



**OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**SOUTH AREA FIRE & EMERGENCY RESPONSE DISTRICT**  
**Board of Directors Meeting**  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026 @ 17:30

**A. Call to Order**

The meeting of the South Area Fire & Emergency Response District Board of Directors was called to order at 17:34 by SAFER Vice Chairman Al Opall.

**Members Present**

Board of Directors – Cronin, Kolden, Maloney (virtual), and Opall were all present, Langenhahn was absent and excused. Also present: Village of Rib Mountain – Administrator Rhoden; Village of Weston – Administrator Gebert; SAFER – Fire Chief Finke, Deputy Fire Chief Lang, EMS Division Chief Gordon-Haessly, Captain Lohman (virtual), Captain Novak, Medical Director Rademan, and Administrative Assistant Latimer.

**B. Correspondence/Comments from the public on issues related to the SAFER District**

None

**C. Consent Items**

Board of Directors approval of prior meeting minutes from October 8, 2025, and November 3, 2025.

***Motioned by Kolden to approve prior meeting minutes from October 8, 2025, and November 3, 2025. Seconded by Cronin. Motion carried 3:0.***

Board of Directors approval of expenditures and receipts from October, November, and December 2025.

***Motioned by Cronin to approve expenditures and receipts from October, November, and December 2025. Seconded by Kolden. Motion carried 4:0.***

**D. Business Items**

Discussion and possible action on 2026 SAFER Board of Directors Meeting Schedule.

- Chief Finke said I was asked to put this on the agenda, if the Board would like to set a schedule for the year, six months, or quarter.
  - Opall said we've always depended on the second Tuesday, and there's always been some flex in that.
  - Cronin said the reason why I asked for this to be brought up was because we've had a couple of instances this last year we struggled to get a quorum for the meetings. I figured if we had a calendar that was done at the beginning of the year, then everybody could plan.
  - Opall said we can set it up for the second Tuesday of every month and we can flex from there.
- Action: Motion by Cronin to hold the meetings on the second Tuesday of the month at 5:30 pm at Station 1 for the calendar year of 2026. Second by Maloney. Motion carried 4:0.***

Discussion and possible action on Purchase of Zoll Cardiac Monitor.

- Chief Finke said in full disclosure this device is already here and in service. I spoke with Chairman Maloney about this before it was purchased because we have staffing on the engine over here (Station 1) at least some of the times and is now responding as an ALS equipped engine to provide patient care, and as part of providing patient care, we need a cardiac monitor. We purchased a used Zoll monitor which saved us about \$11,000.00, it's refurbished and factory tested. The funds that are being used is FAP money, which is one of

the things that FAP, which is Financial Assistance Program that we get from the state of Wisconsin can be used for. We can't use that money for wages, electricity bills, and things like that. It must be used for training and what we call unbudgeted unexpected expenditures for support and improvement.

- Kolden said we didn't have those prior obviously and is that a new requirement to have one of these on the truck.
- Chief Finke said we have them on the ambulances and we have one on the rescue truck in Weston because that has been responding to medical calls for two years. Now this engine will also be responding to medical calls, and it has medications and other paramedic supplies. We need to do cardiac monitoring and defibrillation in the event of a cardiac arrest.
- Deputy Chief Lang said it corresponds with the increase in staffing this year. We have people here and we staff the engine for fire response and we're first responding with the engine till the ambulance gets there from either Weston or if they're both out, we get an ambulance from Wausau or Riverside. We get that point of care as quickly as the taxpayers expect.
- Chief Finke said in years past if there was a patient that went into cardiac arrest back here on Rose Avenue and the ambulance is out, they're not getting anything till the ambulance comes here from Weston. If that same call happens tonight (with four crew members on duty here) and this ambulance is out, the engine will respond and they have 95% of the same equipment in the engine that they have in the ambulances, so they can provide that paramedic level of care within four minutes instead of twelve minutes.
- Kolden said out of curiosity what was the cost of that thing.
- Chief Finke said \$24,892.00, a new one is about \$36,000.00.

***Action: Motioned by Cronin to approve the Purchase of the Zoll Cardiac Monitor. Second by Kolden. Motion carried 4:0.***

Discussion and possible action on Task Force One Membership.

- Chief Finke said Task Force One is based out of Volk Field, traditionally it's been made up of mostly members of larger departments across the state, Madison, Milwaukee, Appleton, Oshkosh, and Eau Claire. They've opened that up as they've expanded their team over the past several years, and they've been accepting from other departments as well from across the state. Task Force One responds all over the country usually to large scale disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and tornadoes. They specialized in disciplines like swift water rescue, high angle rescue, trench rescue, and collapse rescue. When they opened this up several months ago, we had internal interest in it, and I applied saying we would like to have two spots on the team. We were initially denied, but on December 5<sup>th</sup> we were told one of our two requested spots opened up. By seniority we awarded that to an individual on the department. The reason it is coming to the Board is because if there's a deployment to Louisiana for a week because of a hurricane and one of our guys gets deployed, will be in Louisiana for a week and they're being paid by SAFER, and we're going to have to pay somebody to backfill that position, however we submit paperwork that shows how much we paid for our backfill and that individual's wages while they're gone and WEM Wisconsin Emergency Management back pays us through the state budget for that position. The individuals have to go to training, and we're refunded \$50.00 an hour for that individual to be down there. It's a little bit of extra paperwork on our end because we're going to pay them and then submit paperwork to the state to get reimbursed that money. The benefit for us is the training that they will get can be brought back to us. The net cost to the district will be \$0.00.

***Action: Motioned by Maloney to approve the Task Force One Membership. Seconded by Cronin. Motion carried 4:0.***

Discussion and possible action on Addition of Six Full-Time Firefighters Starting July 1, 2027.

- Administrator Gebert said we had added this because the resolution for referendum will go Monday to the Village of Weston, it is on the agenda twice both for \$600,000.00 and \$300,000.00, \$600,000.00 would add six mid-year, and \$300,000.00 would do three this next year and then we would have to discuss what would happen the year after that. Rib Mountain met and made a motion in support of the six mid-year, and I think it's also important that the SAFER Board would have a similar motion to have on record so when we go out with the education for the referendum we would say this is being advocated both by the SAFER Board and by both municipalities.

- Kolden said I'm still not sold on the six, it's an awful lot of staff to add, and the percentage increase is big. I don't know what the goal is from a service level, we're maintaining at a 93% service level with calls, and I don't know what adding nine more people is going to do. I get part of it, but on the other end of it.
- Opall said I echo what Kolden had to say.
- Kolden said it's a big percentage increase in staffing, you're adding ten a 33% increase it's a large commitment from a dollar standpoint as a taxpayer.
- Opall said that's my concern also, of course we just voted to support concept.
- Cronin said was that unanimous as well.
- Opall said it was.
- Cronin said we also had a number of folks in this room echoing similar concerns over the last couple of years.
- Kolden said we have three, I want to see how the three works out. Do we add three again the following year, see how that works out? Add three again. To commit to six, I don't know.
- Opall said I like the idea of the three we have now, three in 2027, and three in 2028.
- Kolden said I'm not in your shoes, but I have to trust what you tell us. I struggle; we're not going to reduce our overtime expenses. We have apparatus that are inoperable or not usable because we don't have enough staff.
- Chief Finke said I get it, it's a big ask, but this department has been understaffed for a long time. I agree with you, what is the service level, what do you want? I know Mr. Maloney brought it up a year ago, we're never going to be able to answer 100% of our calls. Could we? Yes, but we would probably need 25 people on a day, which we all know is unrealistic. We're calling for mutual aid a lot, it's over 100 times a year, with these extra staff our mutual aid requests are probably going to drop by 75%. So instead of 125 people waiting 15 minutes for an ambulance, that might drop to 20, that's the goal. I look at the response times that are greater than 10 minutes in both Villages, rural areas are harder, but in my mind if you live in a metro area like we're in, I think anything over 10 minutes for an ambulance is too long.
- Kolden said you can bring up the extreme cases, some of it we should've been able to cover, some of it you're not going to cover. It's hard to go with the one offs. From a resident standpoint, I'd rather spend my extra money on my homeowners insurance that I have to pay, I'd rather send that to the Village for a fire fee. For Rib Mountain, do we have enough Police protection?
- Cronin said you claim it's one offs, but how often are we getting double and triple tapped on a weekly basis?
- Deputy Chief Lang said it's almost every day.
- Cronin said we don't have the staff to cover that right now. This comes up every year, you look at the number of calls that our firefighters are responding to per capita, compared to other departments, I've seen that statistic numerous times. You talk about the amount of bodies you need to have on the scene within 10 minutes. We are falling short of that bar time, and time, and time again, and as a taxpayer that is represented by this service, I am not comfortable continuing to move down this.
- Kolden said what are you comfortable with, is 93% good enough, what do you want to see?
- Cronin said we don't know what that percentage is going to be.
- Chief Finke said no, we don't know, if you asked me to give you a good estimate, I would say 96% - 98% is very realistic. I don't look at the 96% - 98%, I look at the physical number of calls where it takes an ambulance more than 10 minutes to respond.
- Kolden said I'm not advocating that we don't add anybody, do we need to go jump right in with six more people, it's nine new staff in a year and a half, so you're adding 33% to your staff.
- Cronin said refresh my memory, we're increasing staff by a third, how many of those people are out because they're sick, FMLA, vacation, without anybody being gone for the day, what does this take us to?
- Chief Finke said with the additional six, that will put us at eleven.
- Cronin said what is minimum staffing?
- Chief Finke said we haven't officially decided that yet, but it will probably be eight.
- Deputy Chief Lang said the other number that we're concerned about is when we did our ISO rating, our average bodies at a structure fire is less than six, and our average off-duty response has fallen from 10+ down to 1.5. Those are the numbers that aren't sustainable with the 44 fires we went to this last year.
- Administrator Rhoden said Rib Mountain does not have to go to referendum, so we're really here because Weston does. Does it really matter whether this Board needs to commit to the six today?

- Administrator Gebert said it's hard to have an educational presentation where the Board of the organization that you're providing the funding to wouldn't have taken a stance. I think in the educational piece of it to put forth that the SAFER Board feels also that the staffing is needed.

***Action: Motioned by Cronin to approve the Addition of Six Full-Time Firefighters Starting July 1, 2027. Seconded by Maloney.***

Roll-call Vote:

<u>NAME:</u>	<u>Aye</u>	<u>Nay</u>
Maloney	X	
Cronin	X	
Opall	X	
Kolden		X

Motion carried 3:1.

End of Year Budget review.

- Chief Finke said the budget is in your packet, if you have any questions, let me know. We have a balance of \$189,167.64 of unexpended funds, with half of a payroll that has to come out of there which is approximately \$42,000.00, and there is a few 2025 expenses that need to be paid. There should be approximately \$100,000.00 in unexpended budget money from 2025. Revenue we are \$238,000.00 over, however I want to caution the Board that we were running behind in 2024 on EMS revenue, that was caught up in 2025 and that amount is artificially high. The new billing company is doing well. We do have some lines that are over budget, we had a horrible fourth quarter on vehicle repairs. Our Tender needed multiple different things, like exhaust leaks, and oil leaks that had to be fixed. Then we had two ambulances that had significant exhaust leaks, and a rear end went out. Employee Health Tests are over, we hired a fair amount of people in 2025, and hiring people has gotten expensive. It's \$1,000.00 in psychological and medical health testing for every employee that we bring on.

Attorney Referral.

- None

## E. Staff Reports

Report from Fire Chief

- Fire Chief Finke said we met with our billing company, they're doing a good job with revenue.
- We have a meeting with GEMT tomorrow for 2025 data.
- We anticipate we will negotiate with the Union fairly soon. The question I have for the Board, I am requesting that the negotiations are done by myself, Deputy Chief Lang, our Battalion Chiefs, and final approval will come back to this body before we officially agree. I think we are capable of doing it without an attorney, if there are legal issues or questions that come up we can certainly involve Attorney Dietrich.
- We trained all day today at Mid-State (Technical College) in Wisconsin Rapids, I want to thank Mid-State Tech College, they allowed us to use their burn facility for a small amount of money. We don't have any place to do any live fire training at the moment, so we took our five recruits down there with several different evolutions.
  - o Administrator Gebert said anytime there's new people, and it works with the meeting, can they come and introduce themselves?

Report from Deputy Fire Chief

- Deputy Fire Chief Lang said the reports are in your packet and I'll give you the highlights.
- **Personnel report:** We held a promotional process for the vacant Engineer position.
- **EMS & Fire Incidents:** EMS and fire responses are there.
- **Training:** Training hours are listed with topics.
- **Apparatus:** Nothing to report.

- **Fire Prevention/Public Education:** Activities are listed.
- **Grants/Projects:** We did receive the Firehouse Subs Grant.

**F. Remarks from the Board of Directors to set the next meeting date, as well as discuss items for the next meeting agenda.**

- Next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 10, 2026 at SAFER Station 1.
- Cronin has nothing.
- Kolden has nothing.
- Maloney has nothing.
- Opall has nothing.

**G. Business Items**

18:33 Motion by Kolden to adjourn into closed session pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 19.85(1)(c) for considering employment, promotion, compensation, or performance evaluation data of any public employee over which the governmental body has jurisdiction or exercises responsibility, to wit: 2025 annual review of the Fire Chief. Second by Cronin.

Roll-call vote:

<u>NAME:</u>	<u>Aye</u>	<u>Nay</u>
Cronin	X	
Kolden	X	
Maloney	X	
Opall	X	

Motion carried 4:0.

18:57 Motion by Kolden to reconvene to open session. Second by Cronin. Motion carried 4:0.

Discussion and possible action on closed session item.

***Action: Motioned by Maloney to change the Chiefs Salary Range by 4%, and adjust the 2026 salary to \$123,000.00/annual. Second by Kolden. Motion carried 4:0.***

**H. Adjourn**

**Motion by Cronin to adjourn. Second by Maloney. Motion carried 4:0.  
Adjourned at 18:58**

Respectfully submitted by Cher Latimer, SAFER District Administrative Assistant.