

Board considers 'volunteer' policy

by MICHAEL P. JONES
Post Correspondent

A proposed policy to restrict full-time firefighters or part-time volunteers from serving on the board of the Hoodland Rural Fire Protection District touched off a heated discussion a week ago Tuesday.

Vera Rogers, fire board member, said the new policy would not restrict a firefighter from becoming a member of the board, but said they would have to resign from that position before taking the oath of office. Members of the board, for the first time in the district's history, were sworn in earlier at the meeting.

Lowell Njust, attorney for the fire district, researched the legalities of being both a firefighter and board member and said he could find nothing in the law to prohibit this.

However, he said there would be "an inherent conflict of interest" if firefighters were to serve in both capacities. He said it appears to be in the best interest of the public and the fire department to have a policy preventing this.

With a firefighter holding a position on the board it would mean he would technically be "an employee of the chief who is also the employer of the chief," Njust said.

Board Member David Olson of Wemme, who works as a firefighter for the Redland Fire District as well as a volunteer for the Hoodland District, objected. The adoption of the policy would force him to resign either his position as a volunteer or his seat on the board.

"We won't dwell on the obvious," said Olson. "I'm opposed to this resolution. I have problems with it getting as far as it has."

Olson criticized the wording of the proposed policy, which was drafted by Njust. He said he feels the board is "opening up a can of worms" by calling a volunteer in the department a part-time employee.

The reimbursement of \$2.25 for seven hours of work, said Olson, would interest the Department of Labor, the Internal Revenue Service and "a whole bunch of other people." He said in the past no such policy had ever been passed for this reason.

"I think it's wrong, period," said Olson.

Njust said by law volunteers are designated part-time employees.

"There is a law that says you can't prevent someone from running as a member of the board of directors," said Njust. "There's nothing to say you can't do the contrary."

Njust said the conflict of

interest, for a person to be both a firefighter and a board member, is comparable to "serving two masters."

"If a man had two wives, could he be loyal to both of them," asked Njust. "I couldn't."

Olson said Njust's analogy of serving two masters does not sit well with him. He said he has only one master, "the district."

Shirley Dueber of Brightwood said she has to agree with Olson, and couldn't see where the conflict of interest would be. She said volunteer firefighters on the board could make "a more educated vote than me, John Q. Citizen," who does not understand the inner workings of the department.

Neil Senger, a battalion chief with the department, disagreed and said he feels it would be a conflict of in-

terest because the decisions made would not be what the public wants, rather what a firefighter wants.

"Being on both sides of the fence I don't think you are getting a true, honest opinion," said Senger.

Dueber said the board is currently getting this by having Fire Chief Don Armintrout "at the head of the table," giving advice. She said as a citizen she is not qualified to question any figures Armintrout may give, but volunteer firefighters would be.

Karen Ligatich, who said she was speaking as both a volunteer and a citizen, urged the adoption of the policy. She said as board members, employees of the department could not offer good ideas.

The fire board will vote on the new policy at its next meeting, scheduled for Oct. 5 at 7:30 p.m. at Zig Zag.

Meeting said not open

by MICHAEL P. JONES
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Tension arose over the public reading and posting of policies of the Hoodland Rural Fire Protection District a week ago Tuesday evening at the monthly meeting of the fire board.

The first hint of problems concerning the policies of the district was sparked by Board Member David Olson. He objected to the board voting on policies without first reading them out loud to the audience.

Olson was less than complimentary toward fellow board members Vera Rogers, Peggy Hergert and Ray Miller for not reading the policies out loud. He said he felt the board was in violation of the state open meeting law last month when the policies were first presented, and would again be in violation if they weren't read into the record.

"To take a group of policies that affect everyone in this district, and everyone in this department, and read them to ourselves, is not what the open meeting law intended," charged Olson.

Hergert, the board chairperson, responded that it is the duty of the board to make the policies for the district. This the voters knew when they

elected us to these positions, she said.

"I'm under the opinion we did read

them," said Hergert. "That's what we were elected for. At this point in time I would say it would be a waste of time."

John Larson, a volunteer firefighter who works out of the Government Camp station, objected to a policy proposed at the August meeting. That policy would have forbidden membership on the board by volunteer firefighters in the department.

Hergert said that particular clause had been dropped with the revision of the proposed policy.

"If it (the policy) would have been read, I guess I would have known," responded Larson.

The board voted 3-1 to accept the policies as written. Olson cast the dissenting vote and explained he was voting no "because the policies should have been read in open session."

A policy concerning job descriptions for volunteers was the next agenda item before the board and, this too, was not read.

Hergert explained that until the job description is formally adopted, it is not public information because the content might change.

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