

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

**Meeting Minutes of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District
February 23, 2026, 3:00 p.m. (Study Session); 4:30 p.m. (Board Meeting)
Dannels Fire Station, 901 N. St. Vrain Ave., Estes Park, CO 80517**

Board: Sandra Smith, Scott Dorman, Ryan Leahy via Zoom, Jon Smith, Jeff Robbins

Staff: Chief Warren Jones, Captain Stacey Sutherland, Division Chief Jon Landkamer,
Interim Division Chief Chris Thomas, Logan Lasley, Marinda Baxter

Also Attending: Dot Dorman, Megan Platz, Nicole Friel, Michael Barnhouse, Gina Stine, Tim Gray,
Connor Brewer, Diana Ver Der Ploeg, Nathan Meulener, Lt. Ron Bruchwalski, Brian Schaffer, Patti
Brown

Absent: Jeff Robbins (arrived at 3:11 pm); Ryan Leahy (arrived at 3:14 pm)

Sandra Smith called the study session to order at 3:01 p.m.

Interim Chief Warren Jones led the Pledge of Allegiance

Marinda Baxter performed roll call – All present

STUDY SESSION

President Sandra Smith gave a presentation on the Colorado Open Meetings Act and Open Records Act.

Study session adjourned at 4:17 p.m.

Sandra Smith called the regularly scheduled board meeting to order at 4:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Jon Smith and seconded by Scott Dorman to approve the agenda, modified to note that the study session is “adjourned” and to call the regularly scheduled meeting.
Motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Ryan Leahy and seconded by Scott Dorman to approve the meeting minutes from the 01/19/26 board meeting with a modification changing the term “re-adjourned” to “re-convened” on page 4, and to approve the minutes from the 2/2/2026 special board meeting as written.
Motion carried unanimously.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

Financial Matters

Treasurer’s Report

Board member Ryan Leahy and District accountant Ben Archer-Clowes presented the monthly and year to date financials. Also discussed was whether a separate account for 1A funds was necessary or whether separate accounting of those funds sufficed. It was concluded that detailed separate accounting of those funds is sufficient.

Audit Engagement Letter

The District received an engagement letter related to the 2025 audit from Dazzio and Associates PC, Certified Public Accountants. The engagement will not exceed \$8,000 plus expenses. Dazzio will work with the District’s accountant, JVG, to prepare the 2025 audit for review by the Audit Committee.

*Moved by Scott Dorman and seconded by Jeff Robbins to approve the engagement letter dated February 4, 2026 with Dazzio and Associates.
Motion carried unanimously.*

January Paid Bills

Board Treasurer Ryan Leahy presented the December paid bills. There were no bills that were out of the norm or exceptionally high. Staff is still addressing the removal of former employees as addressees on some bills. Some vendors require additional information before making the change and that information is being provided to ensure that correct identifying information is held by all vendors.

*Moved by Jeff Robbins and seconded by Jon Smith to approve the January 2026 paid bills.
Motion carried unanimously.*

QuickBooks Accounting License

Discussion concerning the QuickBooks account requirement that the District's new accountant JVG be approved by the Board to act as principal on the account in place of the former accounting firm Pinnacle.

*Moved by Scott Dorman and seconded by Jon Smith to approve changing the District's Intuit QuickBooks Account Principal from Amanda Castle at Pinnacle to Steven Rodriguez at James Vincent Group.
Motion carried unanimously.*

RESOLUTION 2026-04 -- RESOLUTION REGARDING THE NEED FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

The following draft resolution was discussed by the board as being necessary to enable "active retiree" firefighters to continue their volunteer service in that capacity.

**ESTES VALLEY FIRE
PROTECTION DISTRICT
RESOLUTION NO. 2026-04**

RESOLUTION REGARDING THE NEED FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

WHEREAS, Estes Valley Fire Protection District ("District") is a special district operating as a quasi-municipal corporation of the State of Colorado, by virtue of organization under Title 32, Article 1, C.R.S., and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Section 32-1-1001(1)(h), C.R.S., the Board of Directors of the District (the "Board") has the power to manage, control, and supervise the business and affairs of the District; and

WHEREAS, the District maintains a combination department of both paid and unpaid volunteer firefighters; and

WHEREAS, the District participates in a volunteer firefighter pension plan under C.R.S. § 31-30-1101, *et seq.*;

WHEREAS, pursuant to C.R.S. § 31-30-1132, a retired volunteer firefighter receiving a pension may return to active service if the governing body of the District determines by resolution that additional volunteer firefighters are needed; and

WHEREAS, the District's Board finds that the District currently has an operational need for additional volunteer firefighters due to continued member shortages, training needs and to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the community; and

WHEREAS, the District has at least one retired volunteer firefighter who is anticipated to receive pension benefits under the District's pension plan and has expressed a willingness to return to active volunteer service; and

WHEREAS, the District's pension plan documents do not prohibit the return of a retired

volunteer firefighter to unpaid volunteer service while continuing to receive a previously approved pension benefit, provided no additional pension service credit is earned.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Directors for the Estes Valley Fire Protection District as follows:

1. The District hereby authorizes the return of qualified retirees to active volunteer firefighter status as recommended by the District's Fire Chief;
2. The District hereby approves that such retiree's previously approved pension benefits shall continue without interruption during such volunteer service as provided under C.R.S. § 31-30-1132.
3. The District confirms that there shall be no additional pension credit which accrues during the period of reactivated volunteer service, and pension benefits will not increase as a result of such service unless otherwise permitted by future lawful act.
4. The District confirms that it currently has an operational need for additional volunteer firefighters and finds that the action taken herein serves the District's and community's best interests.
5. Severability. If any part, section, subsection, sentence, clause or phrase of this Resolution is for any reason held to be invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the validity of the remaining provisions.
6. Effective Date. This Resolution shall take effect and be enforced immediately upon its approval by the Board.

ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2026.

*Moved by Ryan Leahy and seconded by Jeff Robbins to adopt Resolution 2026-04 Resolution Regarding The Need for Volunteer Firefighters.
Motion carried unanimously.*

Wildfire Resiliency Code

Discussion concerning the draft code and the need for further revisions to address concerns about the applicability of the Site and Area Requirements to property owners conducting repairs and certain provisions containing vague language. The board also discussed the need for an agreement between the Town, County and District regarding enforcement and how each of the overlapping jurisdictions will be handling their respective codes. The Board requested a comparison document between the Model Code adopted by the state legislature and the draft local code to be presented at an upcoming working session of the Board.

Estes Valley Watershed Coalition Request for Funding

Division Chief Landkamer reported that the EVFPD has been annually supporting the EVWC with wildfire project development and implementation, which has helped in getting major projects off the ground and funded. Representatives of the EVWC were present and confirmed that each individual project is monitored and that EVWC provides periodic reports on each of them. This request was also approved as part of the 2026 budget adoption.

*Moved by Scott Dorman and seconded by Jon Smith to approve the request for funding of \$50,000 from the Estes Valley Watershed Coalition.
Motion carried unanimously.*

Retention of Permanent Chief Search Consultant

Scott Dorman reported that the new fire chief search subcommittee had completed their research on search firms and recommended that the District engage GMP Consultants as its fire chief recruitment and selection consultant. The cost of the engagement is likely to be between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

Moved by Ryan Leahy and seconded by Jeff Robbins to approve the fire chief recruitment subcommittee's recommendation to hire GMP Consultants as the District's consultant for the 2026 fire chief recruitment process.
 Motion carried unanimously.

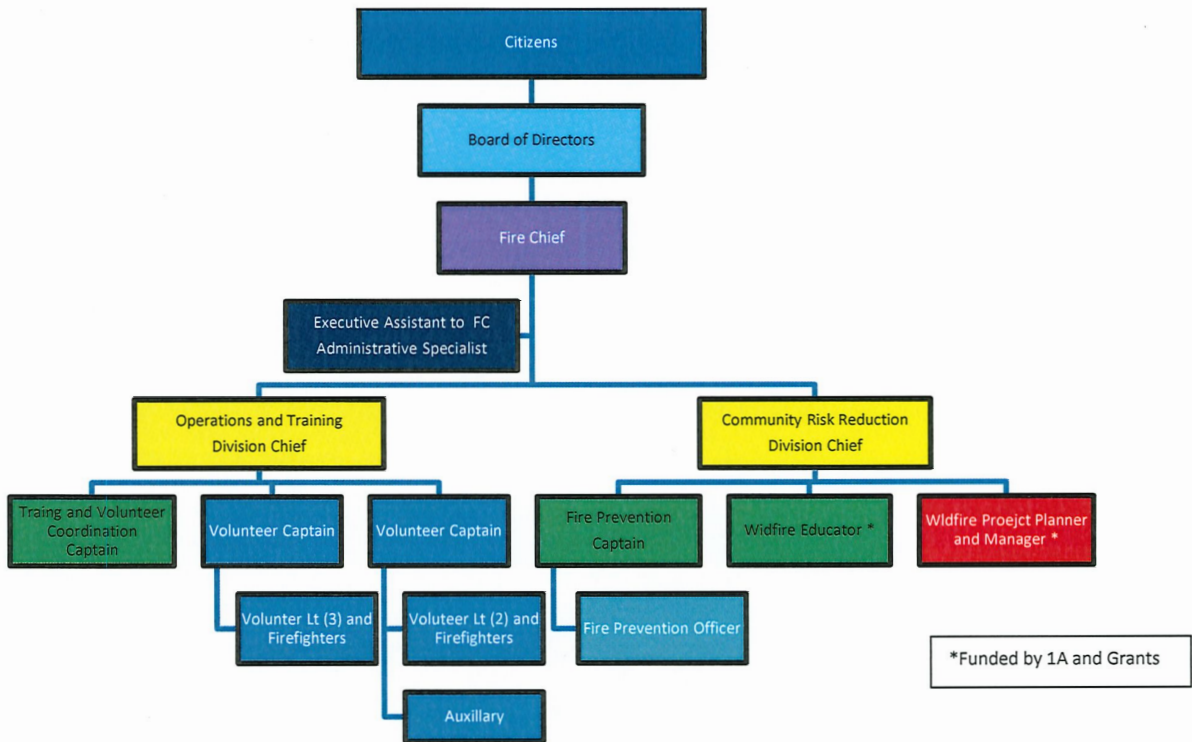
District Organizational Structure

Consolidation of Restructuring and Mitigation Review Subcommittees

President Smith reported that two subcommittees (the Restructuring Committee and the Wildfire Mitigation Subcommittee) had separately come to a place in their work where there was too much overlap to justify two subcommittees. This overlap was taking too much staff time. As a result, she decided to consolidate the two subcommittees into one. The members of the consolidated committee (the Consolidated Restructuring Committee) are Sandra Smith and Ryan Leahy.

Report of Consolidated Restructuring Subcommittee

On behalf of the consolidated restructuring committee, Sandra Smith reported to the Board the committee's recommendation that the District be organized consistent with the following chart:



While the board has already addressed the committee's recommendations concerning the organization of the Operations Division, the fire chief's administrative functions, and the prevention (code enforcement and investigation) element of the Support Services Division, what remained was the remaining structure of the Support and Services Division and the title of that division. Ms. Smith requested that the board agree to the proposed organizational scheme (which will be formalized once certain job descriptions are approved and the Chaplain is added to the chart). The board agreed that this structure is acceptable and a formal adoption of it will occur once the job descriptions are finalized.

Ms. Smith also requested that the board act on two recommendations being made by the committee: (1) that the Support and Services Division be renamed to the Community Risk Reduction Division ("CRRD"); and (2) that a position within the CRRD be created that will focus on wildfire project development and management. This new position is already in the 2026 budget.

Renaming of Support Services Division

On behalf of the Restructuring Committee, Ms. Smith reported the committee's recommendation to change the name of the Support Services Division given that most facilities and apparatus support will be performed by others over time and because this Division focuses primarily on prevention, code enforcement, investigation, and wildfire mitigation issues.

Moved by Jon Smith and seconded by Jeff Robbins to rename the Support Services Division to Community Risk Reduction Division.

Motion carried unanimously.

Structure of Community Risk Reduction Division

On behalf of the committee, Ms. Smith reported that after much research and detailed meetings, the committee concluded that the CRRD is very much in need of a person who has the skillset necessary to engage in project development and management; grant development and management, and related activities. The subcommittee broke out that portion of the organizational chart to detail how the wildfire mitigation structure of the Division is proposed to be organized as follows:

This position is currently funded through the 2026 budget, though the funding is for a different position that is not well-suited to the Division's needs moving forward. The person recruited for this position should have a strong background in project, contract, and grant management and associated financial and other reporting obligations. If the addition of this position is approved, the Division Chief will return to the board with a job description and pay scale to be approved by the board.

Moved by Jon Smith and seconded by Jeff Robbins to add a position in the Community Risk Reduction Division for wildfire project development and management.

Motion carried unanimously.

Operations and Training Division Chief Hiring Process

Chief Jones reported that he had received three applications from internal candidates for the Operations and Training Chief position and requested that the board authorize him to move forward with interviews of the candidates on March 2. The board authorized the Chief to move forward with the interview process.

Chief's Report on Sales Tax Election

Chief Jones reported as follows: In December of 2025, the Board decided not to pursue a tax election in 2026. Our board minutes reflect that an election be conducted after a new permanent chief is hired, a new strategic plan is developed, and the organizational reorganization has been

completed. While not explicitly stated, I think most conversation has been around a 2027 election for a new district sales tax. The most important objective would be to add a new sales tax, so that our tax revenue is fully independent of the town. My understanding is that this will allow the town to use the sales tax revenue they now contribute to us, for their new public safety facility. It's also important to recognize that opportunities to increase tax funding do not come often. So, we should consider our other needs for the foreseeable future in addition to replacing the town sales tax.

The town is currently in the process of acquiring land for the construction of their new public safety facility. The plan recently presented to the Town Board of Trustees has the land acquisition and financing occurring in 2027, with construction beginning in 2028 and occupancy by the police department in 2030. This schedule is faster than I think we anticipated. While the town's need to build a new public safety facility and our desire to become financially independent are separate issues, they are related, and we should seek to move forward in a coordinated manner that meets the needs of both organizations and enhances the potential for success for both projects. Moving forward with a tax initiative in 2027 seems to be the most logical path for us and the town.

A new public safety facility has obvious advantages for the town. It also has advantages for us as a regional fire and emergency services provider. It will include a new and expanded dispatch center, an emergency operations center, and training rooms for all public safety and emergency service agencies. Additionally, it will provide the opportunity to support the growth of all public safety and emergency services in the larger Estes Valley. I believe it is in our best interests to support the town's plans for this new facility and move into the future in the spirit of cooperation that we now enjoy.

The purpose of this briefing is to describe my research so far and propose possible actions for the rest of this year and into 2027. As I'll discuss later, this has a direct impact on the recruitment and selection of our permanent fire chief. This report concludes with three recommendations for moving forward.

It's important to recognize that any tax election is a large and complicated undertaking. It took multiple elections to establish the district, and we had a failed mill levy increase election in 2023. Also, in the last year, we experienced several challenges that may impact our ability to focus resources and attention on a tax election. To be successful, we'll need a full organizational commitment and a well-developed and executed election strategy.

Five critical issues for consideration

Election timing: A tax election can occur either in May at the regular district election or in the general election in November 2027. Both would require a mail election, and in the case of November, coordinated with the county. Generally, the formal process begins four months before an election with the board adopting a resolution calling for an election. My research indicates that the actual process should start up to a year before the election.

This typically includes developing the need, surveys to test community support, communicating the need to the community, preparing our internal organization, following all the required legal steps, and transitioning to an actual campaign. My experience has been that this will be an intensive and time-consuming process for staff, our volunteers, and the board. It could also include the use of one or more election consultants, as well as a significant amount of legal work.

The main advantages of the November election are higher turnout, lower cost due to cooperation with the county, and more time to prepare. The disadvantage is that our issue may get lost in the larger issues at the state and national levels. This could be especially damaging if there are multiple tax questions on the ballot. The main advantage of a May election is that we would not compete with others, and voters would be faced with a purely local issue. The disadvantages are that the turnout would be lower, the cost would be higher due to not being able to share costs, and a shorter time to prepare. In our case, there will also be two board seats up for election, which could cloud the waters if there are candidates running on a platform related to a tax initiative.

If we target November 2027, this process should start late this year; if May, it should start this summer. In either case, the cost will be more than \$50,000 if consultants are used. This doesn't include the cost of a campaign, which must be supported by donations to a separate issue committee as required by state law. If we start this year, we could spread the cost over two years.

What type of tax: My understanding is that most of the conversation so far has been around establishing our own sales tax. Preliminary analysis last year indicates that it would

require a .25% of a one percent of sales tax to replace the amount of funding provided by the town through our IGA. Our other needs, as described below, could add another .25%, or a total of .5% of a one percent sales tax. Because most of the sales tax is paid by visitors, this would seem to be the most logical approach. I've been told that 83% of sales tax here is paid by visitors. If this is the case the actual sales tax increase paid by residents would be far lower than .5% of one percent. In regard to property tax, our mill levy (2.069) is very low, and increasing the mill levy could also be considered.

What do we need: Replacing the town's IGA contribution of \$1.288 million is obvious. However, there may be other needs that could be addressed by a tax increase. Our preliminary analysis of apparatus replacement indicates that we should be contributing at least \$500,000 per year into a dedicated capital replacement fund. If we don't develop a consistent revenue stream for apparatus replacement, we will face increasing maintenance costs at best, and complete fleet failure at worst. In my experience, the lack of a funded capital replacement program is the root cause of future fiscal crisis. Another capital need is renovation of Station 1 to accommodate office consolidation, reduce congestion in our apparatus bays, and increase parking. If our volunteer system remains as effective as it is today, it's unlikely that we'll have large increases in personnel costs in the foreseeable future. However, there may be other operational needs that will improve the support of our volunteer system.

Organizational commitment: My experience has been that to be successful, any tax election must have full and unequivocal organizational support. For us, this includes the board, paid staff, and volunteers. Internally, this will require a well-developed and demonstrated understanding of, and support for, the need. Externally, there is a powerful argument that a modest new sales tax paid mostly by visitors will support overall improvement in public safety in the form of a new police facility, make us fully independent from the town, and address our critical capital needs. Our internal argument must be equally powerful.

Public information, communications, and advocacy: Underlying all issues above is developing a powerful communications strategy to build support (and reduce opposition) within the community, our partner agencies, and our own personnel. Our communications capacity was decimated last year by the unexpected loss of key personnel. We are working now to rebuild this capacity, but even returning to our previous levels of external communications will not be sufficient to support such a major effort as a tax election.

Decisions are needed on the following points

- Decide on timing and type of tax
- Decide on the amount of a new sales tax or property tax increase
- Develop our financial needs in addition to replacing the town sales tax
- Develop an internal strategy that ensures complete organizational commitment
- Develop an external communication strategy to garner community support
- Consider contracting with an election consultant(s)

Impact on recruitment of a permanent fire chief

Our plan is to have a permanent fire chief on board this fall, probably in October. If we target a November 2027 election, this will allow the new chief to be involved in the early stages of planning and be well integrated into the district and community by the time of the campaign. If a May election is chosen, the new chief will come in after the planning has begun and may not be fully integrated by the campaign in the spring of 2027. In either case, a 2027 election will require the new chief to be well-versed in elections, a new category of strategic recruitment criteria.

Recommended actions

Work session: Schedule a work session to discuss the five critical issues described above. This could include preliminary discussion with an election consultant, our legal counsel, and possibly representatives of other districts that have experience with successful tax initiatives. A key point of discussion could be our funding needs in the foreseeable future. Based on the outcome of this work session, a decision could be made at a subsequent regular meeting on timing, type of tax, amount, based on our financial needs in the foreseeable future, and the master schedule.

April might be a good time for this work session. The staffing issues we're working on now should be resolved, the reorganization should be complete, the fire chief process will be well underway, and it will be before the beginning of the 2027 budget process.

Accelerate the fire chief recruitment and selection process: The recruitment and selection consultant discussed in a previous agenda item projects a four-month process. Starting as soon as possible in March could lead to the selection of a final candidate in late June. Adding an additional month before an actual start date, this could bring in our permanent fire chief as early as August. This would be especially important if a May 2027 election is desired.

Build a robust communications strategy: This could include a number of programmatic approaches including aggressive use of social media, information on and promotion of our services, recognition of the importance of our volunteer system, production of high quality visual and printed materials, information distribution at public events (many are already planned), presentations at local community organizations, regular media contact and a citizen fire academy. A part of the approval of our new administrative structure was the anticipation of one or more part-time positions to address special administrative needs. This could be one such need.

After the Chief's report, the board decided to schedule a work session in advance of the April 2026 meeting to discuss.

MINI-BRIEFING: Briefing from Interim DC Chris Thomas.

Interim DC Thomas gave a mini briefing on the Estes Valley Fire volunteer recruitment process.

REPORTS

Support/Prevention Division

- assessments YTD.
- Larimer County Wildfire Town Hall event on January 21 was well received, with over 100 community members participating. We heard from the Colorado Insurance Commissioner, Colorado State Forester, and other community leaders with partner agencies.
- The Neighborhood Ambassador Program orientation kicked off last week for its second year of orientation. There are 5 community members going through this for the next 6 weeks learning about the Structure Ignition Zone, community engagement, and mitigation best practices.
- Captain Sutherland is working on plan review experience, providing comments for multiple projects coming up, Such as the Stanley Hotel projects, Multiple remodel projects, new single-family homes and short-term rental applications.
- Captain Sutherland will be performing re-inspections for the Stanley Hotel properties as follow-up from the annual inspection from December. Captain Sutherland is continuing inspections as needed, mostly on new construction and special events.
- Captain Sutherland led Tuesday night training on Fire Alarm Systems and sprinkler systems to help our crews better understand these complex systems and what to do during our response.
- Captain Sutherland provided training for auxiliary members for inspections on special events and tent. They will now be moving on to ride-a-longs for these inspections.
- DC Landkamer is working on finalizing agreements between all parties to get the CWDG Thunder Mountain project started. Working with Larimer County Sheriff's Department/Emergency Services to get work done on the CWDG project along the boundary with RMNP. They are open to committing to 20 acres of the work that requires hand work. Will be working on an RFP for the larger portion of the project next along with EVWC.

- DC Landkamer is working on grant implementation and management for the 2023 COSWAP, 2022 FR-WRM, and 2023 CWDG Thunder Mountain.
- DC Landkamer also submitted a grant proposal for another COSWAP grant in 2025 for implementation in 2026/2027. We received conditional approval of this grant request pending a site visit by Larimer County Conservation Corp. More information will be released once it is confirmed.
- DC Landkamer has been participating in the Re-Org committee and working on the job descriptions for two open positions.
- The Wildfire Ready Action Plan (WRAP) is complete and is awaiting final approvals before it is publicly released. BTWHP and CPAW are the lead partners in development of this document.
- EVWC invited us to participate in a driving tour of bridges within our district that may be eligible for WRAP projects in the future.
- DC Landkamer is participating in the 2025 Hazard Mitigation plan update that will be going on through Larimer County over the next year. They are updating the plan from 2021.

Operations & Training Division

Training:

- Ice rescue classroom training has been completed and we are waiting on winter to arrive so we can do an on-ice skills training day.
- Instructor 1 starts on Thursday. 8 students enrolled.
- Captain Sutherland taught a great alarm system training.
- PD came and gave a refresher on crime scene considerations.
- Wildland training and refresher month starts in March.

Operations:

- We have mask fit tested more than half of the membership
- Auxiliaries have inventoried all the bunker gear in storage, all the swiftwater gear, and the ice rescue gear.
- Awards banquet was last Friday. Special guest from a CPR save.
 - FF of the year Connor Brewer
 - Officer of the year Captain Rick Spear
 - Rookie of the year Mark Brown
 - Aux of the year Diana Van Der Ploeg
 - Most calls Lt. Ron Bruchwalski- 629 and 2744 hrs on call
 - Most training Trevor Igel 489 hrs.
 - Captain Rick Spear- 20 years
 - Mark Igel- 35 years
- Year to date calls- 112
 - Last year 90 calls to date

Chief's Report

Chief Jones reported that after an internal recruitment process, Marinda Baxter was offered and accepted the position of Administrative Specialist. The job description for the Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief position has been posted and we are awaiting applications to be submitted.

Chief is working on a public information and engagement program to roll out and will provide additional details about this program in March.

Chief Jones and Interim DC Thomas attended the Larimer County Fire Chiefs' meeting. The Wildfire Resiliency Code was discussed at length at that meeting. The Larimer County Sheriff is now empowered to issue burn bans without going first to the county commissioners. The District can issue burn bans locally as well. Aircraft will be coming online in March. Also, the Larimer County Sheriff's Department approached Chief Jones to discuss the placement of fire and smoke detection cameras and Chief agreed to discuss the issue going forward.

UNFINISHED OR OLD BUSINESS -- None

NEW BUSINESS

Board member Jon Smith raised whether to consider increasing death benefits in situations where a deceased firefighter has no family members. He would like to have the board discuss whether amount given in benefits for burial should be increased. It was decided that this issue should be raised at the next Pension Board meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members of Audit and Budget Standing Committees.

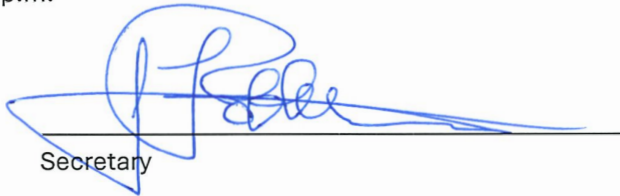
President Smith announced that she had appointed Jeff Robbins to the Audit Committee who will serve with the Treasurer, and Scott Dorman to the Budget Committee, who will serve on that committee with the Treasurer in accordance with the Bylaws.

The next board meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 23, 2026, at 4:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

*Moved by Jon Smith and seconded by Jeff Robbins to adjourn the meeting.
Motion carried unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 6:36 p.m.



Secretary

The Mission of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District is to provide the citizens of and visitors to the Estes Valley with superior fire prevention, fire protection and emergency services in a safe and efficient manner.”

“The Mission of the Board of Directors of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District is to establish policy, goals, strategies and financial leadership that are the foundation for the long-term sustainability of the District.”