

Funding unclear for Meadow Volunteer Fire Dept.

By JOSIE MUSICO
Staff Writer

Funding for the Meadow Volunteer Fire Department remains uncertain as questions arise of whether the city or county holds more authority over its operating procedures.

Terry County Commissioners voted Dec. 21 to reimburse the City of Meadow for the \$10,102 they recently spent on a new fire truck, and agreed that in the future they would like to have direct oversight of MVFD's budget. As the *Brownfield News* previously reported, the commissioners voted 4-0 on Aug. 27 to begin paying MVFD's bills through County Auditor Jan Hudson's office, rather than continue to let the agency control their own finances. They expressed concerns during their most-recent meeting, though, that that plan was not being followed as efficiently as they wished.

"When we voted to give \$15,000, that's not the way it ended up," said Precinct 4 Commissioner John Franks. "The city paid the bills, and we reimbursed them. The bills should come through Jan."

Commissioner Kirby Keese, whose Precinct 2 represents Meadow, agreed, "The city is in trouble with the chain of command as far as how the money's distributed ... If we cut the money loose, the city's going to say that's their truck."

City of Meadow Administrator Terri McClanahan told the *News* that MVFD could be comparable to the water or electric department as a department directly operated under the city, and that the city paid its bills and the county reimbursed them. She was attempting to reach a contract with the city regarding operating procedures, she added.

"We're currently working on an interlocal agreement with the county," she said. "There's not a formal agreement right now."

Fire Chief Jon Williams told

the commissioners that dealing with both local-government entities was a hassle, and he would prefer the county hold full financial control of his department.

"It's a nightmare for us," he said. "I'd rather it be the Meadow Volunteer Fire Department and not have to go through the City Council. I'd rather go through Kirby (Keesee)."

Williams declined to respond to an inquiry from the *News* or provide his contact information, stating that despite his position as fire chief, he was unwilling to serve as a news source.

"I'm not going to answer any questions for the paper," he said Dec. 21.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Mike Swain recommended Williams file 501C3 paperwork to officially proclaim MVFD a nonprofit organization, independent from the city.

"That would eliminate having to go through two entities," he said.

During the Aug. 27 meeting in which commissioners voted to begin paying MVFD's bills directly, County Judge Butch Wagner said that after Meadow City Councilwoman M'Lisa Nieman and former city employee Robert Campos brought the issue to his attention, he determined it would be preferable for the county to handle MVFD's bill-payment in the same manner they handle the Wellman Volunteer Fire Department's.

"They used to pay their own bills, but since we've been doing Wellman's, we needed to do both departments the same way," Wagner said.

State Firemen's and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas Certification Administrator Kevin Creamer told the *News* on Wednesday that Williams was not certified - or at least not through Meadow - as his agency had not received any applications from MVFD listing his or other fire-fighters'



News Briefs

City Council - Brownfield City Council will meet at 7:30 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 2 at City Hall.

Commissioners - Terry County Commissioners will meet at 10 a.m. Monday, Jan. 7 at City Hall.

Art meeting - The Brownfield Art Association will meet at 7 p.m. Monday, Jan. 14 at their headquarters, 1301 W. Main St., with a porcelain art demonstration by Carol Stokes. New and potential members are invited to attend.

Radio fans - If you are interested in joining an antique radio club, contact Stan Baker at 559-4679.

GED classes - Brownfield Independent School District offers GED classes from 5-8 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at the middle school. For more information call 637-2591. To register for daytime GED classes, contact Ginger Stuart at 637-4234 or visit Workforce Solutions, 1321 B Tahoka Rd. Classes meet from 8:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

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training credentials. However, staying up to date on training is considered more of a recommendation than a formal requirement for volunteer fire departments in Texas.

"They have not filed for any certification applications for anyone in the department, including Chief Williams," he said.

Records indicate that Assistant Chief Daniel Harrington and volunteer fire-fighter Stacy Whorton, however, have completed training in Lubbock as paid fire-fighters. According to the Texas Commission on Fire Protection, Harrington has worked full-time for the Lubbock Fire Department since December 2007 and currently holds certification as Firefighter Intermediate, Fire Service Instructor I and Hazardous Materials Technician. Whorton has worked for LFD since July 2008 and currently holds a Firefighter Basic certificate.

MVFD was reorganized about two months ago, with the appointment of Williams as chief following a 3-1 City Council vote. Several volunteer fire-fighters resigned in support of longtime former Chief Robert Campos, whom they had reelected during a departmental meeting.

Meanwhile, Meadow city officials remain enthusiastic about the new direction of the volunteer fire department as

they solve its financial questions.

"I think they're doing a great job," Mayor Natalie Howard told the *News*. "I think it's great we've received some funds from the county. Now that we have a more-structured fire department, I think the county is more willing to work with us."

Howard added that grants had also helped to fund the department, and they were still searching for more volunteer fire-fighters.

SFFMAT Executive Director Chris Barron told the *News* there is no standard system for funding of Texas volunteer fire departments. Instead, payment methods vary significantly among the Lone Star State's 254 counties.

"Fire departments all over Texas are set up differently," he said. "It could range from donations from bake sales and other fundraisers to contracts with either the county or city or emergency-services districts."

County administrators acknowledge that the amount of funding they award MVFD will not likely change significantly after they reach an agreement with the city, but still look forward to establishing clearer guidelines regarding the budgetary process.

"We've funded it a long time, and we're going to do the best we can to get this straightened out," Judge Wagner said.

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