HIGHLANDS FIRE DISTRICT

Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Minutes · 08/18/26

A regular meeting of the Fire Board was held on **Tuesday, August 18, 2026, at 5:00 PM** at Fire Station 23, Administration Board Room, 3350 Old Munds Hwy, Flagstaff, AZ. The meeting was also available through Zoom Video Conferencing.

1. **Call to Order**. Chairperson Smith called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.
2. **Roll Call.** Chairperson Jay Smith, Clerk Carl Nelson, Director Brad Bippus, and Director Tom Hanecak were present. Director Ira Allen was absent.

   Fire Chief Todd Miller, Battalion Chief Josh Pond, Mrs. Erica Lyons, and Mr. Dominic Filosa* were present as well as several members of staff.

*Attendance through Video Conferencing.

3. **Pledge of Allegiance, Invocation, Mission and Vision Statements, and Board Responsibilities.** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by a short invocation. The District's mission, vision, and Board responsibilities were reviewed.
4. **Welcome Visitors.** - The Board welcomed Mr. Peter Smith to the Board meeting.
5. **Call to the Public.** Mr. Smith thanked Fire Chief Miller for helping him make some submissions for the CWPP.
6. **Approval of Minutes**. JULY 21ST, 2026 REGULAR MEETING. The Board reviewed the minutes of the July 21st, 2026 meeting. A **MOTION** was made by Clerk Nelon and was seconded by Director Hanecak to approve the minutes as presented; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**. JUNE 16TH, 2026 EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES – The Board reviewed the minutes of the June 16th, 2026 executive session minutes. A **MOTION** was made by Director Bippus and seconded by Chairperson Smith to approve the June 16th, 2026 executive session minutes; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.
7. **Approval of Financial Report presented by James Vincent Group.** Mr. Filosa presented the July Financial Report (see written report for full details). With this report capturing the first month of the fiscal year, only monthly revenue and expenses were reviewed. He stated July revenue totaled approximately $35,000, about $6,000 under budget, primarily due to under-budget tax and interest revenue. Expenses totaled approximately $376,000, about $11,000 under budget, primarily due to lower personnel costs. He reported he is working on audit preparation. A **MOTION** was made by Clerk Nelson was seconded by Director Hanecak to approve the Monthly Financial Report as presented. The motion was unanimously **APPROVED.**
8. **Summary Reports & Correspondence**

   A. IAFF LOCAL CHAPTER 1505 SUMMARY REPORT – Captain Ahrendt reported upcoming events for the Union which include the second highway cleanup, the Fill the Boot campaign and noted members will be located at the Swift and Pick and Run gas stations, and charity work for High Country Humane Society to improve their outdoor space for animals.

B. BATTALION FIRE CHIEF'S SUMMARY REPORT – Battalion Chief Mitch Lopez presented the Battalion Chief summary report. He reported that the District responded to 88 calls for service during July, including 36 EMS incidents, 5 fire incidents, and 47 other calls. He stated personnel also provided mutual aid on five incidents. Notable activity included assisting Pinewood Fire District with a commercial structure fire and responding to a vehicle fire that had been extinguished by a passing motorist. He concluded by summarizing activities of the Battalion Chief's Office, including the District's preparedness and response efforts related to the Pocket Fire, assistance with establishing a regional Structure Protection Task Force, and support of monthly and shift-level training. The Board discussed revisions to the Battalion Chief's report and recommended the removal of any personal data to include the address of incidents. See written report for full details.

C. FIRE CHIEF'S SUMMARY REPORT – Fire Chief Miller presented the Fire Chief summary report. He discussed continued work on the distribution of Bear Jaw program assets and the feasibility study, including meetings with consultants and a regional fire chief experienced in joint chief agreements and consolidation studies. Updates were also provided on the cell tower lease, Pumphouse Project which has a new timeline set to 2027-2028, CWPP revisions, and Chief's Chats to improve employee communication. He reported one workers' compensation claim involving a knee injury with no lost time, and no accidents occurred during the reporting period. See written report for full details.

D. FIRE BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S SUMMARY REPORT – Chairperson Smith had no additional comments.

E. CORRESPONDENCE – Fire Chief Miller presented a letter from the City of Flagstaff recognizing Engineer Eric Reed for volunteering his time and involving his home and family in the filming of the Fire Ready public education campaign.

9. Topics of Discussion and Possible Legal Action

A. WILDLAND FIRE OPERATIONAL CAPABILITIES – At the Board's request Fire Chief Miller presented a report outlining the District's current wildland operational capabilities. The report highlighted the District's personnel qualifications and experience, available apparatus, and regional response partnerships which include both mutual and automatic aid agreements. He explained how District resources integrate with Greater Flagstaff Region partners and the U.S. Forest Service to provide a coordinated response that can expand as wildland incidents increase in size and complexity. He also presented his vision for strengthening wildfire preparedness and community resilience in alignment with the District's 2025 Strategic Plan. He reviewed steps already underway to advance this vision, including adding firefighter positions, establishing a Staff Captain, supporting employee training and development, expanding public education, and pursuing external funding for fuels-mitigation efforts. He emphasized continuing to strengthen the longstanding collaborative relationships Highlands has established with its Greater Flagstaff Region partners, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management, while developing new partnerships with organizations such as NAU's Ecological Restoration Institute to expand opportunities for public education and community wildfire preparedness. Clerk Nelson, Chairperson Smith and expressed his appreciation for such a thorough report which demonstrated the robust capabilities and qualifications of the existing Highlands personnel. Director Bippus and Director Hanecak expressed interest in making the information more readily available to the public to communicate the District's current wildland response capabilities and strengthened capacity to provide year-round, 24-hour emergency services following the conclusion of the Bear Jaw program. Fire Chief Miller stated Highlands will look into ways to educate the public with this information.

B. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING THE ALLOCATION OF THE DISTRICT'S AVAILABLE GENERAL FUNDS AND THE DISTRICT'S REMAINING CASH ASSETS HELD IN THE BEAR JAW ACCOUNT TO CAPITAL FUNDING AND/OR GENERAL RESERVE FUNDING – At the Board's request, Fire Chief Miller presented a report on approximately $3.33 million in remaining cash assets held in the General Fund and Bear Jaw account that were not incorporated into the FY 2027 budget and remained available for allocation. Fire Chief Miller noted that the District's Fiscal Policy provides for a General Reserve Fund; however, the fund had not yet been formally established. He reviewed the potential benefits of establishing the fund and allocating available cash assets between the General Reserve Fund and Capital Replacement Fund, including strengthening reserves for future capital needs, reducing the need for future transfers from the General Fund, and minimizing the potential need for property tax increases in the near term. Mr. Filosa noted that funds held in the Bear Jaw account do not earn interest and recommended transferring the balance so the funds could begin earning interest. Chief Miller recommended establishing the General Reserve Fund, allocating $500,000 to it, and transferring the remaining available cash assets to the Capital Replacement Fund. He clarified that the Board retains discretion to reallocate the funds in the future, including during budget discussions later in the fiscal year. Director Hanecak supported the recommendation and emphasized the importance of communicating that the funds were being strategically designated to support the District's long-term financial stability and future capital needs. A **MOTION** was made by Clerk Nelson and seconded by Director Hanecak to establish a General Reserve Fund, allocate $500,000 to the fund, and allocate the remaining available cash assets to the Capital Replacement Fund. The motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.

C. DISCUSSION REGARDING BEAR JAW EQUIPMENT ASSETS – Fire Chief Miller reported that Highlands and Pinewood Fire Districts have identified the apparatus they will separately retain and have identified the apparatus that will be submitted to the Board for a resolution to surplus. He stated the final phase will be the division and surplus of the remaining equipment which includes saws, radios, and other items.

D. CONSIDERATION TO APPROVE RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE DISPOSAL OF SURPLUS PROPERTY – Fire Chief Miller presented a resolution authorizing the disposal of surplus property and recommended its approval. The property identified included two crew carriers, one Polaris, one chipper, two flatbed trailers, and one truck. A **MOTION** was made by Clerk Nelson and was seconded by Director Bippus to approve the resolution authorizing the disposal of the aforementioned surplus property. The motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.

E. DISCUSSION REGARDING UPDATES TO MOU BETWEEN HIGHLANDS CHAPTER OF THE UNITED FLAGSTAFF FIRE FIGHTERS, IAFF LOCAL 1505, AND THE DISTRICT – Fire Chief Miller presented the final draft of the Memorandum of Understanding between the District and the Highlands Chapter of the United Flagstaff Fire Fighters, IAFF Local 1505. He reported that the MOU had been submitted to the Deputy County Attorney for review and recommended approval contingent upon completion of that review. Chairperson Smith noted that, according to the agenda, this item was designated for discussion only and was not scheduled for Board action. He recommended postponing consideration until the Deputy County Attorney's review is complete. The item was tabled, and no action was taken.

F. DISCUSSION REGARDING COMPANY EMAIL AND DEVICES ISSUED TO BOARD MEMBERS – Mrs. Lyons provided an update on transitioning Board communications exclusively to District-issued email accounts, with optional District-issued tablets. She reported that the tablets were being prepared and that she would meet individually with each Board member to distribute the devices, assist with account access, and establish email-forwarding rules if any Board member requests. She stated that the transition would be completed before the September Board meeting, after which all Board communications would be sent exclusively to District-issued email accounts.

G. DISCUSSION REGARDING FEASIBILITY STUDY – Fire Chief Miller stated he has met with consultants along with Chief Callendar and Chief Tope. They are determining the scope of work that would be appropriate for consultant group to complete for the three districts.

H. DISCUSSION REGARDING 2027 ELECTION – Mrs. Lyons reported that updates regarding the 2027 election would be included on the Board agenda monthly. She stated that the District is current on all requirements and requests from the County Elections Office and that the next step is publication of the notice of election. In response to Director Hanecak's question regarding election costs, Mrs. Lyons stated that the County Elections Office had not yet provided a cost estimate; however, preliminary research indicated that costs may be based on the number of registered voters within the District. She also stated that she would update the Board regarding opportunities for the District to support candidate forums or other community-engagement efforts related to the election. The Board discussed the cadence of electing members into the Clerk and Chair positions after the election is complete.

I. REVIEW FIRE BOARD TASK CALENDAR - The Board reviewed the Board Task Calendar and determined that Bear Jaw ongoing updates can be removed as all topics of discussion are complete regarding the program.

10. **Board Members Comment.** The Board discussed the start time for the monthly meetings. Mrs. Lyons stated that she would research the requirements for making such a change and report back to the Board.

11. **Adjournment.** A **MOTION** was made by Director Hanecak and was seconded by Clerk Nelson to adjourn; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED.** The meeting adjourned at 6:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Erica Lyons
Administrative Assistant III