

TO: Structure committee

Summary of conversation with Board member Firefighter George Kling Evergreen Fire  
7/15/09

George and I had a solid discussion about what not to do in obtaining a paid chief based upon his experience with Evergreen fire. We also discussed the evolution of the incentive plans from paid dollars per call to the 457 E plan which was disbanded and now the plan similar to the blue line test that our attorneys have stated is acceptable under the new federal mandates.

The hiring of a big city paid chief with a large salary and benefits has met with significant resistance from the community and the firefighters. Approximately ninety volunteers were on the department prior to the change and around sixty volunteers now. It is important that there is buy in from volunteers, community, and the Board as much as is possible prior to the move. The natural evolution where we are seems to be appropriate to move toward a paid chief and George is not adverse to the idea. It is important that the leader have good leadership skills and not act in a way to simply control the volunteer members. Certain animosity will exist in any organization that has this change irregardless of the leader.

It is critical that the Board and fire organization focus on the right leader and work to resolve barriers between paid and volunteer staff. It is important to focus what is right for all including the taxpayers, department members both paid and volunteer and the Board. It was felt doing this will help to improve the organization.

It was felt that allowing the volunteer members ease of ways to visit with the Board was important. This could be remedied by having an individual such as a volunteer Deputy Chief that is elected by the members to serve in the role. We discussed possibly incorporating the Genesee structure in this way to serve this purpose.

In addition, Evergreen has established an organization wide survey using Zoomerang for one hundred ninety dollars (\$190) per year to receive information and concerns from members. This is used as a tool for information rather than a way to terminate members. There will always be a certain fringe on the high and the low so it is important to see the general trends and what is being done to improve the organization. I thought this might be done on a larger scale to the community as well.

The Evergreen District paid consultants up to four hundred dollars per hour to determine whether or not they needed a paid Chief. It was felt the entire process was self serving to obtain one highly paid Chief. Subsequently recall and negative energy permeated the entire organization

Secondly, George was also involved in the discussions of paying volunteers for calls. These programs as you may know prompted IRS to focus on volunteer fire departments and Golden Fire did have issues with the program with the IRS. Subsequently Evergreen

built the 457E plan with support of State Congress to help build incentives for volunteer firefighters. That program had good benefit though encouraged members to leave early so they could obtain their money.

Finally, the department has engaged in providing the incentive plan we are considering basing benefits on the blue line the attorneys have suggested is allowable. This is less than twenty percent of a full time paid person's compensation for a like position. Providing this incentive can be given to volunteer members at all levels and members are encouraged to stay as they can continue to obtain compensation for various services.

The program is currently funded with one hundred twenty five thousand dollars per year (\$125,000) for the volunteer core. Hiring a paid Chief and administering this constructive program simultaneously would help to reduce or eliminate animosity with hiring a paid Chief. It is paramount to motivate the volunteers. This program is run by the volunteers so they have control over it and administer the program. The Board provides the financial obligation yearly for the program and approves payments.

On a related note George wanted to express his heartfelt thank you for our commitment and help on the McDonald's fire. He suggested we visit more about ways to build a solid mutual response to the commercial structures and other events in our Districts.

I will be talking to their Chief on some additional questions and visiting with their President of the volunteer incentive program to provide further information.

Thank You,  
Patrick Smith, Board, Firefighter  
Structure committee