

Regular Meeting, Fire District #1, February 4, 1998

VOTE

Commissioner Betsy Gwin	Aye
Commissioner Paul W. Hancock	Aye
Commissioner Thomas G. Winters	Aye
Commissioner Melody C. Miller	Aye
Chairman Mark F. Schroeder	Aye

Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you. Next item."

NEW BUSINESS

A. PRESENTATION REGARDING STAFFING.

Chairman Schroeder said, "At this time, Commissioners, if it is all right, we don't show it on our agenda, but Jeff Cowley of the Fire Union would like to address us. Jeff."

Mr. Jeff Cowly said, "Good morning Commissioners. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address you once again today. Today you are to make a very important decision and we understand the decisions that you are about to make are somewhat difficult given the budget being set. In the interest of safety for the firefighters and citizens of Sedgwick County, we would like to see if the current levels for the stations at 71st and West Street, 501 East 53rd Street, would remain unchanged. These stations that would lose a position in order to help staff the new station in Andale. Six are assigned there at present. Because these stations are housing special apparatus, in the case of the Station 32 at 501 East 53rd Street North being the hazardous material station, with five people on duty, we would have to leave a key piece of apparatus at the station due to the staffing. According to the Standard Operating Guidelines, which we operate under, mobile air 32 is to respond to all hazardous material calls within Sedgwick County. That would not be possible given that staffing level. To have one person taken off of the staff creates a safety concern. The situation is similar at 71st and West Street again, in that the aerial platform that is housed there along with the foam trailer that we staff to bring with us to certain hazardous material calls. A quicker response on critical calls such as house fires and assistance to back up other areas will be compromised also. Proper staffing levels would protect not only the firefighters of Sedgwick County, but also would be in the best interest and protection of the citizens of Sedgwick County. Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, I would be glad to answer them."

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Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you Jeff. At this time, I think this is somewhat an important topic and I would like all Commissioners to be here. So if it is okay, could we take a recess until Commissioner Gwin is available? Jeff, I should have done that before you started. We'll take a recess here for a few minutes until she is back. Let's say five or ten minutes, I don't think she'll be long."

The Board of Sedgwick County Commissioners recessed at 10:11 a.m. and returned at 10:25 a.m.

Chairman Schroeder said, "I'll call the meeting back to order. Apologize for the recess, but it was necessary. Let's go on the presentation regarding staffing."

Mr. Jarold Harrison, Assistant County Manager, said, "The issues raised by Mr. Cowley were also raised in a meeting two weeks ago. At that time, we were operating off a recommendation for the station staffing from Chief Curmode, and it was our understanding that we were going to utilize that recommendation so we have not analyzed the six additional firefighters or restaffing those two stations to the levels that Mr. Cowley has recommended. A question was asked after the meeting two weeks ago, well what about just hiring three more firefighters as opposed to maybe doing the overtime issue on callback. We have analyzed that. We have looked at that and as we told you, we've averaged 1.7 firefighters per day off for the whole year of 1997 for leaves other than vacation. That may be a little misleading if you don't take into account the distribution of those vacancies. When we went back and started looking at it, 72 days during 1997 we had no firefighters absent from the work force. For 96 days we had one firefighter absent. For 109 days we had two. For 57 days we had three. For 22 days we had four firefighters, this isn't on a per shift basis. For nine days we had five firefighters absent. When we look at that distribution, putting three additional firefighters on to cover these vacancies would only take care of about 168 days of the year. The remaining 200 days would have to be covered with overtime. So we did, like we do for the County, we did a five-year financial plan for the Fire District. We actually started that process last year at budget time, looking at the long-term impacts of decisions we make in the Fire District. The cost of using firefighters and lieutenants on a call back basis at an overtime rate to cover the vacancies, based on the 1997 actual history, would be \$345,800. That cost would be reduced if we hired three firefighters and then only covered the differential in overtime. That would be \$335,000 at a \$10,000 difference in cost.

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“However, as we project that out over time, we began looking at what is that going to cost us in overtime as overtime grows at a different rate than full-time employees’ compensation grows. We began examining that and three years from now, in the year 2000, that crosses over. It is cheaper to hire firefighters today, but three years from now it is going to be more expensive to have those full time firefighters on board than it is to pay overtime. And that differential will continue to grow through the life cycle of the pay system. As the employee progresses through that differential the step is wider as we go through it.

"We then looked at the impact of that cost on the Fire District for 1998, for 1999, through the year 2000. And we looked at several factors. One of the ways we talked about financing this was by using unencumbered cash this year, which would require us to republish the budget sometime this year, probably in September, to get the additional expenditure authority to complete the year. When we looked at that we also looked at maintaining enough money in the special equipment fund so that we can buy the necessary replacement apparatus that we have to buy to keep the Department on track. We also looked at such value and talked with the Appraiser's Office, as you are aware, there were several large annexations on the east side of Wichita which are going to reduce the value to the Fire District. This is also the year that the machinery and equipment inventory value differential kicks in, which is going to reduce another portion of the assessed value for the District. We looked at all those factors and we've looked at replacing the cash, because if you take the cash down, then we're in a bind to finance the budget for 1999 and beyond. So there would be a built in mill levy impact if you approve all these actions, there would be a built in mill levy impact. We anticipate that impact would be about nine tenths of a mill. That would include your action of two weeks ago with the three additional firefighters plus our recommendation of the overtime funding for call back procedures for vacancies for the remainder of this year. As far as the operational issues, I am not prepared to address those. I would recommend that you direct those to Chief Curmode."

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay, thank you Jerry. Questions of Mr. Harrison at this point? I do have a couple of questions and I am not sure who to direct them to, probably Chief Curmode, if you don't mind coming up Chief. I think you probably know where I've been on this. I'd like to hire at least six individuals or two positions, but I don't know if there is support to do that and whatever happens, happens. I do have a couple of concerns, and one is that I had not thought about this, but when we're talking about the rank structure and who comes in to replace who in overtime, who replaces captains that are absent from work?"

Chief Gary Curmode said, "Commissioner, in the format that we are going to use, if a firefighter is off that day, we replace them with a firefighter. If a lieutenant is off that day, we call back in a lieutenant. At this point, when a captain is off on illness, a lieutenant that is on the promotional list is promoted as an acting captain and then we hire in a lieutenant to fill for that position."

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Chairman Schroeder said, "Now tell me why we do that instead of calling in a captain."

Chief Curmode said, "At this point, there are some systems that in the United States that have a call back system that utilizes captains, battalion chiefs and so forth, and the Wichita Fire Department utilizes that system. In the negotiation process that was brought up this year, the Union brought that and we agreed in the contract that it would affect lieutenants and firefighters. Again, captains are in the management level and we can see through the data this year, at the end of the year if it is more cost effective and beneficial to the Fire District and the citizens than again we would come back with that recommendation to you."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Let me ask you this then, is a captain paid the same as somebody else would be if they came in and worked overtime or because they are in management they are salaried, they do not get . . . is that what's your telling me?"

Chief Curmode said, "Captains would come in, in the lawsuit that was settled several years ago on the overtime situation, they are paid overtime when they are called in for meetings and or training sessions. If they would be called back to do station assignments for a 12 or 24-hour period, they get paid straight time. "

Chairman Schroeder said, "Okay, well maybe that answers some of those questions. The other is, and I heard Mr. Cowley stress this in his comments earlier, which Betsy wasn't privy to, but one of them was the concern that I had, it was about equipment being left at the station because we are planning to pull some people out of other stations that have six or five or four instead of three on duty. Can you address that? How would you address those concerns if there is equipment left in the station? What do we do in that case if we have three pieces of equipment in a station and only enough people to drive two of them?"

Chief Curmode said, "Well currently at this time, let me use the example of the Haysville Fire Station 34. We have six people there that are stationed there at this time. If we have a structure fire and it is the high-rise center in Haysville, we would have three people on the engine, two people on the aerial platform, and one person on the tender respond to it. If we have a house fire in the city of Haysville, at that we will take, since it is a hydrant area, we will take a squad, an engine, and a lot of times they will respond the tender. If we anticipate with five people at that station, the same high-rise fire will be responded to with any aerial platform and also the engine company of three people. So we would not have the tender responding, but we do have a hydrant system in Haysville. If you take the same structure fire in the county rural area, they would take the tender, the engine, and the aerial platform would be off track, which it would not be needed out in the county except for a grain elevator structure or something to that effect.

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"If we look at Station 32, up in the north end of the county, the mobile air it is the apparatus they are referring to. I have the deputy chiefs, we're going to review and place that possibly at another station in anticipation of a quicker response for the mobile air unit. Again, we'll monitor our alarm responses this year and see where our needs are. If it shows that there is definitely a need for that, we would try to come back for the 1999 budget and to recommend maybe an additional staffing funds or people, if you will, if that was needed."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you Chief. I have some other questions but I think I'll hold them for a while. Commissioner Gwin."

Commissioner Gwin said, "Chief, despite what we do, what action we take to date, don't you still have a basic responsibility to manage your department. I mean whatever we do, it isn't going to solve all of your problems and isn't your responsibility to utilize personnel and equipment to the best of your ability to the funding that we give you?"

Chief Curmode said, "Commissioner, that is correct."

Commissioner Gwin said, "I am hopeful that what we do today will include a monthly report from you back to us. My preference at this time is the overtime suggestion, to call back a full time personnel. But if we implement that, I guess I need to know from you how are those expenditures going on a monthly basis, what about those absences on a monthly basis, has that solved the problem or has it created others that we weren't anticipating. So as the Manager, as the overseer of this department, I'm going to expect you to tell me what the effects of our actions have been in and whoever makes the motion at some point I'm going to include the fact that I want to see you, I think you should see the commissioners on a monthly basis and give us a recap of the expenditures on this particular effort and the absences and how those relate and why firefighters are absent. I think that is important for us to know too as we look toward the 1999 budget. My sense is that we'll learn a lot from these next several months as to whether the step we've taken today is sufficient or appropriate. I do have a question of Chief Garcia if I can take that time too. I notice that he is here. Chief Garcia, may I ask you a question, sir?"

Chairman Schroeder said, "Welcome Chief."

Commissioner Gwin said, "You are kind of enough to come over and I caught you on the break and asked you if it would be okay if I asked you a question. Does the City of Wichita utilize the callback of full time personnel?"

Mr. Larry Garcia, Fire Chief, City of Wichita, said, "Yes, we do."

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Commissioner Gwin said, "How long have you all been doing that?"

Chief Garcia said, "I'm going to say at least ten years and much longer frankly. I think it has been about fifteen years that we've been doing this."

Commissioner Gwin said, "How effective is it? How does it work?"

Chief Garcia said, "We think it is very effective. It certainly, because of the budget constraints that all of us in the fire service recognize and live with, it doesn't do everything that we want, but it is much better than not having those people on board? One of the things that occurs is that we find with that finite budget, we find that we have to manage to the extent that there will be times during a period of a year that we won't have units on track."

Commissioner Gwin said, "That happens even to you?"

Chief Garcia said, "That's right, absolutely. Because of injuries, illnesses, vacations, kelly days, that whole gamut of causes to reduce our staff on a given day, every day. If we didn't have the constant staffing and the overtime budget, we just couldn't take care of business out there the way we do. Certainly the first responder program has been a great help. I think all of you recognize that we couldn't get the job done in this County without access to each others resources. There is no way that we could get it done."

Commissioner Gwin said, "I heard at one point that the fact that sometimes we might not have as many people available as we wanted to had effected that First Responder agreement."

Chief Garcia said, "Yes, I'm glad you raised that issue because I got the feeling that perhaps the City of Wichita was putting some pressure or putting some mandates on Fire District #1. If any of you have that thought, and I don't think it was the intention of the Chief, but the conversation let me to believe that somebody might have thought that we were putting certain mandates on Fire District #1. We talked about this issue. It was a concern to both of us based on our command structure. It was absolutely critical that we understood and recognized what to expect if we had knowledge that a squad was coming, then we would expect that there would be two people there. An engine company, a pumper if you will, we would expect that there would be three people. So that the officer that was in charge of that incident could make some decisions about what those units would be doing for him once they arrived on the scene. So we talked about it. There have been and will continue to be discussions about what is going on out there as it relates to our response throughout this County. I can't express to you enough that we cannot get the job done without Sedgwick County Fire District #1 nor can they take care of their business without us, I don't think."

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Commissioner Gwin said, "I don't believe we can either and I appreciate that. I think those are the things that I needed to know. I don't know if anyone else has questions of you, but let me tell you I appreciate you coming over and being available without any notice to answer some questions."

Chief Garcia said, "If I may just add this. You talked to Gary about managing the resources. We have all kinds of schemes throughout the fire profession to manage those resources the best we can. In the instance that we have truck company, for example, or aerials, and they talked about an aerial platform, I would imagine, I don't know for sure, I should know but I imagine that they've got two people on that. Almost anywhere in this country, without exception, they'll have at least three and perhaps four and in some instances five or six people on those units. I've been in the Wichita Fire Department for over 40 years and I have not traditionally seen more than two people on the aerial company. Well, depending upon where you're at and who are you talking to, you are either doing a great job or you're the dumbest thing working. But you take the bitter with the sweet. We can tell people across the nation that this community provides fire service to their constituents, their citizens out there, for less than \$70 per person. That is unheard of. I think that is ringing my own bell if you don't mind. I think that is commendable and I know we don't have to go very far down the road to find people that are spending \$120 to \$130 per capita for their fire service. We do an excellent job in Sedgwick County."

Commissioner Gwin said, "Thank you Chief. I appreciate the input. Thank you Mr. Chairman."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you Chief. Commissioner Miller has her light on. Do you have questions you want to address to our Chief or their Chief?"

Commissioner Miller said, "Actually it is to Jeff."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Somebody else Chief, sorry."

Commissioner Miller said, "The Union Chief. I just need to be able to reconcile in my mind the importance of having the six staff, individuals, at the two apparatus laden companies or fire stations, versus the five that we're listening to in the recommendation."

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Mr. Cowley said, "Well, with keeping the current staffing level at Station 34 and 32 at six, it gives us the ability to work very efficiently. In a house fire situation, where we take a squad, engine, and a tender, the squad will be the lead piece of apparatus out of the station and get to the scene a substantial amount of time earlier than the engine because of the differences in the speed of the trucks in which they get up to speed. With us going into Park City, there is probably about a minute of difference in time where the squad will get there sooner. When we go out into the rural areas farther away from the station, that time will greatly increase the distance between the squadron and the engine to where when the engine pulls up on the scene, they will be able to have two people ready to make entry to that house or that structure and take care of business. With only five, the response time is increased to where the Chief had made the statement in December that the fire will grow every thirty to forty-five seconds in intensity. Time is very valuable. That gives us the ability to get to the scene a lot quicker.

"In the instance of the hazardous material response, our standard operating guidelines say that we will take the mobile air with us. What Chief Garcia alluded to, when we show up on the scene, they are expecting to have three people on the engine, two people on the hazardous material truck, and one person on the mobile air. With five, it takes one of the hazardous material truck to put onto the mobile air or leave the mobile air at the station. If we get into a long incident in the County, that is our source of air. We have spare bottles that we have with us, but if it gets into a long incident where we have to make several entries into a hazardous atmosphere, our air supply will be depleted."

Commissioner Miller said, "I do have a follow up question for Chief Curmode. Thank you Jeff. That would be, and being able to roll in my mind the very detailed expertise background that Chief Garcia has rendered and listening to what the President of the Union is saying, how would we remedy with five, having or keeping these particular apparatus laden station at their optimum level?"

Chief Curmode said, "Commissioner Miller, right now we give the captains the discretion to make the decision. Even though you dispatch certain equipment on certain call types of fire alarms or emergencies, we allow them to make the decision. If they need to take more, then take it. You may not need to call that on the air but it will be notified that it will be off track, so to speak, because if the entire station is gone, they take it. But the next apparatus that is left there is out of service. So at this point, like today we are fully staffed everywhere so there would be no callback money spent.

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“In the event, say there had been five people at that station today instead of six. The Captain has that discretion to go ahead and drive the squad to the scene, three people on the engine. Drive the squad to the scene and also bring the hazardous material truck with one person. Basically it becomes a taxi in effect. It is parked there at the scene. We have the capability there, if we need it, which we’ll probably need it at a later time if the hazardous material call continues to escalate, at that point, there will be additional crews on the scene by that time and we’ll have manpower to be able to work the mobile air. That is how management and how our Chefs are utilizing that procedure now. I do not see that change occurring, but again like I said, we’ll monitor it very closely along with the firefighters, the lieutenants, and the union, and if there is anything that we see is a problem for us, we’ll make adjustments.”

Commissioner Miller said, “Okay. Thank you.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Commissioner Winters has his light on but he has yielded to me to make this inquiry. Chief, that’s why you get the big bucks, that’s why you are here representing the Fire Department, but I need to ask you the question, so far we have committed three people plus \$75,000 from extra board to overtime. I don’t recall the additional overtime number that you need. What is that amount?”

Chief Curmode said, “\$185,000.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “If the scenario was that you had a chance to pick up three additional people, would you prefer the total of six or three people and overtime? What I’m saying is if he had a chance to pick up three more individuals, which is one position, plus whatever the overtime amount, which would be smaller obviously much smaller, does that not help you? Does that work? If you were given two positions and some overtime or would you prefer to have one position and the balance in overtime?”

Chief Curmode said, “Chairman Schroeder, the three people that you allotted us already and the overtime. The reason being, if you hire three people, we’re getting immediately six more weeks of leave that we have to now create vacancies for and vacation, not counting any sick leave, funeral leave, maternity leave and those things. If you hire six, then in effect what we have now is twelve weeks of leave. Let me give an example of this. A week ago Saturday, we had eight people off I believe. Two people were on vacation. Our two vacation people covered them. We had six people that called in. Two of them were on funeral leave, unexpected deaths. We had four people that had the flu. We verified that it was all valid. In the event that we would hire two or three per shift, we would have two per shift, I still would have had four vacancies that I would have to call back for overtime.

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“What we did, we called back six people under the union contract, four were called back voluntarily, two required to come back. We spent 132 hours of staffing money, which would be a little over \$2,200. The next day we were fine, so I didn’t have to spend any money. If we had two people on the Sunday or Monday after that, I would have ended up . . . and there is nothing wrong with having extra people, but instead of having peaks and valleys, consistency is more important we believe to keeping the apparatus so it gives the strategic objectives to the instant commander so he knows how to make decisions. Do we call off training? Do we have training? Can we meet mutual aid contracts? Can we meet the automatic aid contracts? Can we fill another station when they’re out on call? When you take that one person away or two, then we’re not able to do that. That’s why the overtime is to me the most vital for our organization. Now in the event, and we will monitor this regularly and if that request is made to come in monthly, we can show you the trends if there is any expected trends, any peaks or valleys, or anything we did not expect, current expectations and so forth. If it looks like hiring people would be better than the overtime, we’ll see that in the next several months before the budget is done for 1999 and we’ll make that recommendation to you at that time.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay. Well that is something I needed to hear and obviously that is important information that the Commissioners need to mull over. But you are giving yourself a little bit of flexibility by knowing what will happen over the next few months to deal with it in the 1999 budget, if you think you need to change your recommendation from hiring one position to hiring two plus some overtime.”

Chief Curmode said, “Yes sir.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay. Commissioner Winters.”

Commissioner Winters said, “Thank you. I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to Chairman Schroeder and Commissioner Gwin. They have both spent a lot of time on this issue. I’ve seen both of them talking to finance people and fire department people and Jeff about this issue. I appreciate the hard work that you two have been doing on this project. I certainly appreciate Chief Garcia coming over today. I think that was important and I think one of the things that he mentioned, well two things that really stand out. One is he reminded us that just as Sedgwick County works with finite resources, they too do that and we all do that in government service. We wish we really had unlimited funds that we could build just perfect systems, but that is just not part of reality.

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“One of the things that his presence did make me think about is this annexation question that is happening in the eastern part of the County. That is going to have an affect on us and one of the things that I have at least thought about at least leaning toward this taking the Chief’s recommendation and working with the three people that we’ve already authorized and working on financing the overtime call back provisions is that in a year’s time it will give us the opportunity to see where the City is going to build a new fire station. If they’re going to build a new fire station and where they’re going to put that to protect those many high dollar housing developments that are going into their system. How is that going to work? Is that going to give us some relief that we can then shift some personnel from certain parts of the County? Because this is the one area where the City makes growth into the County, it does effect us. I’ve heard City Council people talk about this in a number of areas where they believe as they grow that it reduces the service levels that Sedgwick County provides. Well in the fire district it does do that. In our other areas, Mental Health, Aging, I mean it doesn’t matter where you are, you are going to get County services. So we don’t have this construction. But with the Fire District, it does. It does have an effect on us. They’re going to take over a considerable amount of protection that they’re going to need to be able to provide. How are we going to work that together? I have personally visited with Council folks about consolidation of fire departments and I don’t mean to bring that discussion to this conversation about staffing, but sometimes it makes one wonder if we shouldn’t proceed on this. I’ve been very firmly rebuffed and said we’re not going to talk about that. So I have not talked about that for a period of time, but maybe we even have an opportunity as we look in this northeast part of Wichita as they annex, maybe we can do some kind of mini-consolidation that would be to the benefit of both districts, both fire departments in this particular area of the community. I don’t mean to interject that but I would bring it up to the fact that I think part of our district is going to change over the next few months and I’m not sure how that is going to effect us. Let me say now that I’m leaning toward taking the Chief’s recommendation, but I’m certainly still open to discussion.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay, thank you. Commissioner Gwin.”

Commissioner Gwin said, “I guess I have a follow-up question on the . . . we have an overtime cost estimate that has been prepared for us. It says estimate so we’re waiting to see that. It says that all absences are covered with call backs and a total annual cost here is \$345,864. I guess that is one reason because that is what I’m supporting doing, but my question is to you, to the Chief, if we institute this call back of full time personnel, do you think there are going to be enough personnel available on a daily basis to fill the vacancies that we have?”

Chief Curmode said, “Yes I do Commissioner.”

Commissioner Gwin said, “I assume all these guys would put in to be available.”

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Chief Curmode said, "Yes, I believe so."

Commissioner Gwin said, "Okay. If that is the case, is the \$345,000 going to be enough?"

Chief Curmode said, "I believe so. That \$345,000, again with the help of the Budget Department and Assistant Manager Harrison, we looked at the highest level. We looked at a top pay lieutenant, the top paid firefighter, so we looked at the most expensive cost that there would be. We believe that it is going to be less than that, but that would be a maximum. Unless we have an influenza of several months and just a major impact on our area, we feel this is very valid."

Commissioner Gwin said, "Since it is an estimate and we're going to have to experiment with it and see how it works, like I said, that is one reason I would like to see you on a monthly basis to talk about how much we've spent and what the purpose of those absences are. The primary reason I support the call back of full time personnel and funding this overtime amount is that I first of all I want to thank you for trying to find other answers. I know you've been challenged to try to find other answers and you've looked at those areas and you've tried them, discounted them, not applied them, whatever. I want to thank you for experimenting with the extra board. It is a reasonable concept. Unfortunately, it is not a program that worked as efficiently as we thought it would because we have some extenuating circumstances having to do with the fact that guys come to work for this department and they want to stay in this department, which I think is wonderful. If they were leaving like we had a revolving door I'd be worried. So there aren't that many opportunities for the extra board guys to get hired on and they have families to support and expenses to meet and so they can't hang on and wait for that. In theory, I think it was a good idea and in reality it didn't quite pan out. But my sense is that if we do in fact reverse the order of things and the first people we call back are full time personnel, they are trained, they are equipped, they are better prepared to fill those vacancies than extra board. We only have to pay that expense if and when they are needed and it gives the firefighters in this department the opportunity to earn more money being a firefighter. I know most of you all have second. . . other jobs that you use to fill the gap and some of you may love those and wouldn't want to give them up. Some of you, I hope, given the opportunity to be called back and to work at the job that you really like, I expect that you'll say yes and you'll be there for us and for the Chief, for the Department, and for the citizens that you protect. So I'm hopeful that we'll see a very positive response from the firefighters. I am expecting that there won't be any abuses or monkeying with this system. If we're going to fund this I expect you guys to help us make it work and make sure that we're confident that if you're not there, there is a very good reason why you are not there. I've heard too many horror stories about how it works in other departments and other departments abuse it and that is why we don't want to try it here. You guys aren't that way. You don't think that way. You don't act that way. So I expect you to back me up on that in the way you actually do it.

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“I’m real comfortable in offering this opportunity to our full time personnel. That is what I’ll support today. But as I said, it obviously needs to be on special line items so I can see how much has been expended. I’m going to demand monthly reports from the Chief on the expenditures and the absences so that we can look at those for the next several months as we get ready to look at a 1999 budget. If this solves the problem, that is fine. If it doesn’t, then we need to take additional actions in the 1999 budget and we’ll have some information on which to make those decisions. That’s where I am today and I hope the majority of you would support me on that proposal today.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay, thank you. Any other questions or comments? Chief, I do want to say that I appreciate the work that you and your staff have put into this process to try to give us right information. I know you walk kind of a tight rope between management and the elected on the information that we need and want and the issue of who you report to and who you don’t report to and those kinds of problems. I think I need to let the rank and file of our firefighters out there know that the Chief has done the best he can to bring us the information that best protects you and best protects the community and I think he is trying to do that. It is a tough job to walk the line between management and staff and I think you’ve represented them well and I want to give a special thanks to Chief Garcia for coming over here today, supporting us in making these decisions. It is not an easy one. It does come down to money, finances. Everybody is under the gun on budgets. But Betsy has recommended the concept of remaining with the three people that we’ve already approved and approving additional overtime funding to compensate for the shortages. Basically that and the other option of hiring three more plus a little additional funding have been our options. Basically, just two of them floating around. That doesn’t sound like today that there is a lot of support for . . . I don’t know, I haven’t heard from everybody, but it doesn’t sound to me like there is a lot of support for hiring three more. But I’m still willing to look at that. The last thing that I want to do is make it more difficult for you and the firefighters to make the system work. I need to know which would work best. I think there is probably some who agree and disagree with both of them but I want to make the right decision. I want to do what is helpful to protecting our firefighters and the community.”

Chief Curmode said, “Commissioner, thank you. I would like to reiterate what the Assistant Manager, Mr. Harrison said. The actual overtime cost, all absences covered with call backs of \$345,864, again that would be our recommendation.”

Chairman Schroeder said, “Okay. Thank you Chief. Commissioner Hancock.”

Commissioner Hancock said, “That was the question that I was going to ask.”

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Chief Curmode said, "Any money that is not spent, it is stated in the last paragraph of your analysis, basically a statement from Mr. Harrison, if vacancy rates fall, these funds will not be spent. That will be done in a monthly accountability to you in a report that I'll come and visit with you about."

Commissioner Hancock said, "The \$345,000 gives you a comfort zone if I recall."

Chief Curmode said, "Yes sir."

Commissioner Hancock said, "Very good. Chief, everybody has had an opportunity to say something. The only thing I want to say is let's try this for a while. I think we had to make a decision very quickly and we understand what the ramifications are of the three folks that we put on last week and get back as quickly as possible with your understanding of how things are going because June, July, and August come up real quick and we have to make some decisions for the 1999 budget then, as to whether to put on some more folks or not. But it is my intention, as one Commissioner, to create a comfort zone for you and the staff, the firefighters, that there is enough people to adequately staff the equipment that we have in place. Either we have got to quit buying equipment or hire more people, one of the two. I think we're in pretty good shape right now. But we have to do replacement of equipment also and need to update some of the stuff that we have. The tenders I believe we talked about. So get that to us as quickly as possible too. Let us know how the budget is going. Let us know what the results are and what it looks like that you honestly feel you are going to need for 1999. We need to compile that information pretty quickly in the next five months or so, so we can do that."

Chief Curmode said, "Yes Commissioner, I will."

Commissioner Hancock said, "Appreciate you all being here. Chief Garcia, I also appreciate you being here."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you Commissioner. Chief, the three positions that we approved last week, how long before those people are on line and on track?"

Chief Curmode said, "We will be notifying them after today. As we anticipate the fire station in Andale opening between February 11 and the 28th and we're kind of waiting on the weather to poor the approach way for the apparatus. We have a few things to iron out there. But we'll be notifying them and they'll be starting training within the next week or two."

Chairman Schroeder said, "How long is the training?"

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Chief Curmode said, "One of the people we will be hiring is an extra board person who is left on the list. He'll start effective immediately. He'll be on a 24-hour shift. The other two people, they haven't been notified yet, but they will take training and it will probably take four weeks to five weeks of training to get them up to sufficient capability to be able to manage themselves under the supervision of an officer."

Chairman Schroeder said, "Okay, thank you. Other questions or comments? I would like to thank Jeff for being here today. Jeff, I appreciate your patience with us and coming to the meetings and working with me one on one. I appreciate all the firefighters who have come to both of these meetings and expressed their concerns to others and myself about staffing issues and others. I think that what we've seen here is that Chief, I've got to say that I think you're doing a great job. I know you had a difficult time going from one staffing aspect to another, from extra board to this process. I appreciate your candor in saying, 'it is not working, you prefer to try something else.' I think it is a good management decision to make those decisions rather than let something go that isn't working and then have somebody get hurt. I appreciate your honesty and straight forwardness in what you believe works best for the department. I, as one Commissioner, really appreciate it. I know you've taken some heat over it but I think it is the right thing to do. If there is something more that we can do, please let us know. We're here to protect our firefighters and our community and that is what is most important. Like Commissioner Hancock said earlier, you need to get back to us as soon as you can with numbers as this goes to see how we're doing so that when the 1999 budget comes around, if we need to make further adjustments, we will do it. We're here to do anything we can to help in this process and we appreciate you and your staff's hard work."

Chief Curmode said, "Thank you Commissioners."

Chairman Schroeder said, "You bet. Commissioners, do you have any other comments or questions?"

MOTION

Commissioner Gwin moved to use Chief Curmode's recommended method of staffing, which is to fill vacancies by calling back full time personnel. That we utilize the overtime cost estimate amount of \$345,864. Further that the Fire Chief is required to report to the Board of County Commissioners on at least a monthly basis, a report of the expenditure of that line item and the absences that are occurring.

Commissioner Hancock seconded the Motion.

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Chairman Schroeder said, "Let the record show that we have already approved one position or three individuals and an additional \$75,000 from extra board last week. Any other discussion? If not, Clerk call the vote."

VOTE

Commissioner Betsy Gwin	Aye
Commissioner Paul W. Hancock	Aye
Commissioner Thomas G. Winters	Aye
Commissioner Melody C. Miller	Aye
Chairman Mark F. Schroeder	Aye

Chairman Schroeder said, "Thank you. Appreciate you all being here today. Any other business to come before this Board? If not, this meeting is adjourned."

B. ADJOURNMENT

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There being no other business to come before the Board, the Meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF
SEDGWICK COUNTY, KANSAS**

MARK F. SCHROEDER, Chairman
Fifth District

PAUL W. HANCOCK, Chairman Pro Tem
Second District

BETSY GWIN, Commissioner
First District

THOMAS G. WINTERS, Commissioner
Third District

MELODY C. MILLER, Commissioner
Fourth District

ATTEST:

James Alford, County Clerk

APPROVED:

_____, 1998