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CITY OF CREOLA

Since 1978

MAYOR

Donald Nelson

CITY CLERK

Marcy Brown

CITY COUNCIL

Kendal Hadaway
James Brown
Wendy Lynch
Harold Parmer
Mark Howell

MAGISTRATES

Linda Hoiles
Christie Bryant

Minutes of the City of Creola Special Called Council Meeting

Thursday, October 30, 2025

Creola City Hall

Meeting 7:00 P.M.

The special called council meeting was called to order by Mayor Don Nelson at 7:00 p.m. We were led in prayer by Mayor Don Nelson. Mayor Don Nelson led the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll call was taken by Marcy Brown, City Clerk. Present at the meeting were Mark Howell, Harold Parmer, James Brown, Kendal Hadaway, Wendy Lynch, and Mayor Don Nelson. City Attorney Danny Mimms was present.

Mayor Nelson held a discussion on the uniqueness of being a volunteer firefighter. Officers of the fire department with 40+ years of experience are present, this included Jeff Reeves, Charlie Moye, and Gary Huff.

Several recent incidents were highlighted, including:

- Fatality on Elson Avenue involving a lawnmower.
- Accident on a roof requiring rescue.
- Fatality on Highway 43.
- Wrecks on I-65, including one involving an 18-wheeler.

These incidents underscore the necessity of having a responsive fire department.

Discussions on the importance of a paid fire chief being able to work with volunteers.

"When you go to the point of hiring a paid fireman or fire chief, you really need to make sure this person can work with volunteers. Because if he can't...you're going to be standing out there hiring you a paid fire department immediately because they'll quit." – Jeff Reeves stated

History of the Volunteer Fire Department

- Gary Huff was a volunteer for about 30 years and chief for 27 or 28 years.
- First chief was Jim Smith, followed by Virginia Lawshe, the first female Fire chief in the United States.

- Frank Hammond was the third chief.
- Gary Huff was chief for 27-28 years.
- Jeff Reeves and Steve Criswell became chief after Gary.
- The former chiefs had a profound respect for Charlie Moye.

When Jeff Reeves addressed the council, he mentioned Community Day. He stated that Community Day was moved to the second Saturday because the caterer had a conflict on the first Saturday and other caterers were triple the price. Jeff asks that people do what they've done in the past, like garbage cans and the cart for the elderly. The bug people are coming four or five days before to spray. Mark will receive the check. The council will be recognized after lunch. Parking will be a big issue. Overnight security will be needed the Friday before and the officer will be paid \$300.

Jeff Reeves stated that he came into the fire department in 1993 and spent years learning from Huff. Jeff said that being chief is a "lonely spot on that hill." Jeff's granddad was the first fire chief and first mayor, the first truck was from the military. They had a lot of certified firefighters. Charlie and some of his guys moved over from Satsuma to start volunteering. It's tough to manage volunteers because "When you're not paying somebody, you know, when you're out helping somebody who owns the house, and they start griping at you because you're not putting the shingles on the way they want them on. What do you tell them? I'll just go to the house."

Satsuma destroyed their volunteer program because they hired a guy who looked good on paper but didn't have firefighting experience. Jeff notes that some chiefs get training and build their resume but don't share it with other members. Mayor Nelson asked if Jeff Reeves and Gary Huff would consider being a member of the interview team and they agreed.

Charlie Moye believes it is time for a full-time chief and has been saying so for two and a half years. Charlie thanks the council for investing in the fire department, and notes that the city of Creola is doing well and growing and needs a foundation to take care of the growing needs of the community. When Mr. Moye first took over, they ran 35 to 40 calls a month, but now they are averaging more than 60 runs a month. The increase is mostly medical calls.

Mayor Nelson asks the council to think carefully about the decision to hire a full-time Chief because he believes it is the right thing to do at this time. Mayor Nelson hopes the council will seriously consider the homegrown talent they have and emphasizes the seriousness of the decision, as the fire department deals with situations where people's lives are at stake.

Police Chief Shane Stringer Remarks:

Volunteers are "weird" and managing them is "like herding cats," but it's rewarding. There are times that we take for granted what we've got, and we've got such a good thing, and we've got a jam up great fire department. He recounts an incident where the fire department's quick response saved a man's son after a major wreck. He emphasizes the importance of hiring someone who cares about the community and is loyal to the city and department. He notes that hiring someone from outside the agency or state may not work, as they may not care about the community or fit in with the volunteers.

He mentions the difficulty of hiring paid firefighters due to salary expectations and the unique nature of working with volunteers. He warns against hiring someone with a destructive attitude who may run off the volunteers. He acknowledges that change is coming to Creole, and tough decisions need to be made based on budgets and the community's needs. He highlights the importance of volunteers to the community, citing examples of their dedication and quick response to emergencies. He emphasizes that public safety is a top priority for businesses looking to grow in the area.

Chief Stringer stresses the importance of playing the "long game" and making decisions that will benefit the fire department and the city in the future and believes the council will look back and see that they played a key role in the fire department's growth.

Chief Stringer advises the council to interview many candidates but cautions that resumes and interviews don't always reveal a person's true capabilities and suggest that Jacob has been "test driven" and his dedication to the fire department is evident in his unpaid work.

Chief Stringer expresses gratitude for the city's growth and thanks the council for their accomplishments. He acknowledges the changes he has seen since he left and finds it exciting.

Council Discussion

Mr. Howell wants the contract to stipulate that the entire council hires the fire chief, not just the mayor, and to consider training and conference expenses for the fire chief, similar to the police chief. Mr. Howell questioned the contract: Should it be left blank and replaced with a minimum to maximum range, or should it remain at \$67,000?

The council needs to decide to fund the position, assuming someone can be found for the price put in the listing. Mr. Howell stated that they plugged in the \$67,000 salary, but the council had no say in that.

Mayor Nelson stated that \$67,000 was the starting point, but it actually starts at \$56,000. Mr. Howell feels that the council should pick the fire chief along with the mayor and wants that in the contract. He also states that the council is not going to go by ordinance because what was done with the last two chiefs was not per that ordinance. The council was under the impression that they were going to hire two part-time chiefs, but they never discussed the salary.

Mayor Nelson stated that if there are any changes to the contract, give them to Marcy. He also stated that the council needs to decide how they want to interview for the fire chief position. Recommendation was to have a panel with a couple of council members. Jeff volunteered because he brings expertise. Mr. Huff said that he would also be available. Mr. Brown is available after 2:30.

- Recommendation to get somebody at large, like a citizen, for their input.
- Suggestion to have three council members and one citizen.
- The council should review the applications and reduce them to about four or five.
- The council needs to agree that they are going to hire someone for the fire chief position.

- The contract needs to come back to the council, and if it meets what the council wants, then they can say yes.
- Question about what changes are wanted in the contract.
- Mr. Howell wants it in the contract that the current and next mayor approve the contract and sign off on the chosen individual, as it's a contract hire and believes the council should be able to choose the position along with the mayor.
- The ordinance states the mayor and council hire, and the council and mayor have to fund the position. The mayor has firing authority because he runs the day-to-day operations.
- The ordinance states the mayor, and council can hire a fire chief. A recent amendment allows the position to be full-time, part-time, or volunteer.
- Out-of-state candidates may face delays in obtaining reciprocity, hindering their ability to start the position promptly. The fire college conducts a detailed analysis of training backgrounds for reciprocity, which is not guaranteed.
- The council, along with the mayor, should choose the fire chief and sign off on the contract.
- Firefighters have a year to obtain certification or reciprocity after being hired. They can start working under full pay even if they are not yet certified.
- Section 2 of the ordinance states the chief shall be appointed by the mayor and city council. The contract should not violate the ordinance. If hired through the personnel board, the mayor's firing authority would be restricted by personnel board rules. With a contract, either side would have a 30-day out.
- Vacation time is 80 hours (two weeks) after a year of employment.
- Many small municipalities hire a part-time retired fire chief.
- The city has the option to hire a full-time chief.

Mr. Hadaway made a motion to fill Fire Chief position based on council approval of the contract and approval of the candidate by the council and mayor. Mr. Howell seconded the motion. All in favor and the motion was carried.

- The mayor, Jeff, and Shane will do the interviews, along with two 2 council members. The committee will bring back a recommendation to the council.

A letter from the fire former chief and members of the department recommend Jacob Pearl for the chief position. Jacob Pearl did not fill out an application, but his name was added to the list.

Mr. Brown made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Lynch seconded it. All in favor, and the motion was carried. The meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Don Nelson
Don Nelson
Mayor

Marcy Brown
Marcy Brown
City Clerk