

From: jonathan@
To: Holbrook, Marcia
Subject: Please disseminate and publish
Date: Monday, May 13, 2024 9:38:11 AM

Thank you very much.

To the MOFD Governing Board:

I wish to comment on your discussion of Item 9.3 on the agenda of last month's Board meeting (April 17, 2024). As you shall see, the comments are focus upon the degree to which the Board is out of touch with the very organization it is supposed to be governing. And yet, even though it can be difficult to bear the load of perspicacious scrutiny, I ask you to hold on until the end where I offer a concrete suggestion which you may use to improve the general situation.

There has been an off-again, on-again disagreement over the past few years between board members, with one side saying that this fire district is a business -- after all, it charges money and provides services -- and should be run like a business; whereas, the other side contends that a public agency is different from a business, but these differences are never well articulated. From my perspective, this matter is of limited importance because a business can just as easily be run badly as it can be run efficiently, wouldn't you say?

In that Item 9.3 from last month, staff suggested adding over a half million dollar burden to the annual budget immediately, then possibly around the same amount to follow, all for new administrative positions. The Board (yourselves) seemed fine with that, only you wanted to see a job description first for the most costly item, the Deputy Chief (DC) position.

First, I would hope that anyone serving on the board of a business or anything else would not simply rubber stamp such an expensive recommendation without looking more deeply into the situation. In other words, what more information do you need to determine if these expenditures are necessary or not? The fact that the only thing anyone asked for was a job description for the DC position is discouraging. The fact that no one asked about the relative benefits of expanding the bureaucracy by a million or so dollars as compared to reviewing full ambulance staffing is disappointing. Where are your concerns for the broader situation?

Now that the DC's duties are made clear in the packet for your May 2024 meeting, the pertinent question is, "What then will be the fire chief's duties, given that most of what he currently does will soon be performed by the proposed DC?" In fact, what the position actually reads as is a fire chief's job with training wheels, that is, a trial run for a fire chief candidate to replace the current one, who, by my calculations is eligible now for retirement. If this is the case, then my comment, offered above, about you gentlemen being out of touch with this organization might be worthy of further thought. Have you ever discussed succession planning?

Lastly on this point, you might find it worthwhile to inquire why the requirements for the DC position are merely an Associate's degree and two years experience as a Battalion Chief. After two years in a BC position, you are still growing into the job, you are not growing out of it. You cannot yet have experienced directing operations and personnel and medical services and training and being the press contact and everything else. Would it not benefit the District to collect a pool of properly qualified pool of candidates from which to draw our

next Fire Chief?

Moving on now, another portion of your discussion of Item 9.3 mainly consisted of a single director giving direction to staff again and again and again while the other directors sat by in silence. One of the directives given, I would point out to you, was especially tone deaf to a signal element which firmly distinguishes a public safety organization from an ordinary business.

In our culture, special respect is accorded to people who willingly put their lives in jeopardy for the common good. Admittedly, there's not as much evidence for this in contemporary society as there once was, but I believe that the principle continues to be understood, especially within a life-safety organization such as the Fire Service. If you will grant me this premise, then I ask you to imagine how demoralizing it would be when a fire agency board member, who looks casually at a new half-million dollar annual financial burden for administrative purposes, then directs staff to save \$3000 annually by having sworn fire and medical personnel clean gutters and solar panels at the fire stations and, I quote, "*call it training.*" Not only would this directive take the District's only ladder truck out of service for these cleanings -- thus delaying its ability to respond for lifesaving duty -- but, gentlemen, please also consider how demoralizing it is for those sworn members who serve us so well to hear the governors of their institution sell them out for gutter cleaners for \$3000.

This directive, which, because no other Board member spoke up, was effectively endorsed by the entire Board, I expect was made with no disrespect intended. But you see, the fact that you don't even know the difference between a demeaning comment and something else makes things even worse for those on the receiving end your actions who are lower down in the organization. The fact that you don't know that training, a thing you turn to to save your own life and save the lives of others, should not be cynically demeaned is cause for further demoralization. In sum, I ask you, do you not know that there is something special, above and beyond the ordinary, about a group of people who choose to put their own safety at risk to assist the rest of us? And when those who govern such an agency speak or condone speech which might imply disrespect for this, do you not see that such demeanor leaves a great deal of room for improvement?

Finally (and I do, indeed, mean "finally"), if you take my point that this entire "business" would be significantly improved if the echelon of governance were to become more roundly aware of the workings of this organization, then I would offer you the following suggestion in three portions.

1. Place on the agenda for your next meeting a proposal to send the current board president out to meet with the principal constituent parties employed by the District, viz., Firefighter Union reps., BCs, the FM, ASD and the fire chief, to ask them all the same thing. "Please tell me the three most important elements of this fire district you wish your governing board understood more deeply."
2. Invite the board president to report back a factual summary of what he discovered.
3. Discuss which of those items seem most important and consider inviting said constituent parties to present to the Board on those topics at various future Board meetings.

Doing so would likely benefit employee engagement, agency morale and possibly help you deepen your understanding of this enterprise as you lead us into the future.

From: [Mark DeWeese](#)
To: [Info](#)
Subject: Question for item 10.3 Authorize Two New Positions in the FY2025 Budget
Date: Wednesday, May 15, 2024 1:01:30 PM

Sorry I can not attend the meeting, but would like to submit the following question for item 10.3

Thanks

Mark DeWeese

Most of our biggest pensions are from Chief level positions. Do we know what kind of impact adding another Chief level position will have on our unfunded liability? Are any board members concerned about this position creating more high level pensions and Chief level turnover of people in their last year or so of employment?

Are there any duties this Deputy Chief position will be doing that current BCs can not do?

Are there any tasks this Deputy position will be doing that will bring in extra revenue to offset the \$494K cost?

Mark DeWeese

Sent from my iPhone