



NEBRASKA AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Steve Stara, Chairperson
Ulysses Rural Fire District 2
2630 J Road
Ulysses, NE 68669

Dear Chairperson Stara:

The Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) has reviewed the audit waiver request received from the Ulysses Rural Fire District 2 (District) for the fiscal year ending 2020. **That request has been approved.**

While performing, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-304 (2020 Neb. Laws, LB 781, § 8), the preliminary examination necessary to determine whether further audit work would be required or the audit waiver should be allowed, the APA noted certain internal control or compliance matters, or other operational issues, within the District.

The following information is intended to improve internal controls or result in other operational efficiencies.

Comments and Recommendations

1. Payments to Volunteer Fire Department

During our review of the bank statements accompanying the District's audit waiver request, the APA noted that the District paid \$2,000 to the Ulysses Volunteer Fire Department (Department). The District was unable to provide either a copy of a formal agreement or documentation to support how the funds disbursed pursuant thereto were spent.

The Local Government Miscellaneous Expenditure Act (Act), which is found at Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2201 (Reissue 2012) et seq., places strict parameters upon certain expenditures of public funds by local governments, including rural and suburban fire protection districts.

Additionally, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 35-901(6) (Reissue 2016) requires the expenditure of all public funds by the Department to be approved by the "taxing authority supporting" it, namely the District, and properly published, as follows:

All expenditures of public funds as defined in the Nebraska Budget Act for support of a volunteer department or its purposes shall be submitted as claims, approved by the taxing authority supporting such department or its purposes, and published as required by law. All such claims shall be properly itemized for proposed expenditure or reimbursement for costs already incurred and paid except as may be otherwise permitted pursuant to section 35-106.

According to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-503(7) (Supp. 2019) of the Nebraska Budget Act, the term "public funds" means "all money, including nontax money, used in the operation and functions of governing bodies." Any public funds received by the Department attach to the District to which it belongs – and, therefore, may be assumed to be used for the operation and function of that governing political subdivision. Consequently, such funds are subject to both the requirements of the Act and § 35-901(6).

Furthermore, good internal controls require procedures to ensure that any expenditure of funds by the District, whether directly or through a designated recipient thereof, is not only for a statutorily allowable purpose but also in accordance with the underlying objective of that disbursement. Thus, when a volunteer fire department – or, for that matter, any other entity or person – receives such funds, the District should have procedures for documenting their appropriate use.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for the improper, if not prohibited, use of District funds.

We recommend the District implement procedures for documenting the expenditure of public funds by it, whether directly or otherwise, to ensure the proper use of those monies.

2. Payments Not Approved

The APA received a copy of the District’s resolutions that were approved in September 2019. Per discussion with the District’s Treasurer, the Board is aware of expenditures being made, but does not approve all expenditures at meetings. The lack of approval documented in the minutes appears to not be in compliance of the statutory requirements noted below.

Per Neb. Rev. Stat. § 35-508(4) (Reissue 2016), Boards have the exclusive power to “manage and conduct the business affairs of the district.”

Additionally, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 35-511 (Reissue 2016) states, in relevant part,

All donations, contributions, bequests, annuities, or borrowed money received by or on behalf of the district shall be deposited with the secretary-treasurer of the district and shall be drawn out only upon proper check. Such check shall be authorized by the board of directors and shall bear the signature of the secretary-treasurer and the countersignature of the president of such district.

(Emphasis added.) Carrying out those statutory responsibilities necessarily entails properly managing the finances of the District, which requires approving all expenditures prior to, or as soon thereafter as possible, the actual disbursement of funds.

As a public body, Board meetings are subject to the provisions of the Open Meetings Act, which is set out at Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 84-1407 to 84-1414 (Reissue 2014, Cum. Supp. 2018, Supp. 2019). In particular, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-1413(1) (Cum. Supp. 2018) requires public bodies, including Boards, to “keep minutes of all meetings,” showing, among other things, “the substance of all matters discussed.”

Furthermore, a good internal control plan and sound business practices, require procedures to ensure all expenditures and business transactions are approved by the Board, and such approval is documented adequately in the Board’s meeting minutes, and documentation of such approval should include at least the name of the payee, amount approved, and brief purpose of such payment.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk of not only failure to comply with State statute but also the loss and/or misuse of public funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure expenditures are approved by the Board of Directors, and such approval is adequately documented in the Board’s meeting minutes.

3. Lack of Dual Signatures

The APA obtained the bank statements for the District’s bank accounts from its fiscal year 2020 audit waiver request. From these statements, the APA noted that all Fire District checks written during the examination period contained only one signature.

State statute requires District checks to be signed by the District President and District Secretary-Treasurer. Specifically, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 35-511 (Reissue 2016) provides, in relevant part, the following:

All donations, contributions, bequests, annuities, or borrowed money received by or on behalf of the district shall be deposited with the secretary-treasurer of the district and shall be drawn out only upon proper check. Such check shall be authorized by the board of directors and shall bear the signature of the secretary-treasurer and the countersignature of the president of such district.

(Emphasis added.) Good internal controls and sound accounting practices require procedures to ensure that District checks contain the statutorily required endorsements.

Without such procedures, there is an increased risk of not only failure to comply with State statute but also the loss and/or misuse of public funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to require dual signatures, from the District President and District Secretary-Treasurer, on all District checks, as required by law.

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The preliminary planning work that resulted in this letter was designed primarily on a test basis and, therefore, may not bring to light all existing weaknesses in the District's policies or procedures. Nevertheless, our objective is to use the knowledge gained during the performance of that preliminary planning work to make comments and suggestions that we hope will prove useful to the District.

This communication is intended solely for the information and use of the District and its management. It is not intended to be, and should not be, used by anyone other than those specified parties. However, this letter is a matter of public record, and its distribution is not limited.

If you have any questions, please contact **Dakota Christensen at 402-499-8702 or dakota.christensen@nebraska.gov.**

Sincerely,



Mark Avery, CPA
Assistant Deputy Auditor