



# HIGHLANDS FIRE DISTRICT

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS REGULAR MEETING MINUTES · 03/17/26

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A regular meeting of the Fire Board was held on **Tuesday, March 17, 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 5:01 PM.
2. **Roll Call.** Chairperson Jay Smith, Clerk Carl Nelson, Director Tom Hanecak, Director Brad Bippus and Director Ira Allen were present.

Fire Chief Todd Miller, Battalion Chief Casey Modrell, 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 Sarah Benetar, Coconino County Treasurer; Erin Beckett, Deputy Chief for the Treasurer; and Armando Ruiz, Coconino County Assessor, to the meeting.
5. **Call to the Public.** There were no comments from the public.
6. **Approval of Minutes.** FEBRUARY 17, 2026 REGULAR MEETING. The Board reviewed the minutes of the February 17, 2026 meeting minutes. A **MOTION** was made by Director Allen and was seconded by Clerk Nelson to approve the minutes as presented; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.
7. **Approval of Financial Report presented by James Vincent Group.** Mr. Filosa presented the February Financial Report (see written report for full details). He reported revenues are tracking close to projections, and expenditures are currently under budget, resulting in a surplus. He stated the variance is largely attributable to lower-than-anticipated personnel expenses. Fire Chief Miller noted that decisions regarding allocation of surplus funds, including potential carryover to the General Fund or transfer to the Capital Fund, will be addressed as part of the upcoming budget process with the budget committee. A **MOTION** was made by Director Hanecak and was seconded by Clerk Nelson to approve the Monthly Financial Report as presented. The motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.
8. **Summary Reports & Correspondence**
  - A. IAFF LOCAL CHAPTER 1505 SUMMARY REPORT – Engineer Faith Aguirre reported that the crew is preparing for the upcoming highway cleanup, during which each of the three shifts will clean up its adopted one-mile section. She also noted that the crew is preparing for the annual pancake breakfast and upcoming budget committee meetings.
  - B. BATTALION FIRE CHIEF'S SUMMARY REPORT – Battalion Chief Casey Modrell presented the Battalion Chief's Report. He reported 50 calls for service in February, which is consistent with the

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historical average for this time of year. He recognized Firefighters Riley Darnell, Jesse Finney, and Ian Titcomb for successfully completing their six-month GFR Academy Skills exam. He also reviewed incident activity, automatic aid requests, and noted the first wildland fire response of the year. See written report for additional details.

- C. FIRE CHIEF'S SUMMARY REPORT – Fire Chief Miller presented the Fire Chief's Report. He reported that Battalion Chief Mitch Lopez will be assigned to the GFR Training Academy to assist with training a new group of firefighters. During this period, Captain Casey Modrell has accepted a temporary assignment to serve as Battalion Chief for A Shift for approximately ten weeks. Engineer Eric Reed has accepted a temporary assignment to serve as a Captain, and Rover Matt Gross has accepted a temporary assignment to serve as an Engineer. He recognized Firefighters Riley Darnell, Jesse Finney, and Ian Titcomb for successfully completing their six-month GFR Academy Skills exam, as well as their second HFD probationary written test. Fire Chief Miller discussed fiscal management, including upcoming budget meetings and the recent assessed valuation update from the County Assessor's Office; public relations, including meetings with the City of Flagstaff Fire Chief, Police Chief, and the new Dispatch Supervisor; his ongoing engagement with the Flagstaff Leadership Program, and reported no new injuries or accidents. See written report for additional details.
- D. FIRE BOARD CHAIRPERSON'S SUMMARY REPORT – Chairperson Smith had no additional comments.
- E. CORRESPONDENCE – There was no correspondence presented.

### 9. Topics of Discussion and Possible Legal Action

- A. PRESENTATION BY COCONINO COUNTY TREASURER, SARAH BENETAR – Ms. Benetar introduced Erin Beckett, her Chief Deputy, and presented updates from the Treasurer's Office. She reported a transition from JP Morgan to PNC Bank. She stated through a new processing facility in California, property tax payments are now processed more efficiently, resulting in faster collection timelines, improved fraud detection capabilities (including invoice and check fraud), and enhanced internal controls with better separation of duties. From a high-level overview, she also noted the Treasurer's Office is monitoring economic conditions, including the appointment of a new Federal Reserve Chair and broader global economic and tariff developments. Fire Chief Miller asked about the timing for establishing the FY 2027 tax rate for the District's General Obligation (GO) Bond. Ms. Benetar stated the tax rate will be more accurate closer to the end of the fiscal year, as additional information becomes available, including collection levels, fund balance, and known expenditures.
- B. PRESENTATION BY COCONINO COUNTY ASSESSOR, ARMANDO RUIZ – Mr. Ruiz presented an overview of the Assessor's Office and how it determines the taxable value of all property within Highlands Fire District. He discussed the levy limit process and the primary net assessed value by tax year for the District; stating that that the District's assessed valuation increased by 5.86%. Mr. Ruiz reported on recent legislative changes affecting the Assessor's Office procedures for properties damaged or destroyed by natural disasters. He stated that the Assessor's Office is required to inspect and revalue such properties within the same tax year and prorate the assessed value based on the timing of the event. He further noted that, in the event of a large-scale incident, the Assessor's Office will work with the District to prepare for the financial impact of

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reevaluations, including any potential refunds resulting from prorated assessed values. Ms. Benetar stated in a catastrophic event, the County works with the District on an agreement to assist with financial help so the District can continue its operations. Fire Chief Miller noted that the District also maintains reserve and capital funds, and that the Board may take short-term actions, including the transfer of funds, to address immediate operational needs.

- C. UPDATE REGARDING BEAR JAW (FUELS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM) – Fire Chief Miller stated the District scheduled a community meeting on Wednesday, March 25<sup>th</sup>. He stated he will provide talking points for Board members that plan to attend the event. He also noted that if Board members receive questions that they are unable to address, community members can be referred to him for follow-up. Director Allen discussed community concerns expressed on social media regarding the Bear Jaw Wildfire Program. Clerk Nelson also shared concerns from the community related to the community clean-up. Fire Chief Miller and the Board discussed their approach to the March 25th community meeting, including providing factual information regarding both topics and actively listening to community feedback. He stated this discussion item will remain on the agenda until the Board determines it is no longer necessary.
- D. PRESENTATION OF FLAGSTAFF RANCH FIRE DISTRICT OPERATIONAL REPORT – Fire Chief Miller stated that this item was included on the agenda per the Board Task Calendar; however, the operational report was not available for this meeting. He requested that the item be deferred to the April meeting.
- E. CONSIDERATION TO APPROVE DISTRICT INSURANCE RENEWAL WITH VFIS – Fire Chief Miller presented the VFIS renewal policy to the Board. He noted two items remain under review, which includes the addition of a separate cybersecurity policy and potential adjustments to agreed-upon values for apparatus. He recommended approval of the VFIS insurance renewal as presented. He further stated that VFIS will work with the District to update apparatus values and modify the policy as needed, and that he will report any changes to the Board. Additionally, Fire Chief Miller offered to reach out to other District’s to learn what their approach has been to cyber security. After discussion, a **MOTION** was made by Director Bippus and was seconded by Director Allen to approve VFIS insurance policy; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.
- F. CONSIDERATION TO NOMINATE ERICA LYONS TO THE PSPRS LOCAL BOARD – Fire Chief Miller presented ARS 38-847 to the Board and the requirement to nominate an individual to the PSPRS local board who has experience in personnel administration, but who is not required to be a resident of the fire district. Director Hanecak motioned to nominate Erica Lyons to the PSPRS local board and Clerk Nelson seconded; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**.
- G. REVIEW FIRE BOARD TASK CALENDAR. The Board reviewed the Board Task Calendar.

**10. Board Members Comment.** There were no additional comments.

**11. Adjournment.** A **MOTION** was made by Director Allen and was seconded by Director Hanecak to adjourn; the motion was unanimously **APPROVED**. The meeting adjourned at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Erica Lyons  
Administrative Assistant III