Aspen Fire Protection District

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Board of Directors Regular Meeting Minutes
October 8, 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 Charles Cunniffe at 2:02pm.

Roll Call:

- Board of Directors Present: Charles Cunniffe, Jennifer Goldfarb, Dave "Wabs" Walbert
- Absent: Emily Taylor, Parker Lathrop
- Guests: Eli LaVaude (Chromaticaventures) Paul Backes, CPA (McMahan & Associates)
- Staff/Volunteers Present: Jake Andersen, Jan Schubert, Eliza Robison, Amanda Perusse, Sierra Carroll
- Public/Others: Aaron Bern (legal counsel)

MOTION: Motion made by Charles Cunniffe to approve the minutes of the September 8 , 2026 meeting as presented.
Second: Jennifer Goldfarb
Discussion: None
Vote: Pass

Public Comment: None.

2025 Audit Report

Paul Backes, CPA, of McMahan & Associates presented the 2025 audited financials. He provided an in-depth explanation of the purpose of the audit and the items and documents reviewed. There were no disagreements with management, and three journal adjustments were made.

IRS: The IRS may view below-market rental rates as a taxable benefit, so the District should ensure housing is not provided in lieu of compensation. Because the District owns housing and rents it to employees as affordable workforce housing, it should maintain a defined rationale for its rental rates to avoid a potential IRS issue. Operational reserves: The District may need to define reserves as a percentage of expenditures that can grow over time, rather than as a set dollar amount (expenditures plus transfers out, divided by expenses).

The increase in pension expense is due to accruals and an increase in the District's share of FPPA; depreciation of buildings and trucks declined.

Chief Andersen thanked Jan Schubert for her hard work on the audit.

AVFD Inc.: None.

Board member comments/action items:

- The Board asked when the budget will be finalized. The preliminary budget is complete and will be reviewed in more depth; the Board will have two months to adjust and modify it before it is due at the County Commissioners meeting on December 15. Final figures will depend on actual revenue received.
- A work session will be scheduled for the first week of December.

Financials – Provided in the board packet

There were no comments on the September 2026 financials.

High-level review of the 2027 budget:

- The middle column was adjusted to reflect estimated actual 2026 figures.
- The original budget was $5.9 million; the new estimate is $6.2 million.
- December 2026 sales tax will be collected in January 2027. Only a slight increase in sales tax is projected, since the airport will close in April.
- The budget assumes a $500,000 contribution from the Aspen Wildfire Foundation, to be transferred into the general fund.
- The budget is balanced; $2.3 million is currently held in reserve in case of a sales tax shortfall.
- The District may reallocate 2026 budget surpluses into general reserves. A policy would define how those funds can be used.
- Personnel: general pay raises totaling a 5% increase, plus some additional positions. Seasonal firefighter wages also increase 5%.
- Health insurance is estimated to increase 15%, with a higher deductible.
- FPPA contributions increase 0.5% each year.
- A salary study is being completed; the District is mostly in line, falling in the top 78th percentile. Some outliers will receive increases.
- Contract labor increases to cover an impact study, a possible consultant, and strategic planning sessions.
- The volunteer budget increases due to more volunteers and training opportunities.
- Supplies and parts for fleet and equipment are budgeted flat, though that may not be realistic.
- All stations and grounds will be combined into one line item; AFPD will track major expenses within it.
- The Board noted it is great to see that most increases are allocated to personnel.
- The list of capital reserve items has not yet been defined.
- The District would like to increase and rebuild the capital plan. A ladder truck will be purchased by 2030; with lead times over two years, purchasing will begin in 2028. Depreciated values will be reviewed.
- Housing: $1.1 million is proposed to pay COP's, with the remainder going to the general fund reserves.
- Overtime is budgeted flat; 2026 overtime is currently under budget.
- **The Board would like to review the 2027 hiring plan at the next work session.**

Staff Report:

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

Fire Marshal Report – Reviewed by Chief Andersen

- The Fire Marshal's office has been very busy with investigations, inspections, and prevention.

Photos

- This report summarizes the District's incident response, training activity, community engagement, and events for September 2026. Highlights include a roadside vehicle incident, a pickup truck response, and Aspen Fire crew members working the Bigfoot fire in Northern CA; auto extrication, rope rescue, and

wildland crew training, including time at the training site with new DC of Training Sierra Carroll; community engagement at the AES Annual Fun Run fundraiser, visits with young supporters, and helping a community member who locked her keys in the car; and the 9/11 Memorial Event and Wildland Appreciation Lunch.

Training & Current Class Report

- Vehicle extrication training was a huge success; each crew worked on about three cars.
- EMS training covered strokes and TIAs.
- Lieutenant training begins mid-October.
- Current firefighters are progressing in their personal and professional development.
- Sierra Carroll has been a full-time career firefighter for 16 years. She has worked in training since 2023 and led training for many years before that. She chairs the All Valley Training Consortium, which meets with other departments in the valley, and has extensive training connections throughout the valley and the fire service.

Recruitment, Academy and HR Updates

We are excited to announce that Chris MacGregor has been offered and accepted the Training Lieutenant position. Please join me in welcoming him to this new role!Chris brings more than 10 years of fire service experience. His background includes emergency response, recruit academies, EMS education, curriculum development, and mentoring instructors and firefighters. He has also supported peer fitness programs and brings a strong focus on safety, wellness, and operational readiness.

Charles Cunniffe left the meeting at 3:30pm.

CEO / Fire Chief Report – Jake Andersen

- Mitigation crews have logged over 10,000 hours on more than 200 acres. The program will continue for another 2–4 weeks.
- Contributions are coming in to cover expenses; the total cost will be clearer once the work is complete.
- Burn piles will be burned when conditions allow, which may take some time. A burn plan is being created, and some piles will be masticated depending on slope and location. Messaging on the timing and plan is being developed. Weather and smoke dispersal conditions must be ideal, so some piles may not be burned this year.
- All wildfire risk assessments were completed this summer, with the exception of larger condo complexes.
- To date, District crews have moved over 28,000 lbs of debris off American Lane.
- Seneca: The second of five planned training sessions was just completed. The drones are very easy to fly. The District is assembling an aviation team that will use a train-the-trainer model; this remains a work in progress. Not all five drones have been received, and the program will most likely be fully operational by summer 2027. The District is still working on a Certificate of Authorization (COA) from the FAA.
- Board charter: A board charter outlining the Board's governing guidelines is being developed. The Board will meet to discuss it, and it will require Board approval.

Newsletter:

"The Stoke" newsletter will run on Sunday, October 11th and will be posted on various other social platform.

Old Business

The District has taken possession of the Midland Residences. Four employees have moved in: three at Midland and one at Fireplace.

New Business: None.

MOTION: **Motion made by Jennifer Goldfarb to adjourn.**
Second: Dave "Wabs" Walbert
Discussion: None
Vote: All approved

Adjourned at 3:46pm

***** A board packet of this meeting can be requested by contacting the Executive Administrative Assistant at eliza.robison@aspenfire.com or by calling 970-925-5532.**