

## **TRAVIS COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT NO. 8**

### **Minutes**

**December 12, 2025**

A Special Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of Travis County Emergency Services District No. 8 was held on **Friday, December 12, 2025, at 11:00 am.**, at Station 801, located at 801 Bee Creek Road, Spicewood, Texas 78669, for the following purposes:

1. Call meeting to order;
2. Public Comment: Members of the public may speak for up to three (3) minutes regarding general topics or specific agenda items. This may not exceed 30 minutes in total unless approved by the board at the start of the meeting. In accordance with the Texas Attorney General's opinion, any public comment that is made on an item that is not on the published final agenda will only be heard by the Board of Commissioners. No formal action, discussion, deliberation, nor comment will be made by the Board of Commissioners.
3. Public Comment on Agenda items: Individual members of the public may address the Board for a maximum of three minutes per person per agenda item. Individuals may address the Board once per item. Members of the public will speak on agenda items before Board consideration of item. Members of the public who wish to speak on agenda items or make a public comment must complete speaker cards prior to the beginning of the Board meeting.
  - Melody Hostetler commented on item 4.
    - "Hello, my name is Melody Hostetler. I want my comments recorded verbatim in the minutes of this meeting. The mention of a merger is in 2023 minutes when Chief Haden was just hired and was working under Chief Wenzel. According to the minutes there were many meetings between President Opdahl, Chief Haden, Chief Prange and Director Courtney with ESD 6 representatives. These meetings took place in 2024 and 2025. Every meeting I have attended regarding shared services with ESD 6 end with a merger. The only option this Board and Chief Haden end with a merger without public vote which is against State Law. It has been stated that shared services can lead to a merger without a public vote. If this happens, every promise that Chief Haden has given to the firefighters in ESD 8 regarding job security and pension protection would be null and void because a new Board could make any changes that they choose. Therefore, the new Board could be blamed for the changes, not Chief Haden. We have determined that both ESD 8 and ESD 6 are financially healthy I feel there is no reason to change. President Opdahl has said that Governor Abbott could cut taxes to all ESDs. If tax dollars are cut, why take on a larger burden with a larger single ESD? I urge everyone to get on the ESD 8 website and read all of the ESD 8 meeting minutes every month. The next meeting is December 16<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m. in this room. Thank you."
  - Ann Aiken commented on item 4.
    - Ms. Aiken expressed agreement with Ms. Hostetler. She added her concerns that the Board was working to create a merger without a vote from the public.
  - Charles Reagan commented on item 4.
    - Mr. Reagan stated that he has been following this discussion for a while and said that his comments have been posted on the Briarcliff NextDoor and FaceBook pages. He stated that the Pedernales Fire Department has provided great service to him on several emergency calls over the

years, but that he did not know who the Fire Chief was. He searched for Fire Chief Haden online and saw on his LinkedIn profile that he describes himself as a Vision Caster and a Culture Warrior. He stated that he knows a lot about culture due to his work history. He feels like the comments on LinkedIn describe more of a management style. He asked if the department has had turnover at the Assistant Chief, Battalion Chief, or Firefighter Ranks since Chief Haden was in place. He asked if the department was aware of the reason that the Auxiliary moved their meeting location out of the department meeting room. He told the Board that staff turnover and the auxiliary show a serious issue that needs to be looked into. He stated that he sent an email to the Commissioner's office in July with no response, again stating that there are management issues that need to be addressed before trying to merge two large and growing ESDs.

- These comments about department culture and leadership were later addressed by department employees through Local 4820 during item 4.

#### **Discussion/Action Items**

4. Discuss and consider taking action regarding feasibility study for sharing services or merging with other ESDs.
  - Fire Chief Tony Haden led the meeting as a facilitator, allowing the Board to ask questions that could be answered by Pedernales Fire Department ("PFD") staff and Local 4820 members.
  - Local 4820 President Lieutenant Jared Mikeska, along with Engineer CJ Melton and Firefighter Chase Brunnemann shared feedback from the survey that went to all PFD employees regardless of rank or position.
    - Employees were asked to select the option they prefer after having seen the full feasibility study.
      - Option 1: Enhanced Shared Services – 19 votes
      - Option 2: Creation of shared department – 10 votes
      - Option 3: Full Merger under 775 – 2 votes
      - Option 4: Stay solely as PFD – 11 votes
        - This option was added by employees and was seen as a vote of PFD pride. Lt. Mikeska stated that for purposes of explanation to the Board it should be combined with the votes for Option 1.
  - Five key points of concern were listed based on feedback collected in the survey.
    - Pension and Benefits Security
    - Organizational Culture and Morale
    - Community Engagement and Traditions
    - Lack of Buy-in and Engagement from ESD6
    - Preference for Enhanced Shared Services over Full Merger
  - All three employees also spoke about the PFD culture being strong. They stated that the leadership from Fire Chief Haden and his staff was instrumental to the fact that they are still employed at PFD, and they disagreed that there is negative turnover due to employees being unhappy in the department. They stated that the positive culture and pride in the

PFD is the primary reason they don't want to merge with ESD6.

- Commissionrs Becky Wynn, Bruce Goodhart, Bruce Mills, and Debra Opdahl also agreed that Chief Haden and the staff have worked together to improve the culture and build a stronger department.
- The Board thanked the employees for their presentation and the professional, unbiased way they presented the feasibility study findings.

The Board took a recess at 12:40 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 1:18 p.m.

- The Board discussed Option 1: - Enhances Shared Services
  - Board Members stated that this option is our current model.
  - Minimal discussion was had around the existing Shared Services between ESD8 and ESD6.
- The Board discussed the following questions specific to Option 2: Creation of shared department
  - Would employees be able to work in stations that are currently LTFR station?
    - Yes, it would be one department. Only payroll is different to allow for pension options.
  - In the "do nothing" pension option, would employees moving to ESD6 only start over with their pension years?
    - Yes, an ESD8 employee that moves to the ESD6 payroll and pension would keep their years of service and rank and be paid accordingly. They would not start with years of service towards vesting, which would be tracked separately.
  - If we have a new fire department where 8 and 6 remain intact, but are combined and work as one, will all "former" ESD8 firefighters become part of the ESD6 collective bargaining?
    - No. Employees of ESD6, including any current ESD8 employees that move to the ESD6 payroll/pension, would be able to participate in the CBA process (negotiation team, vote). A combined department would be able to give all CBA negotiated protections and rights to all employees by having the policies on the items point to the CBA for all employees.
  - If the departments combine and new fire department is created but the taxing district remains independent, how do we ensure ESD8 sales tax does not get grabbed by a city?
    - Under option 2 there is no change to the tax district, including to sales tax.
  - What would be the path for a full merger if we were in option 2 with a new department?
    - Option 3 would still require a community vote along with other recommendations if it was later selected by the Board.
  - If this option happened, how would ESD16 tax dollars be protected?
    - ESD16 would operate the same way it currently does.
- The Board discussed the following questions specific to Option 3: Full Merger under 775

- Would creating one District still allow for board members from ESD8's current district in the future to help make sure it keeps a voice on the board?
  - No guarantee, but past practices have been to look for geographical diversity on ESD boards.
- What is the cost of an election?
  - We would expect this to cost tens of thousands of dollars. In 2019, ESD8 paid around \$12,000 to a firm to help manage that process.
- Are our employees concerned about losing social security if we moved to their system?
  - No.
- What is the risk to our established sales tax under Option 3?
  - This would be best answered by an attorney and the steering committee if option 3 is selected.
- ESD6 is 70% Ad Valorem and 24% Sales tax (LTFR 10yr p.15). If risk to Ad Valorem is a concern, are we better off with our model that is closer to 50/50 for ESD8?
  - This gets closer over time based on our projections. At year 10- ESD 8 will be at the 27% sales tax, ESD 6 will be at 22%.

The Board thanked Chief Haden, PFD Staff, and PFD Employees for the unbiased and well-run feasibility study conducted over the last 7 months and also for today's presentation.

The Board discussed what would happen if ESD6 decided on another option. Fire Chief Haden was directed to work with ESD6 Fire Chief Abbott for any follow-up needs.

The Board worked through their thoughts and options as presented.

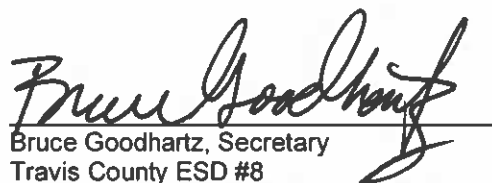
Commissioner Mills moved to direct the Fire Chief to explore additional shared services opportunities with other ESDs maintaining separate districts while expanding collaborative programs, resource sharing and operational alignment through interlocal agreements. Commissioner Valadez seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken.

- Commissioner Mills- Yes
- Commissioner Goodhartz- Yes
- Commissioner Wynn- Yes
- Commissioner Valadez- Yes
- Commissioner Opdahl- Yes
- The motion passed unanimously.

5. Discuss agenda, time and date for next meeting; and

The next regular meeting will be held on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025 at 5:15 p.m. at 801 Bee Creek Road Spicewood Texas 78669

6. Adjourn at 2:50 p.m.

  
 Bruce Goodhartz, Secretary  
 Travis County ESD #8