

Aspen Fire Protection District



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Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes April 14th, 2026

The Board of Directors of the Aspen Fire Protection District met for their regular meeting. The meeting was open to the public in person and virtually via Zoom.

Meeting called to order by Wabs at 5:27pm.

Roll Call:

- Board of Directors Present: Dave “Wabs” Walbert, Emily Taylor, Parker Lathrop, Jennifer Goldfarb
- Board of Directors Absent: Charles Cunniffe
- Staff/Volunteers Present: Jake Andersen, Ken Josselyn (online), Nikki Lapin, Jan Legersky, Jan Schubert, Amanda Perusse, Andy Fisher (online), Ben Smith (online), Zach Abley (online), Michael Holmes (online)
- Public/Others: Aaron Bern (legal council)

MOTION: Motion made by Jennifer to approve the minutes from the Regular Meeting on March 10th, 2026.

Second: Emily

Discussion: None

Vote: All approved.

Public Comment: None

AVFD Inc.: None

Financials – Provided in the board packet

Board discussion included:

- **Sales Tax Revenue Timing**
 - January revenue reflected; February revenue pending due to reporting lag
 - Additional ~\$970K received, representing a significant increase over prior years
 - Cross-reference the list of taxable businesses in the district with Department of Revenue data to ensure all applicable businesses are remitting sales tax.
- **Expense Review**
 - Equipment maintenance costs higher early in the year due to irregular, high-cost repairs
 - Capital expenditures (radios, equipment) occurring in lump sums rather than evenly throughout the year
- **Budget Considerations**
 - Discussion on potentially adjusting future budgets to better reflect:
 - Equipment maintenance variability
 - Capital purchasing timing

- Clarification that early-year revenue appears low due to timing of property tax distributions, expected to normalize by April/May

Board member comments/action items:

- Discussion regarding assistance for a former volunteer firefighter experiencing medical hardship
- Staff advised they are exploring appropriate avenues (e.g., benevolent funds, external support options)

Amended Budget & Staffing Proposals

A. Seasonal Wildland Staffing

- Proposal to increase seasonal wildfire staffing to 9 positions to address elevated fire risk and mitigation needs
- Focus on:
 - Fuels mitigation work
 - Increased response capability
 - Community risk reduction

MOTION: Motion made by Emily to allocate funds to the seasonal wildfire position as presented

Second: Parker

Discussion: Investigate the feasibility and requirements of offering FPPA or other retirement/benefit options for seasonal staff and determine appropriate benefits package.

Vote: All approved

B. Additional Full-Time Positions

- Proposed additions:
 - Training Division Chief (full-time)
 - Training Lieutenant
 - Plans Reviewer (Fire Prevention)
- Rationale:
 - Increased training demands and ISO rating goals
 - Growing inspection and development workload
 - Organizational capacity needs

MOTION: Motion made by Jennifer Goldfarb to approve 3 more full time employees as presented (Division Chief of Training, Lt of Training and Prevention Plans Reviewer)

Second: Emily

Discussion: None

Vote: All approved

Staff Report:

Staff reports were reviewed as provided in the board packet. Highlights included:

- **Fire Marshal Report – reviewed by Fire Marshal, Jan Legersky**
 - Recognition:
 - Zach Abley – Fire Inspector I certification
 - Ben Smith – Certified Fire Investigator (IAAI-CFI) certification
 - Ongoing and upcoming projects:
 - Airport redevelopment

- Major hotel and commercial projects
 - Use of third-party plan reviewers to manage workload
 - Continued coordination with state fire agencies
 - Review and update permit fees for inspections and plan reviews, including consideration of an impact fee study, and report back to the board.
- **Operations Report – reviewed by Fire Chief, Jake Andersen**
Highlights included:
 - Structure fire responses and prevention effectiveness
 - Pre-planning for infrastructure projects impacting response (e.g., Wrights Road water line)
 - Training initiatives:
 - Salvage and overhaul
 - Rapid Intervention Team (RIT)
 - Live fire behavior and search techniques
 - Community engagement activities and events
 - Equipment maintenance and apparatus updates
- **Training Report – Information provided in the packet by Division Chief of Training, Scott Arthur. As he was out of town, this information was not reviewed in the meeting.**
- **Wildfire Mitigation and Preparedness – Reviewed by WCAF director, Ali Hammond**
 - County-wide exceptional drought conditions and historically low snowpack
 - Begin weekly or bi-weekly local fuel moisture sampling in the district, with support from experienced auxiliary members, to better track local fire risk.
 - Expansion of:
 - Wildfire risk assessments (90+ requests)
 - Mitigation programs
 - Chipping program (district-wide)
 - Coordination with city, county, and regional partners
 - Development of fuels mitigation projects (e.g., Red Butte, Shadow Mountain)
 - Exploration of:
 - NEPA funding for federal land projects
 - Home hardening grant opportunities
- **Human Resources Report – Reviewed by Human Resources Director, Nikki Lapin**
 - New hires:
 - Deputy Chief Andy Fisher, has already started
 - Community Engagement Coordinator – Sander Olson, started 4/13/26
 - Executive Administrative Assistant – starts on 4/20/26
 - Ongoing hiring:
 - Wildland Battalion Chief - accepted by Jake Spaulding
 - Wildland Lieutenant (in process) - assessment center scheduled for 4/27/26
 - Seasonal firefighters (28 applicants) – assessment center tentative for 4/30/26
 - Volunteer recruitment ongoing with target onboarding in Fall 2026

CEO / Fire Chief – Jake Andersen

Sales Tax Implementation

- The District has begun receiving initial sales tax revenue, with the first two months showing returns above projected baseline estimates (approximately 25%–40% higher than comparable prior data).
- Revenue is currently tracking close to projections when accounting for forecasting assumptions.
- Staff emphasized the importance of not significantly exceeding the voter-approved revenue projections, in order to remain compliant with statutory and ballot expectations.
- Additional analysis is underway to better understand sources of revenue (e.g., construction, retail, tourism-related spending).

Communications & Public Outreach

- The District is actively working to expand both internal and external communications efforts.
- A new Community Engagement Coordinator has been hired to support:
 - Public information campaigns
 - Social media and press outreach
 - Community education efforts
- Planned improvements include:
 - Increased presence in local media
 - Development of informational videos and public messaging
 - Regular newsletters for both the public and internal personnel
- Leadership noted that improving communication is a priority to ensure the community fully understands ongoing initiatives, particularly around wildfire mitigation and staffing expansion.

Aviation Program (SEAT Base Operations)

- The District has completed procurement of equipment necessary to support Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) operations at the Aspen/Pitkin County Airport.
- The program is not yet fully operational, pending:
 - Required personnel training
 - Coordination with the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control (DFPC)
- Progress has been slowed by state-level staffing changes, but efforts are ongoing to complete certification and training requirements.
- Once operational, the program will significantly enhance local wildfire response capability.

Seneca Drone Program

- Jake will work with Parker (and others involved in drone program) regarding broader drone plan and FAA waiver process, ensuring all relevant parties are connected.

Housing – Basalt Midland Residences

- The District has committed to the purchase of three housing units (two one-bedroom units and one studio).
- Units are expected to be completed in mid to late 2026.
- While initial discussions included potential ownership/equity-based programs for employees, staff recommended:
 - Implementing a rental model in the short term
 - Deferring development of a more complex housing program until sufficient administrative capacity is available
- The Board expressed general agreement with this approach.

Long-Range Financial Planning

- The District is working with financial consultants to develop a comprehensive long-range financial plan.
- Areas of focus include:
 - Sustainability of staffing growth
 - Allocation of new revenue streams (sales tax, impact fees, etc.)
 - Reserve fund targets and financial stability
- Current reserves were noted to be below ideal long-term targets, and staff indicated future recommendations may include increasing reserve levels.

- The planning effort will also evaluate:
 - Capital funding strategies
 - Workforce investments
 - Diversification of revenue sources

Old Business None

New Business None

MOTION: **Motion made by Parker Lathrop to adjourn.**

Second: **Jennifer Goldfarb**

Discussion: **None**

Vote: **All approved**

Adjourned at 7:15pm

***** A board packet of this meeting can be requested by contacting the Human Resources Assistant at amanda.perusse@aspensfire.com or by calling 970-925-5532.**