

# **NEBRASKA AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

Mike Foley State Auditor

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December 11, 2023

James Lichtenberg, Chairperson Cedar Bluffs Suburban Fire Protection District 7 1848 County Road 15 Colon, NE 68018

Dear Chairperson Lichtenberg:

The Nebraska Auditor of Public Accounts (APA) has reviewed the audit waiver request received from the Cedar Bluffs Suburban Fire Protection District 7 (District) for the fiscal year ending 2023. That request has been approved.

However, as noted in **Comment and Recommendation Number 1** ("Annual Banquet and Recognition Dinner – Purchase of Alcohol and Other Issues"), the District expended public funds on apparently disallowed purchases, totaling \$2,015, and spent an excessive amount of public funds on its Annual Banquet and Recognition Dinner. While the fiscal year 2023 audit waiver request has been approved, <u>the District must provide to our office a</u> <u>formal, detailed corrective action plan to ensure District funds are protected from misuse, loss, and theft.</u> <u>The corrective action plan must include the District's planned course of action to resolve the issues noted</u> <u>below in this letter. If the corrective action plan is not submitted timely or is deemed to be inadequate, the</u> <u>APA will require a financial audit or attestation to be performed at the expense of the District.</u>

While performing, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 84-304 (Supp. 2023), 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. <u>Annual Banquet and Recognition Dinner – Purchase of Alcohol and Other Issues</u>

While reviewing the District's bank statements for fiscal year 2023, the APA noted 12 checks, totaling \$15,358, written to the Cedar Bluffs Fire Department (Department) as reimbursement for monthly expenses. The APA requested supporting documentation for two of these checks, issued in February and March, totaling \$6,686, from the District's "Special Funds" bank account, which contains public funds from Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and rescue billings. These two reimbursements were mainly for the annual banquet and recognition dinner hosted by the District and the Department.

According to the District, this banquet and recognition dinner is held each year, and the invitees include the Department's volunteers, members of the Board of Directors (Board) for the District, special guests, and spouses. Upon review of the supporting documentation received from the District for these reimbursements, the APA noted multiple issues with the District's expenditures related to the annual banquet and recognition dinner held during fiscal year 2023.

#### Purchase of Alcohol

One of the District checks to the Department included a reimbursement to the Fire Chief for a purchase of \$1,100.08 at the Hy-Vee supermarket in Fremont, Nebraska. This reimbursement was for food and beverage supplies for the annual banquet and recognition dinner. Upon review of the itemized receipt, this purchase included \$744.60 for alcoholic beverages, as shown in the table below:

Item Purchased	P	rice
RumChata Horchata Cream Liqueur	\$	45.99
Jack Daniels Whiskey		43.99
Knob Creek 9 Year Bourbon		37.99
Fireball Cinnamon Whisky		29.99
Fireball Cinnamon Whisky		29.99
Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey		28.99
Skrewball Peanut Butter Whiskey		28.99
Tito's Handmade Vodka		28.99
Jameson Irish Whiskey		26.99
Captain Morgan Spiced Rum		26.99
Captain Morgan Spiced Rum		26.99
Crown Royal Regal Apple Whisky		26.99
Crown Royal Regal Apple Whisky		26.99
Busch Light 30 Pack Cans		22.98
Busch Light 30 Pack Cans		22.98
Busch Light 30 Pack Cans		22.98
Bud Light 24 Pack Cans		21.73
Bud Light 24 Pack Cans		21.73
Coors Banquet 24 Pack		19.98
UV Orange Vodka		18.99
UV Orange Vodka		18.99
Boulevard Quirk Citrus Mix		17.99
Boulevard Quirk Berry & Botanical		17.99
Dr. McGillicuddy's Cherry Liqueur		16.99
Dr. McGillicuddy's Cherry Liqueur		16.99
Dr. McGillicuddy's Cherry Liqueur		16.99
Bacardi Superior Rum		16.99
White Claw Variety Pack 12 Pack		16.48
Truly Berry Mix 12 Pack		16.48
White Claw Surge Variety Pack		16.48
Keystone Light 15 Pack		10.99
Total	\$	744.60

An image of the actual itemized receipt showing the above purchases is provided in Attachment A hereto.

The Local Government Miscellaneous Expenditure Act (Act), which is set out at Neb. Rev. Stat. §§ 13-2201 to 13-2204 (Reissue 2022), specifies the various expenditures, aside from those otherwise authorized by law, that constitute allowable uses of public funds by designated political subdivisions. The provisions of the Act are made applicable to rural or suburban fire protection districts, among numerous other public entities, by both subsections (2) and (3) of Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2202 (Reissue 2022).

The purchase of alcohol with public funds is prohibited by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2203(2) (Reissue 2022), which permits the governing body of a local government subject to the Act to purchase, among other things, only nonalcoholic beverages.

Good internal controls require procedures to ensure that all District expenditures are allowable and appropriate, which necessarily precludes the purchase of alcohol with public funds. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for not only noncompliance with State statute but also loss, misuse, or theft of District funds.

We recommend the District implement procedures to ensure all District expenditures are allowable and appropriate, which necessarily precludes the purchase of alcohol with public funds.

#### Potentially Disallowed Purchase

The APA noted also that the District reimbursed the Department \$1,040 for the cost of booking a comedian to perform at the annual banquet and recognition dinner. The APA questions whether such a purchase is an allowable expense under the Act.

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2203 (Reissue 2022) of the Act enumerates the miscellaneous expenditures permitted by governing bodies of local governments. Payments for entertainment at an annual banquet and recognition dinner are not found among that select statutory list of permissible expenditures.

Consequently, not being expressly permitted under the Act - or, to the best of our knowledge, elsewhere in State statute – the use of public funds to pay for the entertainment costs addressed herein must be presumed disallowed by law.

Good internal control requires procedures to ensure that all expenditures of public funds are lawful. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for not only noncompliance with applicable State statutes but also loss or misuse of District funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure all District expenditures are allowable under State statute, including the provisions of the Act.

#### Payment of Nebraska and Local Sales Tax

During review of the supporting documentation for the District's payments to the Department, the APA noted reimbursement for \$230.62 in Nebraska and local sales taxes. Of this amount, \$54.27 was incurred on the purchase of alcohol from Hy-Vee, as shown on the image of the itemized receipt in **Attachment A** hereto. The remaining \$176.35 in sales tax was part of a \$2,527.65 payment to Hake Catering of Colon, Nebraska, for the meal at the annual banquet and recognition dinner, as shown below:

Sub-Total = \$2351.307  $\frac{1}{2}$ % tax = \$176.35Grand total = \$2527.65

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 77-2704.15(1)(a) (Supp. 2023) says that purchases made by the State or its designated political subdivisions are exempt from sales tax, as follows:

Sales and use taxes shall not be imposed on the gross receipts from the sale, lease, or rental of and the storage, use, or other consumption in this state of purchases by the state, including public educational institutions recognized or established under the provisions of Chapter 85, or by any county, township, city, village, <u>rural or suburban fire</u> <u>protection district</u>....

(Emphasis added.) Good internal controls require procedures to ensure that District funds are not expended for the payment or reimbursement of Nebraska or local sales tax, besides reasonable reimbursements made to employees or officials of the District for expenses such as meals while traveling or at training. Without such procedures, there is an increased risk for not only noncompliance with State statute but also loss or misuse of District funds.

We recommend the District implement procedures to ensure District funds are not expended for the payment or reimbursement of Nebraska or local sales tax, besides reasonable reimbursements made to employees or officials of the District for expenses such as meals while traveling or at training.

#### Annual Banquet Expenditures

In addition to the specific purchases addressed above for the annual banquet and recognition dinner, the APA questions the total amount of funds expended on the event.

The table below details purchases, totaling \$4,733, reimbursed by the District for the annual banquet and recognition dinner:

Date of				
Reimbursement	Name/Vendor	An	nount	Description
2/20/2023	Hake Catering	\$	2,528	Meals for Banquet
3/20/2023	Hy-Vee		1,100	Alcohol/Snacks/Supplies for Banquet
3/20/2023	Gigsalad		1,040	Comedian for Banquet
3/20/2023	Hobby Lobby		65	Banquet Supplies
	Total	\$	4,733	

As the APA tested a sample of the payments, the District may have incurred more expenses related to the annual banquet and recognition dinner than those listed in the above table.

Based on its roster, as of September 15, 2023, the Department had 29 volunteer members, in addition to the five members of the District Board. For these 34 individuals, the District would have spent at least \$139 per attendee on the annual banquet and recognition dinner. It should be noted that the above total of \$4,733 includes \$2,015 (\$744.60 alcohol; \$1,040 comedian; \$230.62 sales tax) in apparently disallowed purchases. Had the District not made reimbursement for these questioned expenditures, the allowable purchases would have totaled only \$2,718 – resulting in a cost of approximately \$80 per person. Even so, the District would have still exceeded the \$50 maximum cost per person allowed under the Act.

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2203 (Reissue 2022) states the following, as is relevant:

In addition to other expenditures authorized by law, each governing body may approve:

\* \* \* \*

(2) The expenditure of public funds for:

\* \* \* \*

(b) Nonalcoholic beverages and meals:

\* \* \* \*

(iii) Provided at one recognition dinner each year held for elected and appointed officials, employees, or volunteers of the local government. <u>The maximum cost per person for such dinner shall be established</u> by formal action of the governing body, but shall not exceed fifty dollars....

(Emphasis added.) In addition, the Board appears to have failed to take the "formal action" required for establishing the "maximum cost per person," as highlighted in the above statutory language.

Neb. Rev. Stat. § 13-2204 (Reissue 2022) prohibits, moreover, expending public funds to pay for costs incurred by a spouse, as quoted below, in relevant part:

Nothing in the Local Government Miscellaneous Expenditure Act shall authorize the expenditure of public funds to pay for any expenses incurred by a spouse of an elected or appointed official, employee, or volunteer unless the spouse is also an elected or appointed official, employee, or volunteer of the local government.

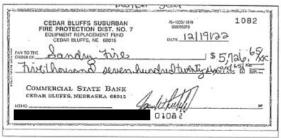
Further, good internal controls require procedures to ensure that the District expends public funds in strict compliance with applicable statutory restrictions and requirements. Without such procedures, there an increased risk for not only noncompliance with State statute but also loss, misuse, or theft of public funds.

We recommend the District implement procedures to ensure that the District expends public funds in strict compliance with applicable statutory restrictions and requirements.

District Response: a) Purchase of Alcohol – The Board agrees with your position on this finding. The receipts were not reviewed in adequate detail to break out this un-allowed cost. More thorough review of receipts/invoices will be performed in the future to ensure this does not occur again. b) Payment for comedian / entertainment – As stated in your letter, there is not clear guidance on payment for entertainment by the District for the banquet. However, your interpretation that these costs should be disallowed (since the guidance doesn't clearly state otherwise), appears reasonable. Now that the Board is aware of this clarification, they will be sure they do not incur these costs in the future. c) Payment of NE Sales Taxes of \$176.35 – The Board agrees with your position on this finding. The receipts were not reviewed in adequate detail to break out this un-allowed cost. The department member who presents these costs for reimbursement, has discussed a revised summary/cover sheet to provide to the board with a separate column for "allowed" and "unallowed" costs, to be sure to exclude all sales taxes going forward. d) Annual Banquet Expenditures in excess of statute – The Board was unaware of the \$50/member limitation based on Neb. Rev. Stat. 13-2203 (reissue 2022). Now that the Board is aware of this clarification, they will be sure they do not incur costs in excess of this limit in the future.

#### 2. Lack of Dual Signatures

The APA obtained the monthly statements for the District's bank accounts from its fiscal year 2023 audit waiver request. From those statements, the APA noted that one District check written during the examination period contained only a single signature, as shown below:



01/23/2023 1082 \$5,726.65

Nebraska law requires both the Secretary-Treasurer and the President of the District to sign all checks approved by the Board. In particular, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 35-511 (Reissue 2016) states that those checks "shall bear the signature of the secretary-treasurer and the countersignature of the president of such district."

In addition, 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 for not only failure to comply with State statute but also loss or misuse of public funds.

We recommend the Board implement procedures to ensure all District checks contain the dual signatures, from both the Secretary-Treasurer and the President, required by law.

District Response: The Board does closely follow the requirement to have two signatures on every check that is issued. They were extremely surprised to see that this one had missed a second signature. When signing checks, the two signers pass around each applicable check book and take turns signing. This particular check selected for testing was written from the "Equipment Replacement" account (primarily made up of MFO funds). Because it is not common to use checks from this check book, it must have been missed. The Board will be diligent to obtain both signatures on all checks going forward.

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,

Mike Foley Auditor of Public Accounts

cc: Joni Cantrall, CPA

Your e-Receipt detailing your recent purchase at Hy-Vee.



# **Today's Transaction**

Christopher, Thank you for your purchase. Date: Jan 28 2023 11:39 AM

#### Dairy (2):

	DEANS FRENCH ONION 2670013301 1 × \$4.99	\$4.99
	DEANS FRENCH ONION 2670013301 1 × \$4.99	\$4.99
Genera	al Mdse (7):	
	MINI PARTY CUPS 73304602074 1 × \$4.39	\$4.39
	<u>MINI PARTY CUPS</u> 73304602074 1 × \$4.39	\$4.39

3/13/23, 6:48 PM		Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
	MINI PARTY CUPS 73304602074		\$4.39
	1 × \$4.39		
	RED JR CUP 20Z 63711810443		\$4.39
	1 × \$4.39		
	RED JR CUP 20Z 63711810443		\$4.39
	1 × \$4.39		
	RED JR CUP 202 63711810443		\$4.39
	1 × \$4.39		
	RED JR CUP 20Z 63711810443		\$4.39
	1 × \$4.39		
Grocery	/ (21):		
	WHEAT THINS ORIGINAL 4400006923		\$3.98
	1 × \$3.98		
	WHEAT THINS ORIGINAL 4400006923		\$3.98
	1 × \$3.98		
	WHEAT THINS SD TOMTO 4400006920		\$3.98
- 11	1 × \$3.98		
	WHEAT THINS SD TOMTO 4400006920		\$3.98
	1 × \$3.98		
	RUFFLES ORIG PARTY 2840051773		\$6.59
	1 × \$6.59		
	RUFFLES ORIG PARTY 2840051773		\$6.59
	1 × \$6.59		
	RUFFLES ORIG PARTY 2840051773		\$6.59
	1 × \$6.59		
	HYV PRETZEL STICKS 7545013123		\$1.49
	1 × \$1.49		
	HYV PRETZEL STICKS 7545013123		\$1.49
	1 × \$1.49		

3/13/23, 6:48 PM	Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
	RED BULL 12PK ENERGY 61126942672 1 × \$19.99	\$19.99
	1 × \$19.99 <u>RED BULL 12PK ENERGY</u> 61126942672	\$19.99
	1 × \$19.99	
	RED BULL 12PK SF ENE 61126973373	\$19.99
	1 × \$19.99	
	HYV 100% UNSWT ORANG 7545022933	\$4.49
	1 - 01010	¢4.40
	HYV 100% UNSWT ORANG 7545022933	\$4.49
	1 × \$4.49	
	HYV LEMONADE 7545000851 1 × \$3.29	\$3.29
	1 × \$3.29	
	LIBBY PINEAPPLE JUIC 7458405064 1 × \$4.79	\$4.79
	1 × \$4.79	60.50
	MOTTS 100% APLE JCE 1480000039 1 × \$6.59	\$6.59
	OS CRANBERRY JCE	\$6.99
	3120020300 1 × \$6.99	
	OS CRAN-GRAPE 3120022007	\$3.68
	1 × \$3.68	
	CMPBLLS TOMATO JCE 5100014757	\$4.29
	5100014757 1 × \$4.29	121071010
	CHILI DAWGS HABANERO 89301800205 1 × \$6.99	\$6.99
	HV Beer (12):	
	WHITE CLAW VPK #3 12 63598580026 1 × \$16.48	\$16.48
	La contrata de la contrat	

6:48 PM	Gmail - Your I	ly-Vee Receipt
	TRULY BERRY MIX 12PK	\$16.48
	8769200686	
	1 × \$16.48	
	WHITE CLAW SURGE VP	\$16.48
	63598580080	\$10.40
	1 × \$16.48	
	BLVD QUIRK CITRUS MI	\$17.99
	72695991462	
	1 × \$17.99	
	BLVRD QUIRK BRY&BOTA	\$17.99
	72695991397	011.55
	1 × \$17.99	
	BUD LIGHT 24PK CANS	\$21.73
	1820053168	
	1 × \$21.73	
	BUD LIGHT 24PK CANS	\$21.73
	1820053168	021110
	1 × \$21.73	
	BUSCH LIGHT 30PK CAN 1820086031	\$22.98
	1 × \$22.98	
	1. 912.00	
	BUSCH LIGHT 30PK CAN	\$22.98
	1820086031	
	1 × \$22.98	
	BUSCH LIGHT 30PK CAN	\$22.98
	1820086031	φ22.90
	1 × \$22.98	
	KEYSTONE LIGHT 15PK	\$10.99
	7199048045	
	1 × \$10.99	
	COORS BANQUET 24PK	\$19.98
	7199011600	¢13.30
	1 × \$19.98	
	HV Food Mdse (5):	
	7010 7010 71 00000 0000	
	ZING ZANG BLOODY MRY 61600374136	\$6.49
	1 × \$6.49	
	E TO SERVICE AF	
	LIQUID ICE ENERGY	\$2.50
	85815900120	0.000
	1 × \$5.00	
	LIQUID ICE ENERGY	00 50
	85815900120	\$2.50
	1 × \$5.00	

3/13/23, 6:48 PM	Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
	LIQUID ICE ENERGY 85815900120 1 × \$5.00	\$2.50
	LIQUID ICE ENERGY 85815900120 1 × \$5.00	\$2.50
HV N	lonfood Mdse (1):	
	ROSES GRENADINE SYRP 1660000104 1 × \$5.99	\$5.99

1 ~ 40.00

# HV Spirits (19):

12	JAMESON IRISH WHISKE 8043250017 1 × \$26.99	\$26.99
	KNOB CREEK 9YR BOURB 8068601676 1 × \$37.99	\$37.99
	DR MCG CHERRY LIQ 8800414822 1 × \$16.99	\$16.99
	DR MCG CHERRY LIQ 8800414822 1 × \$16.99	\$16.99
14	DR MCG CHERRY LIQ 8800414822 1 × \$16.99	\$16.99
	JACK DANIELS WHISKEY 8218409042 1 × \$43.99	\$43.99
	<u>UV ORANGE</u> 8711601445 1 × \$18.99	\$18.99
	<u>UV ORANGE</u> 8711601445 1 × \$18.99	\$18.99
	FIREBALL PLASTIC BTL 8800402617 1 × \$29.99	\$29.99
1 Å /	<u>SKREWBALL PB WHISKEY</u> 86026500240 1 × \$28.99	\$28.99

Million .

3/13/23, 6:48 PM		-	Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
	n t a	BACARDI SUPR RUM 8048001545		\$16.99
	1.0	1 × \$16.99		
	<u>*1.5</u> 1.41 -	SKREWBALL PB WHISKEY 86026500240		\$28.99
	<u> </u>	1 × \$28.99		
	<u>nåe</u>   11 /	FIREBALL PLASTIC BTL 8800402617 1 × \$29.99		\$29.99
	ska	CAPT MRGN SPICED RUM 8200075910		\$26.99
	11	1 × \$26.99		
	2.1.0 11	CAPT MRGN SPICED RUM 8200075910 1 × \$26.99		\$26.99
	eta n	CROWN ROYAL APPLE 8200077156 1 × \$26.99		\$26.99
	r.ka U	<u>CROWN ROYAL APPLE</u> 8200077156 1 × \$26.99		\$26.99
	*10 11	RUMCHATA HORCHATA 89035500100 1 × \$45.99		\$45.99
	88.0	TITOS HANDMADE VODKA 61994700003 1 × \$28.99		\$28.99
	Health N	larkt FS (2):		
		VALLEY WHITE POPCORN 85003244001 1 × \$6.99		\$6.99
		VALLEY WHITE POPCORN 85003244001 1 × \$6.99		\$6.99
	Milk (3):			
		HILAND JALAPENO FIES 7206000419 1 × \$4.19		\$4.19
		HILAND BACON & CHEDD 7206000423 1 × \$4.19		\$4.19

			Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
3/13/23, 6:4		HILAND BACON & CHEDD	Ginali - Tour Hy-vee Kebelpt	\$4.19
		7206000423		01.10
		1 × \$4.19		
	Pop (12	2):		
		DEDRI 1001/ CAMP		\$7.99
		PEPSI 12PK CANS 1200080994		\$1.55
		1 × \$7.99		
		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
		PEPSI 12PK CANS 1200080994		\$7.99
		1 × \$7.99		
		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
		DIET PEPSI 12PK 1200017186		\$7.99
		1 × \$7.99		
10.00		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
		DIET PEPSI 12PK		\$7.99
		1200017186		
		1 × \$7.99	(12.02)	
		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
		A&W ROOTBEER 12PK 7800005216		\$7.49
		1 × \$7.49		
		SQUIRT 12PK CAN		\$7.49
	11	7800001616		Q1.40
		1 × \$7.49		
		MTN DEW 12PK CAN 1200080996		\$7.99
		1 × \$7.99		
		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
		MTN DEW 12PK CAN		\$7.99
		1200080996 1 × \$7.99		
		1300116 Pepsi 12/8/10pk 0%:	(\$3.03)	
			00.507170,004 (e940)	\$7.50
		COKE CLASSIC 12PK 4900002890		\$7.50
		1 × \$15.00		
		SPRITE 12PK CANS		\$7.50
		1 × \$15.00 1300114 Coke/Aha 12/8pk 0%	(\$7.50)	
		1300114 COKE/Ana 12/opk 0%	. (41.50)	

3/13/23, 6:48 PM		Gmail - Your Hy-Vee Receipt	
		DIET COKE 12PK CAN 4900002891 1 × \$15.00	\$7.50
		<u>DIET DR PEPPER 12PK</u> 7800008316 1 × \$7.49	\$7.49
	deals	Hy-Vee Deals & Coupons	View Coupons
	deals	Hy-Vee Deals & Coupons	
	View Co	oupons	
	Sub-To	tal	\$1,045.81
	Net An	nount	\$1,045.81
	NE Sta	te General 5.50% on \$775.33	\$42.64
	City of	Fremont NE 1.50% on \$775.33	\$11.63
	NO TA	Х	\$0.00
	Total		\$1,100.08