

July 1, 2009

To: FFPD Structure Committee
RE: Perspective on FFPD Organizational Structure

Dear FFPD Structure Committee:

As the business manager who is intimately involved with the daily functions of Foothills Fire I wanted to offer some thoughts regarding our organizational structure. I know this is a topic of concern and has been an issue since the departments merged. I would like to offer some thoughts from my perspective as business manager, firefighter, and former volunteer.

1- When I first joined the department five years ago one of the first things I noticed was a lack of clear leadership. There were officers but I was unsure of who to go to for what and who was in charge of what. The rules seemed to change depending on who you talked to and there were often heated disagreements. I believe this was all a hint of a larger problem. Though we've had a lot of dedicated and driven leaders within the department the issue has been consistency of this leadership. The officers and chiefs are volunteers and a great deal is demanded of them. But they also have a personal life and have the right to place that first, as they should. Hence, we do not retain our officers, chiefs in particular. When they move on someone new steps in and the rules change, wheels are recreated, and time is wasted. This creates confusion and frustration amongst the membership and now the staff with the chief as their direct boss.

Many have been talking about the option of hiring a paid chief. I have believed for some time that this is what Foothills needs in order to stay on track and start moving consistently forward, rather than falling into long periods of upheaval, as has been our history. I believe a part-time paid chief that is available on a daily basis and is committed to staying long term would create the consistency of operational leadership that we need and allow projects, growth, and positive change to move forward without halting and starting over due the time restraints and frustrations of a well-intentioned volunteer.

I believe that a part-time chief is our best option due to the upcoming economical decrease in budget, the continuing trend of decreasing call volume, and other priorities such as facility and fleet improvements. As part-time the salary would be a known budget number with no benefits or additional costs. By offering a part-time position we could easily attract a retired career firefighter who wants to stay involved in the fire department but not full time or a career firefighter who works a limited schedule. A part-time paid chief would be a good stepping stone for those who may have objections. It would also be affordable to the district without any change in mill levies.

2- There has also been discussion regarding the business manager reporting directly to the chief or to the board. In light of recent issues with the Rainbow Hills remodel where a volunteer chief was in charge but the manager not involved with the project I can understand why this did not

work well. My reaction to this issue has been the following: As long as we have a volunteer chief who may have limited time available or may need to resign his or her position I must be directly involved on every issue that involves the finances of this department. That is my responsibility which I take very seriously.

With a paid chief the management would be facilitated because there would be a commitment to follow through on projects and the ability for us to work together on a day to day basis for long term rather than a year or less at a time. I believe the part-time paid chief would not only provide consistency of leadership for operations as noted above but also would provide consistency for the staff and for the board.

If the committee chose to have the business manager report directly to the board there may be a concern regarding call response and training. The guidelines are very clear and understood. As the business manager my primary responsibility is the day to day business management of the district. I am capable of using discretion when responding to calls as is evidenced by the previous last three months of call responses. In April I responded on 4 out of 40 calls, in May 2 out of 35, and June 3 out of 36. Responding to these calls has not interfered in any way in my ability to complete my job and has benefited the district with the availability of an additional driver, firefighter, and EMT if needed. In regards to training and maintaining my certifications, I have required little to no oversight by the chief due to the fact that I volunteer with another department during my off time and am able to receive sufficient training through their programs.

I feel that Foothills does need consistency of operational leadership in order to move beyond some of our current concerns and I believe that need could be met through the hiring of a part-time paid chief. We are growing and evolving and though we've had some setbacks, I honestly believe that we have moved forward in many ways and that the ability to serve our community has and will continue to improve with time.

Thank you for your time in the review of our organizational structure. I commit to doing my best to serve this community and to work with the current and future structure of the department.

Sincerely,

Jeanette Kehoe
Business Manager