SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Sawmills Town Council

May 6, 2026

6:00 PM

Attendance:

Keith Warren, Mayor
Clay Wilson, Mayor Pro-Tem
Melissa Curtis, Council
Rebecca Johnson, Council
Bobby Mosteller, Council
Chase Winebarger, Town Manager
Dustin Millsaps, Assistant Town Manager
Abby Rich, Town Clerk
Greg Wilson, Chairman, Sawmills Fire Board
Gary Annas, Sawmills Fire Board
Dino DiBernardi Sr., Sawmills Fire Board
David Price, Sawmills Fire Board
Casey Proctor, Sawmills Fire Board
Richard Tucker, Sawmills Fire Board
Kelly Winkler, Sawmills Fire Board
Greg Greyson, Fire Consultant

Mayor Keith Warren called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

Councilman Mosteller led the invocation.

Councilman Wilson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discussion:

Mayor Keith Warren began the meeting by stating he was asked to meet with Sawmills Fire Chairman Greg Wilson. At this meeting, Mr. Wilson stated the Fire Boards intent to postpone the fire department merger with the Town of Sawmills.

Manager Winebarger provided a summary of the merger timeline up to this point. This account included events and actions that had taken place since October of 2025. Manager Winebarger intended for this to be an opportunity to provide the perspective of the Town during the merger process.

After Manager Winebarger finished providing his outline of events. Fire Board Chairman Greg Wilson provided the Fire Department did not want to be a financial burden to the Town. The Fire Board was concerned about the cost of benefits with onboarding the firemen. Chairman Wilson also stated the command staff were not pleased with things they had heard such as the Fire Department no longer serving the unincorporated area. Another reason was the stated intention of some part-time employees to leave the Fire Department if the merger went through.

Fire Board member Richard Tucker echoed Chairman Wilson's concerns about the financial stress the merger would put on the Town. Tucker said the merger does eventually need to occur.

Councilwoman Curtis wanted to ensure there were no issues with the Town funding the Fire Department. Manager Winebarger confirmed this, but voiced concerns of a staffing shortage. Manager Winebarger said there was not a line of people waiting to apply and the last position that was advertised at the Fire Department received no applications.

Councilwoman Curtis then expressed that the Town has invested too much time, energy, and funding in the merger this to turn back. She further said funding is not an issue and there will be a constant threat of walk outs at any company, but you can't let employees hold you hostage with a threat, and you do what you must do to move forward. Councilwoman Curtis then addressed the matter of waiting a year to resume the merger. She questioned if the merger would go through a year from now and stated it would not be fair to the new hires to pause the merger. In closing, Councilwoman Curtis said everyone has to make a decision based off what's right for the Town and everyone. The merger won't be perfect, but it's what's best for the town and waiting a year is not going to help.

The topic of discussion turned to the full-time employees. Councilwoman Johnson said she is concerned because the fire department currently has good full time staff members who were under the impression the merger would go through and they would begin receiving benefits.

After this discussion Chairman Wilson asked if services be lost outside of municipal district once the merger was completed. Manager Winebarger explained that this had been

brought up as a scenario when discussing and exploring all budgetary possibilities, but to the Council this was completely off the table.

Councilman Wilson provided that Council had also discussed the potential cost of adding an additional station to serve the unincorporated area quicker given the new construction along Highway 321.

Councilwoman Curtis said the Town is growing, and it is not going to go anywhere but forward. Council wants to do the right things for the people and does not have any ulterior motives.

At this time, Fire Board member Dino DiBernardi Sr. asked to speak. He stated that everyone could agree that the merger is the best thing that could happen- and provided that the Fire Board has also made financial contributions by paying off the building. DiBernardi stated that most of the manager's recount was correct, but he did want to address a couple of things he believes may could be interpreted differently. He said he asked about the MOU being legally binding to see if it could be amended to add stipulations that addressed the concerns of full time and part time staff.

A discussion was held where both the Town Council and Fire Board agreed that communication could be more adequate. It was noted during this discussion that governmental operations can be a hurry up then wait process, sometimes making it difficult to disseminate information quickly.

The next topic of discussion centered around community. The Council communicated its intent for the Fire Department to be community centered once again. The Fire Board wishes to see a dedicated approach to connecting with the community.

After this discussion, Fire Board member David Price expressed his concerns regarding the financing of the department and stated his desire to pause the merger. Councilwoman Curtis countered by asking what waiting one year would change and voiced that the Town has come to a point of no return for the merger. Other thoughts expressed that there is no way to make everyone happy with the merger.

The Fire Board discussed wanting to meet again to decide on whether they wished to continue the merger or not. The Town Council requested the Fire Board continue meeting to make the decision while Council went into recess.

After an agreeance from the Fire Board, Councilman Wilson made the motion to recess the meeting at 8:18 PM. With a second from Councilwoman Johnson, the motion carried unanimously.

At 9:03 PM Council was asked to return. Councilman Wilson made the motion to return to regular session. With a second from Councilwoman Johnson, the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Wilson informed the Council the Fire Board wishes to move forward with the merger, with the request that some things be added to the final agreement. Those were:

1. Keeping the current schedule for the 26/27 Fiscal Year
2. Maintaining current daily staffing.
3. Maintaining service to the unincorporated district.
4. Acknowledgment that the Town is taking on the financial responsibility for the Fire Department.
5. Support of part-time personnel to keep them engaged.

The Fire Board and the Council both agreed to meet again if any issues were presented.

With there being no more business to attend to, Councilman Wilson made the motion to adjourn at 9:16 PM. With a second from Councilwoman Johnson, the motion carried unanimously.