduced the fire districts' call volume so personnel could focus efforts on those who were most in need of 911 services. He noted the concept of visibility and stated that staff should be in the community as much as possible, as the community funded them, and the fire department served as a benefit and service for the citizenry. He noted that those efforts started with the neighborhood firehouses and fire apparatus, which was why firefighters took such pride in the landscaping of their facilities and the washing and waxing of their apparatus. He elaborated that taking care of the apparatus let community members know how much the personnel appreciated them for investing in the fire department and fire district. He opined that each time the community saw fire personnel, an opportunity was presented for an interaction to share what the fire district did and the services staff provided, and to form a better relationship and increase connectedness.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *Where do you see the TMFPD in five years, and how would you lead it there?*

Vice Chair Herman remarked that she represented District 5, which she described as very rural. She asked if Mr. Edwards' vision for the TMFPD in the future included an improvement of her district, as the population had grown impressively. She noted that District 5 was very large and spread out, and she hoped that his plan for the TMFPD would include future improvements to the fire service in that area.

Mr. Edwards responded to Vice Chair Herman's questions and noted that her questions demonstrated what excited him and why he wanted to come to the TMFPD. He opined that there was a significant opportunity in the area in the coming years. He stated that the TMFPD had a phenomenal budget that would only continue to grow and fiscal health that could be leveraged to improve how fire services were provided as the entire County grew. He recalled seeing that the population of the County would grow by over 150,000 people in the following 15 years and stated that the increase in population per year

was notable. He explained that population growth would create a demand for the TMFPD to increase service levels. He noted that he viewed growth as an opportunity to improve the department's service delivery efficiency and suggested that it presented the chance to investigate different models for service delivery. He elaborated with examples of how opportunities could be examined by postulating whether the TMFPD could expand upon the service delivery model of three-person engine companies or four-person truck companies used at that time, further analyze the wildland program, and better meet the needs of more rural customers and the fire protection services in that area for wildfire protection. He speculated that there would likely be changes in dispatch in the future and acknowledged that the Hexagon program was expected to be implemented soon. He emphasized that firefighter safety would be one of his first priorities as fire chief. He opined that a firefighter safety issue arose when firefighters were not working on the same frequencies and the same CAD system without immediate identification between those centers. He reflected that he had lost a firefighter in the line of duty and would do whatever he could collaboratively or as a fire chief to prevent that loss from happening again, with one of his first recommendations to the Board being to implement something to prevent that.

Mr. Edwards described some of the other things he considered, including his belief that the TMFPD had a great strategic plan and that he would try to operationalize that plan so all the members understood, could communicate about, and agreed with where the Fire District was going and the organization's vision. He opined that those factors were very important for an organization. He stated that the organization could not have staff going in different directions, as they were most effective when aligned and going the same way. Mr. Edwards noted that another major consideration was community safety and outreach because the area was prone to wildfire. He emphasized the importance of considering community safety, particularly because of longer response times in more rural areas and the need for the tools and abilities to address that, looking into code changes, the potential for new construction, increased community outreach, and evacuation programs to ensure that those systems were in place and the related education programs were accessible. He opined that while addressing the expected total growth for the region over the next five years, a good standard to cover was to see whether the District had firehouses in the best possible locations to provide the highest level of service and meet response times. He noted that if that was not the case, the District could investigate how to improve service levels, such as by asking how it could leverage grants, funding opportunities, and community partnerships to increase what was provided without having to exclusively use the General Fund or the members of the community. He opined that many other alternative and creative ways to achieve those goals could be leveraged to improve the District.

Mr. Edwards noted that another component he intended to discuss was related to firefighter safety and acknowledged that he had mentioned dispatch previously. He suggested that there was an opportunity to investigate how resources were deployed, especially in certain areas, such as with like-for-like resources in automatic and mutual aid, that would ensure the agencies had similar staffing arrangements. He remarked on the connection between those factors and partnerships with neighboring jurisdictions. He explained that if the District had automatic aid agreements with neighboring jurisdictions,

staff would train with their partners regularly and would have standard operating procedures or guidelines so everyone knew what to do when they arrived at a building fire, warehouse fire, or another type of technical rescue and could work under the same plan instead of staff from each of the jurisdictions using potentially differing procedures. He noted that those factors could create confusion on the fire ground, within command and control, and in strategies and tactics. He reiterated that when partners were in alignment, they ultimately provided better service to their communities. He stated that as a fire chief, he lived by an ethos of delivering the highest level of service that the department was capable of and taking the best care of the men and women who provided those services daily. He explained that taking care of those personnel members increased the level of service they could provide because morale went up, staff were healthier with fewer injuries, and had fewer workplace issues, ultimately leading to the fire department flourishing.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. Edwards and noted those were the last of the Board's questions. She appreciated Mr. Edwards' consideration of the questions they had asked him. She explained that they would take a break before beginning the interview for the next candidate.

Mr. Edwards thanked the Board for having him there and voiced his appreciation. He stated that he would be honored to be their next fire chief. He opined that the TMFPD was an incredible organization with an exciting foundation, including the members, budget, outlook, and challenges. He suggested that he was well-versed in addressing many of the issues facing the organization, ranging from the conversation regarding regionalization to automatic aid and dispatch. He noted that he had built his career as a fire chief on similar factors and opined that it seemed as though the position was constructed for him on some level. He reiterated that he would be very excited to be the next fire chief of the TMFPD and appreciated the opportunity to interview.

**1:30 p.m.**      **The Board recessed.**

**1:45 p.m.**      **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

Chair Hill invited the final candidate forward for their interview. She explained that the candidate would begin with an introduction, followed by members of the Board of Fire Commissioners (BOFC) asking a series of questions.

Walt W. White introduced himself as the Fire Chief for the City of Sparks Fire Department (SFD) and explained that he was very humbled and honored to serve the community in that role. He expressed gratitude to the Mayor of Sparks and the Sparks City Council for entrusting him with that responsibility. He hoped to convey to the Board his qualifications and suitability for the TMFPD fire chief position. He asked if the Board wanted additional background, and Chair Hill indicated that it was up to his discretion as it was his introduction.

Mr. White informed the Board that he was a 40-year fire service veteran and had served as fire chief for over a decade across three different agencies. He recounted

that he had risen through the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District ranks, which he noted was previously 16 different agencies that, through a series of reorganizations, formed a singular major metropolitan fire department in 2000. He explained that he moved to the local area when he accepted his position at the SFD just over two years before that point. He reported that he initially lived in the Crystal Bay area within Washoe County, which he noted belonged to the district represented by Chair Hill, but had since relocated to Sparks, within the district represented by Commissioner Garcia. He stated that he and his wife had been married for 32 years and had two children together, with his youngest child attending the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) to study environmental science. He remarked on the recent arrival of his first grandchild. He felt fortunate and excited about the opportunity to be at the interview that day.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *What is your understanding of current trends and best practices in fire suppression, emergency medical services (EMS), and specialized rescue operations. How would you ensure the TMFPD remains current and adaptable? How would you integrate data and technology into the TMFPD emergency response strategy?*

Mr. White thanked Commissioner Clark and responded that there were quite a few trends when discussing fire protection and suppression. He explained that at that time, a home was almost twice as likely to burn from a fire that started outside compared to one that began within. As a result, home hardening and building community resilience had become very important. He described being very experienced in those things and recounted that he previously worked in a rural area with a vulnerable population. He explained that there were several things staff did to address working in such a location. He explained that first, his fire prevention division was rebranded as the community risk reduction division and conducted services in addition to providing prevention inspections and fire investigations, such as helping communities achieve Firewise status with the NFPA. He noted that as fire chief with the Amador Fire Protection District (AFPD), the agency conducted the first of its kind home hardening fair at the Amador County Fairgrounds. He explained that the AFPD brought vendors to that fair who provided ember-resistant vents, preferred roofing materials, and substantial education on vegetation management. He noted that at the time of those events, homeowner insurance non-renewals had been becoming a major issue in California, further exacerbating the housing crisis in that area. He explained that the AFPD took an active role in preparing their community in advance of a major incident or for the likelihood of fire. He noted that they were always trying to stay ahead of trends related to EMS.

Mr. White expressed his happiness in the last year from the implementation of an innovative piece of equipment known as a Lund University Cardiopulmonary Assist System (LUCAS) mechanical cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) device that could provide patients with the correct depth and rate of compressions. He explained that the LUCAS device also removed the need for a firefighter to be unrestrained in the back of a moving ambulance. He recounted that he had previously worked with high-volume EMS systems as fire chief for the City of Sacramento Fire Department (Sacramento FD). He noted that the Sacramento FD had 15 full-time ambulances and provided roughly 250 daily

transports. He explained that he had become very analytical in that position when measuring things such as unit hour utilization to ensure crews were healthy, that factors such as physical and compassion fatigue were addressed, and that personnel were rotated due to the intensity of their assignment. He added that he became very familiar with other models as a result. He opined that factors such as paramedics, transportation rate, and call volume could vary dramatically across EMS systems.

Mr. White expressed joy that he could report that after a nearly 70-year lapse, the SFD began providing transporting ambulance services again in the City of Sparks. He noted that the service was provided through a P3 with REMSA, which the department was very proud of. He explained that with the addition of an ambulance, there was a reduction in response times from roughly 11 minutes to 6 minutes. He reported that the ambulance had been very active but still stayed within a healthy unit hour of utilization. He recounted that since the ambulance was put in service in July, it had gone on over 1,000 responses and provided over 900 transports. He noted that those efforts were achieved while operating with the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) program and remaining relatively net neutral to the City of Sparks, which allowed the department to add six additional positions. He elaborated that of those six positions, two would work directly on the ambulance and were capable of fire suppression, with four other positions available to reduce the impacts of mandatory overtime, known as *force hires*. He noted that he had become very familiar with P3, which was a type of partnership he believed could allow the County to collect GEMT funds to a greater extent. He acknowledged that GEMT funds were collected to a limited extent. He explained that economic generation was when outside revenue was brought in, which could be done by drawing down federal funds to support the department's system. He offered to explain more about that topic, but he voiced interest in mentioning another area of importance.

Mr. White stated that the trends related to home-hardening were mitigations that mattered and resulted in structural survivability. He wanted to see the County be more analytical in what mattered regarding EMS, which he opined was patient outcomes. He stated that the County was not a member of the Cardiac Arrest Registry to Enhance Survival (CARES) system, which was a partnership between Emory University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) survival rates and measure what mattered, which was whether or not the patient discharged from the hospital with neurological faculties. He recounted having been a catalyst and advocating for the implementation of the CARES program while employed with Sacramento County. He stated that he would try to work towards achieving the same goal with regional partners in the local area, as he believed in benchmarking the performance of past practices to compare with other similar agencies. He explained that if the agency could not tell how effective the new techniques or technologies were becoming, it would be harder to justify the reasoning for moving in that direction. He reiterated his interest in seeing those goals achieved. He noted that the trends were towards becoming much more analytical in everything done by the department, and opined that the more that was achieved, the more successful they would become.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it evolved over your career? Can you give an example of a significant leadership challenge you faced in your career? How did you handle the situation, and what was the outcome?*

Mr. White responded to Commissioner Andriola's questions by noting that he followed a philosophy of servant leadership. He stated that he was there to serve the members who were in service to the public and to ensure they had the tools and training needed to be successful. He described his management style as participative and noted that he had an open-door policy, so if an individual brought him what they believed to be an issue, he would listen and provide them with a task to tackle the problem and the authority to make decisions. He explained that those efforts were part of developing new leaders. He noted that as individuals stepped into the role of fire chief, they had to recognize that they were merely custodians of that position, as someone held the job before them and would have it again after them. He elaborated that as a result, they had to make the best decisions they could and set the next person up for success. He stated that those factors meant his job as fire chief was about building trust, maintaining accountability, and developing others. He noted that with those goals, he took chief officers to essentially every next-level meeting he attended to expose them to the work associated with that stage, provide an extra set of ears, and allow them to begin building the relationships they would need as they advanced into the role of fire chief. He remarked on the importance of relationships, regardless of whether they were good, bad, or indifferent.

Mr. White recounted that there were times when he faced a significant challenge when he first began working with the City of Sacramento. He acknowledged that when an individual first entered a role, they were not an anointed leader, merely a person in a position of authority. He explained that being a leader was determined by whether or not the membership decided to follow them. He recounted that the Sacramento FD faced a good challenge when coming out of an economic downturn, as the department needed to hire just over 100 firefighters in a relatively short period after the decision was made to restore the stations that experienced brownouts from that economic decline. He noted that after a lot of personnel had attrited out of the department, there was a requirement to begin the lengthy hiring and training process, which was complicated by the onboarding and hiring process lasting nearly eight months. He explained that the department was losing candidates to other agencies as a result. He recounted that he called a huddle meeting that included all staff involved with that hiring process in the same room to map out the entire procedure, investigate the areas where that process had cost the department time, and identify preventative alternatives. He explained that one alternative they had discovered was to outsource the department's background checks, as they had always been conducted in-house by the Sacramento Police Department (Sacramento PD). He noted that he was quickly told by a staff member that the city manager would never approve those changes to the procedure. He recalled learning almost immediately that the employee's assumption had been false, as upon asking the city manager, Mr. White was told that he did not have a problem with the change. He acknowledged that the Sacramento PD police chief did not initially agree, but ultimately, the issue was resolved. He happily reported that the Sacramento FD reduced the timeline for the hiring procedure by four months and saved the

City of Sacramento approximately \$60,000 per individual processed by transferring to a state hiring list and contracting out background check services. He noted that those changes had also been implemented in the City of Sparks, and before he left his role in the Sacramento FD, the Sacramento PD began outsourcing background checks to the same vendor. He opined that the cost savings, reduced attrition rate, and faster processing associated with those implementations ultimately saved the City of Sacramento time and money, which was extremely valuable at that point.

Mr. White reiterated that his primary charge as fire chief was to develop others. He explained that he was naturally curious about his capacity to lead and always participated in leadership training opportunities. He stated that an individual was never a learned leader, as there was always something new to discover. He recounted that four of the five people he had appointed as deputy chiefs through hard work and track record had become fire chiefs. He noted that two of those individuals succeeded him within their agencies, and three others were fire chiefs in Laguna Beach and Pasadena. He felt that he had spent a fair amount of time using his role to develop others and prepare them for the fire chief position.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What strategies do you use to build trust and morale within your department? How do you approach succession planning and leadership development within the department?*

Mr. White noted that he might have already answered some of the inquiries in Commissioner Garcia's first set of questions. He indicated that his strategy to build trust and morale was partly based on recognizing that the role of fire chief was managing relations between people and that humans were very emotional creatures. He emphasized the necessity of not taking anything too personally and understanding that everyone approaches things from their own perspective and position. He opined that firefighters would not bring their problems forward for two possible reasons. He explained that those reasons could be that the firefighter did not believe that the person could help them due to a lack of confidence or that the person did not care due to a lack of trust. He emphasized the need to quickly develop a reputation as somebody who could help them with their problems and cared about giving them that assistance.

Mr. White recounted his experience conducting a climate survey when he first began to work with the City of Sparks and noted that he had also done the same elsewhere. He explained that the survey was done to assess the organization's atmosphere and attempt to determine the perspectives of personnel. He opined that whenever an individual allowed somebody to provide unsolicited anonymous feedback, they would receive much information back. He noted that the information needed to be sifted through to identify the main themes. He indicated that in his case, there were many primary themes that he brought forth in a meeting with management staff to discuss the perceptions they needed to work toward changing immediately. He noted that when he began the strategic planning process for the SFD, he included a two-day labor management retreat so the representatives of the fire department members would be directly involved. He noted that together they developed a five-year strategic plan emphasizing innovation, infrastructure,

and inclusion. He explained that innovation was doing things differently than in the past, which could mean new technology or a new method and way to operate. He emphasized that the department's infrastructure was critical, and there was a need to ensure that it was responsibly maintained so their personnel would have the tools and training necessary to be successful. He noted that inclusion was a matter of working cooperatively with all community members and the department's allied agencies. He reported that a year ago, while working with the Northern Nevada fire chiefs, he brought in a Sacramento FD Fire Captain Erika Enslin, who provided a presentation on hosting a girls camp held to expose young women to the fire service and allow participants a day of activities that would assist in building their confidence of pursuing a career in the field. He noted that the girls camp event would be hosted for two days that year. He was happy that the first year of that camp was very successful, and the Sacramento FD was preparing for another successful event in 2025. He noted that some of those who participated in the camp almost immediately enrolled in courses at the community college and began working towards a career in the fire service.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *How do you handle interagency coordination, particularly during large-scale or multijurisdictional incidents?*

Mr. White responded by expressing pride in having participated in the California Master Mutual Aid System (CMMAS). He opined that the CMMAS was likely the best mutual aid system. He explained that the system operated on a give-and-take model, which involved a qualification and certification component that several staff members participated in. He noted that such a component was included to ensure that staff had access to the available education, whether that be by sending them elsewhere to train, bringing others to the local area to teach them directly, or giving them the opportunities to shadow, learn, and achieve all of the job requirements necessary to support a large incident in other locations. He recognized that the system operated through support as well as by giving to other agencies, which was a factor he took a lot of pride in. He recalled previously serving as the western region sponsoring agency chief of the FEMA US&R Task Force. He explained that he had represented 9 of the Nation's 28 total US&R Task Forces at the federal level. He stated that throughout his career, he had the opportunity to participate in mutual aid at the local, state, and federal levels. He expressed his appreciation for the system and reiterated his pride in contributing to it.

Commissioner Clark asked the following pre-approved questions: *TMFPD has its own budget. Please describe your experience in developing, managing, and overseeing a significant budget. What are your key principles for fiscal responsibility and transparency?*

Mr. White replied to Commissioner Clark and noted that he had the opportunity to manage budgets of different sizes throughout his career. He explained that while working with the City of Sacramento, he had a \$176 million budget with 24 fire stations and 674 employees, with an overwhelming portion of the costs related to personnel. He acknowledged that certain fixed costs had to be addressed. He noted his



consideration for revenues, assets, and obligations, which allowed him to take a balanced approach between cost recovery and organizational efficiencies, which could reduce operating expenses. He recounted that he worked with a much smaller budget for Amador County and emphasized the need to stretch those funds further due to the vast area covered by the AFD. He reported advocating directly for the state budget to secure funds to build a new station. He noted that the AFD fortunately received over \$8 million with bipartisan support after he demonstrated the need of the local vulnerable population and the underserved area. He explained that to gain support for the funding and construction of the station, he presented it as a community resiliency hub that could serve as a cooling center in the summer, a warming shelter in the winter, a community vaccination site as needed, or provide a community room.

Commissioner Andriola asked the following pre-approved questions: *Can you share your philosophy about consolidation versus operational regionalization as it pertains to our area and as it relates to our current budget constraints? What is your position regarding unrestricted mutual aid if crew sizes are different? What experience do you have with grants, alternative funding sources, and/or public-private partnerships, like our relationship with REMSA?*

Mr. White responded that in addition to working with REMSA, he had worked with other private parties and partnerships. He opined that one of the most transformational leadership programs he had the opportunity to attend was when he received a fellowship to attend Harvard University's National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (NPLI). He explained that Harvard University studied every national disaster following September 11, 2001, to look for effective leadership traits. He noted that Harvard University identified five core traits of the most effective leaders, ultimately teaching the NPLI participants about them. He listed those five traits as: self-awareness, uncommon levels of situational awareness, the ability to lead a silo by communicating a leader's intent, desires, and definition of success, the ability to lead upwards by being a subject matter expert and supporting bosses with good decision making, and lastly cross-silo collaboration. He reported that Harvard found that those who were most effective in building bridges and conducting cross-silo collaboration were the most successful in managing major incidents.

Mr. White stated that he had always advocated for regionalization, as he believed that when an individual was not looking at matters from a regionalized perspective, they might find that those in unfavorable positions at one time could be considered the winners later due to shifts in developments and funding. He noted that such situations could also be true if the situation were reversed. He opined that when considered through a regional perspective, the agencies were reliant on one another, as no single agency could handle every type of emergency that arose without the support of its regional partners. He firmly believed that collectively, the agencies were more than the sum of their parts. He explained there were times when regionalization made sense and others when it did not. He suggested that the local region was shaped similarly to Northern Nevada Public Health (NNPH) and that the more the agencies collaborated and pooled resources, the better off they would be.

Mr. White opined that one of the most significant enhancements or advancements to regionalization in the local area was when he worked with former TMFPD Fire Chief Charles Moore to advocate, support, and create a shared management agreement for a personnel position within the TRIAD. Mr. White noted that those efforts had worked out very well, with that personnel member being a chief officer and employee of the City of Sparks. Mr. White explained that costs were shared for the management of that employee, as the agencies involved in TRIAD were pooling resources and talent to provide the highest level of service. He described himself as a survivor of many agency reorganizations and stated that he had substantial experience with such actions. He opined that the concept of shared management was worth considering, as ensuring personnel were active in the field was the most important, such as through firefighters on the end of hose lines or paramedics connecting intravenous (IV) bags to patients. He introduced the idea of reducing overhead or administrative costs. He noted that among the three separate agencies, he did not believe any were top-heavy regarding their personnel. He explained that the role he served within the SFD was no less complex, and the scope was not drastically different or reduced compared to his role with the Sacramento FD, but there was a variation in the economy of scale. He thought that if the local agencies reached a point where they transitioned to a true shared management agreement, the involvement of two agencies could enable the overhead management costs to be cut in half, or if three agencies were involved, those costs could be cut further by a third. He elaborated that those actions would make more funds available to be used for what he believed mattered, which was practical application in the field.

Commissioner Garcia asked the following pre-approved questions: *What role does a fire department play in community outreach and education? What is your strategy for addressing community concerns about wildfire risks, emergency services, or department visibility?*

Mr. White recounted that one of the first things he had done when he began his position at the SFD was to bring the person who had served as fire marshal at AFD with him to the SFD. Mr. White noted that the former AFD fire marshal came to Sparks, was tested, and was hired. Mr. White explained that the former AFD fire marshal was someone he had worked with for years before his relocation to Sparks, where he took a focus on community risk reduction with the SFD emergency manager. He noted that the SFD emergency manager was in the process of doing many things, such as preparing a public service announcement (PSA) message to be played before major events at the Nugget Events Center to provide instruction to crowds should there be a hazardous or catastrophic event during the use of the venue. He noted that there was a grant for dumpsters, which allowed SFD personnel to go out and assist communities with vegetation management and enable community members to conduct the necessary home hardening to make their homes more defensible. He explained that there were members who attended the Child Death Review Team (CDRT) to learn and identify the causes, threats, and risks to the community, so an active role could be taken in public education. He noted an acronym for community safety, consisting of five words beginning with the letter *E*. He listed those words as education, engineering through things like smoke detectors and pool barriers, enforcement of code compliance, economic incentives, and emergency response.

He explained that many opportunities were often missed ahead of time to prevent or reduce the severity of an incident concerning emergency response. He noted his intent to take a very active role in emergency management and opined that the SFD and the TMFPD had an understaffed fire prevention division. He indicated that there could be an ability to combine and prioritize those divisions to fulfill the mission of community risk reduction.

Vice Chair Herman asked the following pre-approved question: *Where do you see the TMFPD in five years, and how would you lead it there?*

Mr. White answered that was why he was present at that interview. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity provided by the role he served at that time, and emphasized that he was honored and humbled. He described the City of Sparks and the SFD as great. He believed he might have more opportunities to advance some of the regional initiatives from a position within the County. He opined that a crossroads had been reached regarding inflation outpacing new revenues and the regressive tax structure in Washoe County. He explained that a balanced approach was needed to find ways to recover costs and identify organizational efficiencies that would remain sustainable. He believed that regionalization was a method to achieve that approach, with three primary forms of leverage associated with organizational renewal. He noted that an organization's structure was one of those forms of leverage, which included the organization chart for the governing structure, division of tasks, and order of personnel reporting. He added leadership as another of those forms, specifically the organization's philosophy of leadership and the belief that the agency's purpose was to serve the public and adhere to its core values. He concluded that list by mentioning an organization's policies, practices, protocols, and procedures. He was happy to report that the SFD had unrestricted automatic aid with the City of Reno and the TMFPD.

Mr. White emphasized the importance of policy adhering to legal compliance, remaining updated, incorporating best practices, and connecting with an agency's core values. He recounted that the SFD had implemented a review of all of the agency's policies, as he believed policies could become outdated. He explained that if personnel could not find a direct correlation between policies and the department's core values, consideration would have to be given to modifying or removing such policies. He considered the overall situation from different perspectives of organizational renewal. He stated that the agencies had not been in a great place, but how they responded at that time was remarkable. He expressed that he was extremely optimistic about where the agencies were headed and opined that the TMFPD and the region had a brighter future ahead.

Chair Hill thanked Mr. White and stated that the Board would take a break. She appreciated Mr. White's consideration of the Board's questions and participation in the interview process. She noted that the Board would proceed to make a decision and thanked Mr. White again.

Mr. White thanked Chair Hill and noted that he genuinely appreciated the Board's time and attention.

Chair Hill explained that the Board would return at 2:35 p.m. to distribute ballots, allow Commissioners to choose their top candidate, and hopefully have a consensus.

**2:18 p.m.**      **The Board recessed.**

**2:35 p.m.**      **The Board reconvened with all members present.**

There was no response to the call for public comment.

Chair Hill directed Commissioners to vote for their top candidate. She explained that if there was no consensus, a discussion could take place at the dais. County Clerk Jan Galassini read the Commissioners' votes aloud, indicating that Mr. Edwards was the chosen candidate.

On motion by Commissioner Andriola, seconded by Commissioner Garcia, which motion duly carried on a 5-0 vote, it was ordered that Richard Edwards be offered employment and that the negotiation of an employment contract be delegated to the Washoe County Human Resources Director and the District Attorney's Office to be brought back at a later date for appointment and Board approval.

**25-068F**      **AGENDA ITEM 6** Announcements/Reports.

Vice Chair Herman asked that Mr. Richard Edwards give a speech. Chair Hill suggested he be invited to speak following any other announcements or reports from Commissioners.

Commissioner Garcia expressed her gratitude to everybody involved in the planning, recruitment, interviews, and selection of the new Truckee Meadows Fire Protection District (TMFPD) Fire Chief. She thought it was a well-rounded process and that the booklet the Commissioners were given was very thorough. She commented that the mixer event held the prior night was a great way to spend time with the candidates in a more casual setting than an interview.

Commissioner Andriola echoed Commissioner Garcia's comments and extended her thanks to Chair Hill, the County's legal team, Human Resources (HR), the recruiter, and all of the candidates. She agreed that the event the prior evening was a good opportunity to meet the candidates and speak with them. She observed that the whole process was an opportunity to learn about what the TMFPD needed for the future, and she thought a lot of information was provided that would be helpful. She stated her appreciation for all of her colleagues and everyone else who assisted in the search process.

Commissioner Clark thanked Chair Hill and congratulated Mr. Edwards on his appointment.

Chair Hill thanked Alicia Agrella, Jay Cwiak, Krystal Shaver, Stephanie

Dietz, Sandy Francis, James Flint, Jessica Gutierrez, Christie Hubbard, Sally Johnston, Deputy Fire Chief Chris Ketring, Adam Mayberry, Dustin Perez, and Robert Schultz for all of their help. She also thanked County Clerk Jan Galassini, who attended the meeting along with Chief Deputy County Clerk Cathy Smith. She recognized their extra work and that there was another TMFPD meeting the following day. She invited Mr. Edwards to provide remarks.

Mr. Edwards thanked the Commissioners for entrusting him to be the next TMFPD Fire Chief. He shared that he was extremely proud and humbled to have been selected from a unique and challenging interview process. He acknowledged the rest of the candidates and disclosed that, as he reviewed their resumes, it was evident that they were all phenomenal candidates for fire chiefs in each of their areas and specialties. He expressed that he looked forward to working with the Commissioners and all of the men and women who were part of the organization. He concluded that it was a phenomenal opportunity, and he looked forward to helping move the TMFPD into the future.

Chair Hill thanked interim Fire Chief Dale Way, who she said had been incredible in the last three months. She stated that working with him had been an honor, and his commitment to the TMFPD had been outstanding, though she knew it had been stressful. She thanked him for his work and said she looked forward to continuing to work with him.

**25-069F**      **AGENDA ITEM 7** Public Comment.

There was no response to the call for public comment.

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**2:43 p.m.**      There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned without objection.

  
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**ALEXIS HILL**, Chair  
Truckee Meadows Fire  
Protection District

ATTEST  
  
  
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**JANIS GALASSINI**, Washoe County Clerk  
and Ex-Officio Clerk, Truckee Meadows  
Fire Protection District

*Minutes Prepared By:*  
*Heather Gage, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Brooke Koerner, Deputy County Clerk*  
*Elizabeth Tietjen, Deputy County Clerk*