

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

## **CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

The regular board meeting of the Board of Directors with the Lower Valley Fire Protection District is called to order by Board President Cullen Purser. Advance public notice of this meeting is posted in three separate public spaces, and online at [www.lowervalleyfire.com](http://www.lowervalleyfire.com). In attendance are the following board of directors: Cullen Purser, Mark Bonella, Jeff Phillips, and Cliff Gray. Others in attendance: Fire Chief Matt Katzenberger, Deputy Fire Chief Gary Mulkey, Diana Manzanares, Mahea Rodriguez, Fire Marshal Travis Holder, Thomas Creel, and Kaden Fife.

## **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**Thomas Creel** led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **CITIZENS COMMENTS/REQUESTS**

None.

## **DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None.

## **APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

**Cliff Gray** motioned to accept the regular board meeting minutes from 02/12/2026; seconded by **Mark Bonella**. **Motion** was passed with three votes from the board members present on 02/12/2026.

## **APPROVAL OF EXPENSES**

**Diana** rendered the information reporting the expenses from February 1, 2026, through February 28, 2026, totaled \$94,750.41.

**Mark Bonella** made a **motion** to accept the bills for February 2026; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

## **APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORTS**

**Diana** reports that the total balance in our bank accounts, including cash on hand as of February 28, 2026, is \$3,263,798.29. The interest accrued for the month of February 2026 is \$9,588.06. The YTD interest accrued is \$21,004.54. The Mesa County Statement of Collections for the month of February 2026 totaled \$985,311.47.

**Jeff Phillips** made a **motion** to accept the financial statements for February 2026; seconded by **Cliff Gray**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

## **APPROVAL OF AMBULANCE BILLING RESOLUTIONS**

**Mahea** reports that the billing write-offs for February 2026 totaled \$130,512.84. There were 20 accounts sent to collections in February 2026, which totaled \$24,452.85.

**Cliff Gray** made a **motion** to approve the resolutions and write-offs for February 2026; seconded by **Mark Bonella**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS**

**Mahea** reported that ambulance revenue for February 2026 totaled \$86,989.26. She will attend a national ambulance coding and billing conference in Las Vegas next month, where she will also sit for her Certified Ambulance Coding (CAC) exam.

Next, **Mahea** reported that a billing software company, NSure, has reached out to offer services tailored to EMS billing. The platform is designed to help identify missing patient information, including insurance coverage, Social Security numbers, addresses, and correct patient demographics, to improve billing accuracy and recovery. She noted that the company also offers a self-pay analysis tool, which utilizes credit data to estimate a patient's likelihood of payment when no insurance is available. Mahea has participated in a couple of virtual meetings with the company, one of which was attended by the Chief. The company offers two pricing models: a flat monthly fee or a contingency-based option in which they retain 30% of recovered revenue. Mahea stated that, if implemented, the service would likely be used selectively, primarily for complex cases such as motor vehicle accidents, out-of-state patients, or accounts where all internal efforts have been exhausted prior to being sent to collections. The Board agreed that Option 2, the pay-per-usage, contingency-based plan, was the most appropriate choice.

Lastly, the CMS audit from April 2025 has been officially concluded. The audit focused on the practices of Rocky Mountain Health Plans (RMHP), not LVFD directly. RMHP has received the results, and the findings do not involve our District.

**Diana** reports that \$200,000 was transferred from the ColoTrust checking account to the Grand Valley Bank (GVB) checking account on 03/02/2026. The funds will be used to cover payroll and operating expenses.

In the future, **Diana** asks the board to consider **Chief Matt Katzenberger** as an approver for internal transfers, from bank-to-bank only. It was clarified that the board would still maintain all authority of any money that leaves a bank account. **Cullen Purser** adds that the process of approving these transactions can be cumbersome for the Board. He recently worked through the steps

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

required to authorize and sign, and it took some time to get everything set up with ColoTrust. **Cullen** continues, stating that the more important discussion, however, is how we maintain appropriate board oversight and accountability for outgoing payments when the process is no longer as simple as signing a check. This is especially relevant when using ColoTrust for fund transfers, and the Board will work to clarify these procedures between us and them. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** states another reason for this request is to try to take advantage of potential earning of interest. For example, GVB currently has over \$1 million following the February tax deposit. While we don't want to move a large portion due to upcoming expenses, such as the water tender by the end of the month and the Type III by the end of April, having internal flexibility is key. If that capability exists, we could temporarily move available funds to an interest-bearing account for four to six weeks, then transfer the money back to GVB just before it's needed for those larger purchases. **Mark** requested to receive communication and notifications when transfers occur. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** agreed to notify the Board prior to any internal transfers and to wait for acknowledgment before proceeding.

**Cliff Gray** made a **motion** to allow **Chief Matt Katzenberger** to approve and initiate internal transfers between banks and to provide prior notification of such to the Board; seconded by **Mark Bonella**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

## **FIRE CHIEF REPORT**

**Chief Matt Katzenberger** informed the Board of an unruly patient who was recently sent to collections and is now threatening to hire an attorney and pursue claims of fraudulent billing and medical malpractice. The patient has called multiple times and spoken with **Mahea**, **Chief Katzenberger**, **Chief Mulkey**, and **Travis**. **Chief Katzenberger** provided a heads-up to the Board regarding the situation in case the patient engages an attorney. **Chief Katzenberger** emphasized that all billing was accurate, the medical care provided was appropriate, and there is no fraudulent activity. The dispute centers on \$580 in co-pays for the patient and his wife, with insurance covering the remainder in full. The patient has suggested dropping the legal threat if the co-pays are waived; **Chief Katzenberger** clarified that the District will not write them off. If the patient does contact a lawyer, **Chief Katzenberger** will forward the matter to the District's legal counsel for response.

Next, **Chief Katzenberger** provides apparatus updates. **Travis** followed up with the dealer regarding the Type III, and there has been progress, although it hadn't been posted to the website. The fabrication error on the hose beds, which was discussed a few months ago, has been resolved. The pump housing is now installed, and the owner of Front Range Fire Apparatus indicated that

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

the projected timeline for final inspection is the end of April. We also received a zip file with roughly 20 photos showing forward progress. The water tender is moving along as well. It came out of paint last week, and we approved the striping. Ground lights that were omitted from the initial specs are now in discussion, and brackets are being fabricated for placement. Final assembly is underway, keeping the project on track for the end-of-month completion. The only potential delay is a chassis recall, which the dealer will address before pick-up; it's a minor issue involving a wire harness. There are no new updates on the ambulance.

With the strategic plan process now complete, **Chief Matt Katzenberger** has been able to shift focus back to our three key policy documents. The Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG), which outline operational procedures, have been distributed to all staff; these are not typically reviewed or approved by the Board. We've separated the physical policies that previously lived in that document into a new Operations Policy Manual. This manual will combine the remaining content from the old district manual with the formal policies from the SOG's. It is currently about 75% complete, with **Chief Mulkey** finalizing the SOP section and **Chief Matt Katzenberger** working on the rest. The goal is to have the complete manual ready for Board's review before the next meeting, allowing time for approval and distribution to staff, ultimately concluding the year-and-a-half-long policy overhaul. On a similar note, **Chief Matt Katzenberger** addresses our employee handbook project, stating that our contract with Lighthouse HR officially ends at the end of May. One of the recent payments reflects the final installment under that contract. Moving forward, we will retain Lighthouse for an \$800 per year fee. This service provides automatic updates for any legislative or labor law changes affecting the employee handbook, including addendums, supplements, or replacements, ensuring we remain in compliance. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** confirmed that all other services under the previous contract will be canceled. He informs the Board that \$800 per year is a reasonable cost for this ongoing compliance support.

## **DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF REPORT**

**Deputy Chief Mulkey** begins with grant updates. He attended the NWRETAC grant hearing and applied for a matching grant to expand on equipment purchased last year, including additional Lucas Devices. Our goal is to have one Lucas Device in each of our first-out ambulances, which has already proven to be a game changer by enhancing our capabilities with limited personnel. The grant application also includes additional ventilators. The hearing went very well. He received positive feedback, and **Adam Compton** did an excellent job explaining the need and benefits for our district. We're hopeful for good news in the coming weeks.

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

Next, **Deputy Chief Mulkey** provides some training updates to the Board. **Cody Ciotti** and **Matt White** have completed their Instructor I course and testing. We also held a wildland refresher on April 10<sup>th</sup>, with the BLM providing an overview, updates on drought conditions, and expectations for the upcoming fire season. The high school academy students are finishing their HazMat training and are scheduled for testing this month, with excellent progress so far. Additionally, the new part-time recruit academy will begin on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Regarding the call volume, **Deputy Chief Mulkey** reports that the call volume is down by about 10% compared to last year, with 456 calls recorded through the end of February. This is only 5% lower than 2025, but still an increase from previous years. The start of the burn season was busy. LVFD responded to 22 calls related to agricultural burns, 12 of which required active fire suppression.

## **FIRE MARSHAL REPORT**

**Fire Marshal Travis Holder** provides his YTD Fire Prevention Activities to the Board. The Board is informed that there is significant new construction on the west side of town. For example, the former Oaks site on Ottley is being developed into a new apartment complex, and other projects are underway as well. **Travis** has been participating in numerous pre-construction meetings, discussing fire mitigation strategies and reviewing appeals to minimize fire risk. Construction and mitigation efforts are expected to begin in April. **Travis** confirms that he, along with the City of Fruita, has a list of contractors and will review it to select the best bid. After the heavy fuels are mitigated, they plan to reintroduce the sheep to graze the area. He anticipates a busy Spring season.

## **OFFICERS REPORT**

None.

## **LOCAL 5265 - UNION REPORT**

Union President **Kaden Fife** reports that Local 5265 is launching its campaign for Measure A, with the first major outreach day scheduled for tomorrow. Some members will attend the Loma auction, while others will visit local businesses. They've prepared front-and-back handouts with campaign information and a QR code linking to their website. They will also be asking businesses to display posters in support of the campaign. In addition, social media ads for Measure A will be running on Facebook, and targeted mailers will be delivered to registered voters within city limits between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. Using voter data from Mesa County, the Union has identified over 3,200 active voters who have participated in the past two years, ensuring their outreach is focused and efficient. The Union also has a campaign app from the CPFF that provides addresses, voter names, suggested talking points, and allows them to track whether residents are in favor, opposed, or undecided. This helps volunteers

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

engage more effectively during door-to-door outreach. Interest from community members has been strong, and volunteers can contact us via our website, [lvfdlocal5265.com](http://lvfdlocal5265.com), to get involved. **Kaden** has also reached out to nearby GJFD's Union to see if their members would like to assist. It was strongly emphasized to all union members and volunteers that they will represent the Union exclusively while conducting outreach for Measure A. They will not represent the Fire District in any capacity.

Next, **Kaden** reports on the annual LVFD employee surveys. He is hoping to have the surveys sent out by next month.

Lastly, **Kaden** announced that he and **Anthony Padilla** have been reelected for another two-year term, with **Kaden** continuing as President and **Anthony** continuing as the Secretary/Treasurer.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Fire Marshal Travis Holder** begins with asking for the Board to adopt Resolution 03/12/2026-1 - A resolution adopting the Mesa County Wildfire Resiliency Code and the 2025 CO Wildfire Resiliency Code as amended and map within the Lower Valley Fire Protection District. This year, a state-mandated code was issued that must be adopted by April 1<sup>st</sup> and go into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup>. **Travis** states that we've been coordinating with Mesa County, Grand Junction Fire, and other local fire agencies to determine how it will be implemented within Mesa County. The code specifically addresses large areas within the wildland-urban interface, for LVFD, this includes the river corridor into Kings View Subdivision and establishes guidelines for code analysis and response in these areas. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** adds that the State did not have sufficient funds to hire personnel to implement this code, so responsibility was shifted back to municipalities and fire districts, as outlined in the state statute. Essentially, this resolution amends the 2024 International Fire Code, which the District adopted in September of last year. Specifically, the resolution:

- Incorporates the state-mandated requirements into the existing code.
- Adds provisions to clarify enforcement authority within the District, ensuring it remains under local control rather than the state or county.
- Addresses the fee schedule included in the state code, specifying that any fees can be established by future Board resolution. Currently, no fees are being implemented.

**Chief Matt Katzenberger** further explains that under Mesa County's process, this code will primarily come into effect when a property owner submits a site plan. If the property owner does not contest the hazard classification assigned by the state (Class 1, 2, or 3, with 3 being the highest hazard) and agrees to implement the required mitigation measures, the District will conduct a site inspection to ensure their plan meets code requirements. Any deficiencies

## *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

would be handled similarly to a business inspection, with **Travis** performing reinspection's as needed. For ongoing maintenance, the property owner would sign an affidavit taking responsibility for compliance with the code; the District will not routinely inspect all properties. If a property owner contests their classification, the county maintains a list of approved third-party mitigation specialists. These specialists can assess the property, perform an evaluation like the District would, and recommend whether the property should be reclassified. Based on that assessment, the District can either conduct an inspection or approve an administrative boundary adjustment, officially changing the parcel's classification. Both Colorado and Mesa County have adopted wildfire resiliency codes, with Mesa County making similar amendments that give local jurisdictions authority rather than the state. Mesa County has already established inspection fees, ranging from \$50 - \$100. The resolution for the District specifically amends Section 309.1 of the 2024 International Fire Code adopted last September. Under this amendment, the Lower Valley Fire District formally adopts the Mesa County Wildfire Resiliency Code and Map, as well as the 2025 Colorado Wildfire Resiliency Code and Map. This establishes minimum standards for new construction, defensible space, and existing structures within the Wildland-Urban Interface and identifies a process for appeals. Appendices A, B, and C from the state model are adopted, covering permits, construction documents, inspections, and enforcement. All references to "jurisdiction" or "authority having jurisdiction" in Mesa County or the state code are replaced with the Chief of the Lower Valley Fire District or their designee as the code official. Sections of the Colorado Code that previously assigned authority to the state (Part 2, Section 103) or allowed the state to establish fees (Part 2, Section 106.1) have been stricken. Fees will now be set by Board resolution. In short, the resolution allows the District to assume full authority and responsibility for code enforcement within its boundaries, ensuring local control rather than deferring to the state.

**Mark Bonella** made a **motion** to adopt Resolution 03/12/2026-1, the Mesa County Wildfire Resiliency Code and the 2025 CO Wildfire Resiliency Code as amended and map within the Lower Valley Fire Protection District; seconded by **Cliff Gray**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

Next, **Chief Matt Katzenberger** seeks adoption of the 2026-2030 LVFD Strategic Plan. He states that there was a lot of work involved in this process and wants to recognize the committee that put it together. Having participated in strategic plans before, he has seen cases where things are rushed just to get something down. This plan clearly reflects thoughtfulness in every decision.

# *Lower Valley Fire Protection District*

*March 12, 2026*

---

Many of the decisions were challenging and were thoroughly discussed and even questioned by the group and the consultant to ensure the right outcomes. A few points to highlight: with the adoption of this plan, the District will have a new mission statement and value statement. The department developed the phrase, “*Driven by Mission, Defined by People,*” which effectively serves as our mission statement. Those six words effectively capture our mission. The formal mission statement is also included below, but **Chief Matt Katzenberger** believes those six words are powerful and clearly convey what our District is trying to express. The strategic plan and the elements within the packet were thoroughly discussed. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** clarified that this document is not a living document, it serves as a roadmap. While unforeseen issues may arise that require attention, the core goals and strategic pathway outlined in the plan are not intended to be significantly amended over the next five years. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** states that the decision to work with Convergent Impact was significant and well worth the investment. Their approach was exactly what our District needed. The final invoice came in at less than half of the approved budget, even with an additional session added, totaling around \$11,000–\$12,000, making it extremely cost-effective. The value they added was indispensable. Importantly, they guided us through the process down to the foundational level, leaving us with staff who are now equipped to manage and guide this process in the future. While we might consult with them again, it would likely be on a much smaller scale, as we now have a framework we can continue to use.

**Mark Bonella** made a **motion** to adopt the 2026-2030 Lower Valley Fire Protection District’s Strategic Plan; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

Lastly for New Business, **Chief Matt Katzenberger** seeks the approval to order a Fire Marshal Vehicle Replacement. We budgeted \$80,000 for capital equipment based on **Travis’s** research. **Chief Matt Katzenberger** tasked him with sourcing a vehicle equivalent to our other three Ford pickups for consistency, a 2026 crew cab with a 6½-foot bed, EcoBoost engine, and outfitted similarly to the Chief’s truck (not like the squads). This includes a ranch-style front guard, slide-out bed tray, and front leveling kit. Instead of a camper shell, we chose a folding tonneau cover to keep the bed accessible while still protecting equipment. After several bids from several dealerships, the best pricing came from Phil Long Ford in Denver. They include all upfitting and delivery, at \$60,584. Additional costs include \$2,000 for striping and graphics, and \$12,500 for emergency lights and radio installation from 2-Way (an increase from previous installations). The total package comes to approximately \$75,000, which is within our \$80,000 budget.

# Lower Valley Fire Protection District

March 12, 2026

---

**Cliff Gray** made a **motion** to purchase a replacement Fire Marshal truck for up to \$80,000; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. **Motion** was passed with four votes.

## OLD BUSINESS

**Chief Matt Katzenberger** begins Future Funding Initiatives, stating he was contacted by Dan West at the *Daily Sentinel* to run a story on the sales tax initiative. He participated in an interview, and their photographer took several good photos of our apparatuses last week. As of today, that story has not yet been published.

Lastly, the Loma Hall had an asbestos inspection performed last week, and those results are still pending.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Cullen Purser** made a **motion** to adjourn the Regular Board Meeting.

All in favor with four affirmative votes.

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

#### **CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Workshop Meeting of the Board of Directors with the Lower Valley Fire Protection District was called to order by Board Vice President **Mark Bonella** at 6:00pm. Advance notice of the meeting was provided. The following board of directors were present: **Mark Bonella, Jesse Mease, Jeff Phillips, and Cliff Gray**. Others in attendance: **Fire Chief Matt Katzenberger, Mahea Rodriguez, Diana Manzanares, Anthony Padilla, Casey Burns, Keila Utu, Cooper Lovern** and community members, **Monica Kraynek, Cheri Miracle, and Bill Friedrichsen**.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP – PUBLIC Q&A FORUM ON REFERRED ISSUE A**

**Fire Chief Matt Katzenberger** begins with introductions in a round-table format. Next, **Chief Katzenberger** provided background information on the proposal of the sales and use public safety tax, and the unique partnership that was established between the Lower Valley Fire Protection District (LVFD) and the City of Fruita for this purpose.

**Chief Katzenberger** explained that discussions with the City began several months ago, around mid-year last year, as part of ongoing coordination meetings. These conversations focused on the future of both organizations in relation to public safety, including resources, funding, apparatus, staffing, and growth projections. During these discussions, he informed the City Manager and Assistant City Manager that recent state legislation now allows special districts to pursue a sales tax independently. This change followed property tax reduction measures enacted between 2023 and 2024, with some impacts extending into 2025. While supportive of those reductions, he noted they have resulted in relatively flat property tax revenues for the District over the past three years. Current stability is largely due to new development; without that growth, the District would be experiencing annual deficits.

He emphasized that a flat revenue model is not sustainable given increasing service demands and rising costs, including apparatus, medical supplies, personnel, salaries, and insurance. As a result, the goal of these discussions was to establish a more sustainable long-term financial model. The District and its Board did not believe that pursuing an additional mill levy from property owners, following the last one approved in 2018, was the best path forward, especially since prior projections had anticipated sufficient funding before state-level changes altered those expectations.

Instead, the District explored diversifying revenue sources by incorporating a sales tax alongside existing property tax revenues and service-based billing (such as ambulance transport and standby services). Based on projected needs, the District estimated approximately \$1 million annually would be required to support future staffing levels, equating to roughly a half-cent sales tax.

As discussions progressed, City Council reviewed historical sales and use tax data and determined that a 0.2% (two-tenths of a cent) sales tax could generate comparable revenue. This approach broadens the tax base by including not only residents, but also visitors and patrons spending within the community. Additionally, the use tax component captures revenue from building materials, allowing new development to contribute more directly and reducing the burden on property owners alone.

**Chief Katzenberger** explained that the partnership with the City emerged from a shared understanding that pursuing separate sales tax measures could limit future opportunities and place repeated requests on voters. By working together, the District and the City aim to implement a coordinated, sustainable funding solution. He noted that this type of partnership between an independent special district and a municipality is uncommon, with few existing models to follow.

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

**Chief Katzenberger** explained that the partnership was formed with a shared understanding that a collaborative approach would be mutually beneficial moving forward.

He noted that under recent legislation, if a fire district were to pursue its own sales tax independently, it would also be responsible for administering that tax. This would require establishing systems to collect, track, and reconcile revenues, including managing refunds and quarterly adjustments. Most districts must rely on outside consultants for these services due to a lack of in-house expertise, resulting in costs totaling tens of thousands of dollars annually.

In contrast, the City already has the infrastructure and systems in place to administer sales tax. By partnering with the City, the District can avoid these additional expenses, create significant cost savings while allowing the City to continue its existing collection and allocation processes with minimal change.

To further develop the partnership, the District's Board of Directors and the City Council held a joint workshop to discuss key details, including potential ballot language and how revenues would be allocated if the measure passes. That discussion ultimately led to the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which outlines how funds would be distributed and ensures transparency and accountability for both entities and the public.

The MOU serves as a preliminary agreement and is intended to protect the City, the District, and the taxpayers by clearly defining how revenues would be used. Because the arrangement involves the transfer of funds between governmental entities, state statute requires a formal Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA). However, to avoid unnecessary legal expenses, the MOU specifies that the IGA will only be drafted within 90 days if the measure passes. The terms outlined in the MOU will be carried forward into the IGA.

Under the proposed structure, revenue generated from the sales tax would be split evenly, with 50% allocated to the District and 50% to the City, after administrative costs are deducted. The District would be responsible for its share of those administrative expenses.

**Chief Katzenberger** also clarified that the ballot language related to the Fire District was developed directly from materials provided by the District, including a white paper that outlines the need for additional funding. That document includes historical call volume data, budget considerations, and service demand trends over the past decade, along with mapping data showing call density. These analyses demonstrate that approximately 80–90% of service calls occur within the City limits of Fruita.

He acknowledged concerns that funds generated within the City could be used outside City limits. However, he noted that surrounding areas, such as Loma and Mack, still contribute economically to Fruita, as residents frequently travel into the City for goods and services. Additionally, a portion of call volume is tied to tourism and City-hosted events, such as races and outdoor recreation activities, which bring visitors into the area and contribute to service demand beyond strict municipal boundaries.

Finally, he addressed questions regarding the ballot language, particularly the clause allowing City Council to determine additional necessary expenditures. He explained that this wording is required for compliance with TABOR (the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights). Under TABOR, ballot measures must either require excess revenues to be refunded to taxpayers, which is difficult with sales tax, or include language allowing those funds to be retained for designated purposes. The language used in this proposal mirrors that of the District's successful 2018 ballot measure and ensures compliance with state requirements while maintaining flexibility to fund public safety services such as police, fire, and emergency response.

Citizen Comment/Question: How are taxpayers within the District who are not qualified voters within the City of Fruita being represented in their opportunity to vote on this issue? He was under the impression that TABOR requires voters to approve any tax increase. Since I won't be able to vote on this measure, how does that align with those requirements?

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: 1) Because they are not eligible to vote on this measure, those taxpayers are not directly represented in the decision. 2) One of the challenges with TABOR and sales tax is that people who spend money in the area help fund the tax but don't get a say in approving it.

Citizen Comment/Question: While the District is a clearly defined geographic area and had the option to pursue a mill levy increase or an independent sales tax, it chose a different path. Regardless, the reality is that residents in Loma are not eligible to vote on this issue.

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: That's the reason it's on the City's ballot, the City collects the sales tax and then shares those funds with the District, instead of the District collecting it themselves.

Citizen Comment/Question: Since half the money is already set aside for the District in the MOU, it kind of feels like the City is just acting as a pass-through, with the District ending up with a big portion of the funds.

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: The City has never covered the cost of fire services since it was incorporated, which was also a key point in the discussions. The District was established in 1980 as a merger of the Fruita Volunteer Fire Department and the Lower Valley Rural Fire Department. At that time, neither department was operated by the City. When the Fruita Fire Department indicated that the existing arrangement was not working, they offered the City the option to take over fire services for Fruita. The City declined, and the District continued to operate as an independent organization.

Comment from Vice Chair Mark Bonella: With a mill levy, everyone in the District must pay, regardless of choice. One advantage of a sales tax, however, is that people have some control over it through their spending decisions. Residents can choose where they shop, if they prefer to spend money outside Fruita, they can, whereas a property tax automatically applies to their property value each year. While there are concerns about tourism, such as visitors attending events like bicycle races, the sales tax captures contributions from both residents and non-resident patrons who use local services and spend money in the area.

**Mark** emphasized that the proposed sales tax is a small increase and would be shared among residents, visitors, and those spending money in the area. He noted that, while some people worry that taxes may deter spending, in practice, visitors rarely consider local sales tax rates when deciding where to go, and the rate in question, 0.2%, is minimal.

He explained that as a conservative, anti-tax individual, he nonetheless recognizes the critical need for reliable, high-quality fire and emergency services. Costs for services continue to rise due to inflation, equipment upgrades, and state mandates, but funding has not increased proportionally. He cited examples: ambulance costs rising from \$250,000 to \$350,000, and new lifesaving technologies, such as the Lucas CPR device at \$25,000 each, which automates compressions and saves personnel while directly saving lives.

He highlighted that all District funding goes directly to protecting life and property. Unlike other municipal services, the District is not generating revenue through fines or unrelated programs, its sole purpose is emergency response. He stressed the importance of keeping equipment and vehicles up-to-date because lives cannot be replaced, even if property can.

He addressed concerns about funding from non-residents, noting that out-of-town visitors and tourists also contribute to the sales tax, which helps diversify funding beyond property taxes. Diversification is critical because relying solely on property taxes exposes the District to instability during economic downturns or state budget cuts.

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

**Mark** also described staffing challenges. Full-time positions are limited, and part-time personnel often move on to full-time positions elsewhere after gaining experience here at LVFD.

**Chief Katzenberger** further explains that currently, the District maintains 18 line positions with a combination of full-time and part-time staff to ensure adequate coverage. Each ambulance crew includes at least two paramedics, supplemented by EMTs, with part-time staff filling gaps as needed. He noted that training and retaining qualified personnel is essential to maintaining service quality, and having enough ambulances and crews is crucial to responding promptly to emergencies.

He reiterated that this sales tax allows the District to maintain service quality, invest in the best equipment and technology, and ensure the safety of both residents and visitors in an environment where demand and costs continue to rise. The approach balances local control, shared responsibility, and sustainability.

Citizen Comment/Question: LVFD has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) because the City does not control the District, correct? By contrast, the City oversees the Police Department, which is why a separate memorandum is not needed for them. Correct? LVFD specifies exactly how you will use your 50% of the funds. Does the Police Department, or the City for that matter, have to specify how they will use their portion as well?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: That is correct. He went on to explain, on the City's behalf, the ballot language explicitly identifies that funding for the Police Department is dedicated to personnel and equipment. Public records from City Council meetings and workshops confirm that this funding is intended to supplement what the Police Department already receives. He noted this was particularly important given past experience with Mesa County in 2019, when sales tax funding for the Sheriff's Department was pulled back after the measure passed. Knowing that the City Council and management documented the intended use of funds in the ballot language provides assurance that the money will go where it is designated. City staff were initially surprised by the request to specify this, but it was important to ensure the funding would not simply be absorbed into the general fund.

Citizen Comment/Question: LVFD has done an excellent job of providing clear and detailed information. The white paper you referenced thoroughly outlines the department's needs and challenges. In contrast, when I asked the City for a similar document regarding the police side of this issue, they do not have one. There is no formal, board or council-endorsed white paper specifying how funds would be allocated, such as the number of officers, equipment, or other resources. The City has not released a documented plan to the public. I appreciate the Fire District's transparency in doing so.

Citizen Comment/Question: That's exactly why this meeting is being held, to ask these questions. One of my concerns has been the lack of clarity around how the City intends to use the funds. It sounds like there will be some level of accountability, including budget tracking and reporting on how the money is spent. Even so, my understanding is that there will be a requirement for mutual accountability, essentially a self-audit process, on a regular basis. Is that something that will occur annually?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: Yes, both entities are bound by the agreement to provide public updates twice a year. The first occurs during budget season, typically August through December, when each entity outlines how it intends to use the funds for the upcoming year. The second occurs after the annual audit is completed, usually between April and July, depending on the timing of the independent auditor. For example, our independent accounting firm will be on-site next week conducting a full audit of our records. While final reports aren't due to the state until July, once the audit is complete and released, both entities will present the results publicly, both to

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

the Board and the City Council. These presentations ensure transparency by documenting how funds were actually spent in the previous year. While there isn't direct oversight dictating how the funds must be spent, there is clear public accountability through regular reporting and disclosure. There will be mutual review and each entity will review the other's reporting.

Citizen Comment/Question: Was the primary driver behind this ballot measure the Fire District's needs, with the City joining in support? Or was there a shared need from the beginning, with the City also seeking funding for the Police Department?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: This ballot measure came out of a shared discussion about the future of public safety in Fruita. Both the Fire District and the City identified needs, particularly because the Police Department is currently understaffed, with some shifts covered by only one officer. It wasn't driven solely by the Fire District approaching the City with a funding shortfall. Rather, both entities recognized that while growth has kept revenues relatively flat, it has also increased service demands for both fire and police. As a result, this effort reflects a mutual need and a collaborative approach to addressing those challenges.

Citizen Comment/Question: Does the need for service always stay within the city limits, or does it extend beyond those boundaries at times?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: No, public safety services in Mesa County operate under mutual and automatic aid agreements. That means resources don't stay strictly within city limits; instead, the closest available unit responds when needed. If one agency is tied up or out of service, another nearby agency fills the gap until the primary jurisdiction is available again. For example, Fruita Police may respond to calls in Loma or Mack until the Mesa County Sheriff's Office can take over. The same applies to fire and EMS - if one area is short on resources, neighboring agencies step in. It works both ways: if Fruita needs help, the county or Grand Junction responds, and if those agencies are overwhelmed, Fruita provides support. The goal is continuous, countywide coverage so that whenever someone calls 911, the nearest available help is dispatched.

Citizen Comment/Question: Do you have an estimate for how many years the 0.2% funding would adequately support your budget before additional adjustments might be needed?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: We can only estimate based on historical trends. Looking at the growth of sales and use tax in Fruita, we feel confident that this 0.2% will be sufficient to support the staffing goals outlined in our strategic plan. That said, it's not a guarantee, there are factors beyond our control, such as economic downturns, legislative changes, or unfunded mandates, that could affect how long the funding remains adequate.

Chief Katzenberger continues, adding that Fruita citizens will start seeing the impact of the new state fire code, which has been implemented but left to local enforcement. That's one reason a full-time fire inspector position was included, because it will increase the workload for the Fire Marshal's office. While we can't guarantee it's a permanent solution, based on historical trends, assuming total funds continue to grow around 3–5% per year, we expect the 0.2% funding to sustain the Fire District and support the staffing and operational goals outlined in our strategic plan.

Citizen Comment/Question: Has the district considered impact fees for new development? If the goal were to limit growth in an area, that would typically involve increasing impact fees, development fees, and other statutory

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

charges. The downside is that it drives up housing costs, so much so that the first \$100,000 of a home's price could essentially go straight to fees, making homes unaffordable for many buyers. So, if the goal were going that direction, one could raise fees significantly. That might also generate some funding for future equipment, but I'm not on the board and don't make those decisions. Plus, impact fee revenue is earmarked for specific uses, as you mentioned, so it can't just be redirected freely.

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: The District has considered impact fees but, at this time, doesn't feel that pursuing them is a reasonable option. That doesn't mean it won't be revisited in the future, but for now, it's not part of the plan.

Comment from Vice Chair Mark Bonella: I have a problem with a "no growth" mindset. Being a fourth-generation resident, our family's ranches were where places like Walmart and where the junior high now stand. That history makes seeing rapid development feel personal. It can be sad to see fields turn into subdivisions, but growth is a reality. He noted that taking a strict "no growth" stance would have made housing far less affordable, potentially pricing out families like yours. His perspective is that growth is inevitable, but it should be managed responsibly to maintain community accessibility, so people can still afford to raise kids and buy a first home here. Mark also explained that impact fees have been revisited over the years, but implementing or raising them further would disproportionately affect current homeowners. Ultimately, the District and City have explored all options, turning over every stone, to balance funding needs with fair and responsible growth.

Mark continues, thanking the citizens for attending tonight's forum. He acknowledged that, while some meetings go a whole year with little public attendance, having engaged citizens asking questions is extremely valuable. He said tonight is especially important because there's been a lot of misinformation circulating online, particularly on Facebook, often from people who don't even live here. He sees it as a positive that a few concerned citizens come in, ask questions, and get answers directly from the source. Those who attend can then share accurate information with others, helping to correct misunderstandings. Essentially, it ensures people hear the truth firsthand, rather than relying on social media rumors, and can make informed decisions about the ballot measure.

Citizen Comment/Question: Many residents, especially those who didn't grow up here, may not realize that the Fire District is a separate entity from the City. Coming from Western Pennsylvania, where fire services were largely volunteer-based and funded through community events like fish fries, it's understandable that the funding structure here, through property taxes and formal budgets, might not be widely known. Chances are, a significant portion of Fruita residents may not fully understand how the Fire District operates or where its funding comes from, which can shape how people perceive ballot measures or local public safety initiatives.

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: Exactly. Most people just see police and fire as "public safety" and assume it's all one system, dial 911, and both show up. They don't realize the Fire District is a separate entity with its own budget, governance, and funding sources. That lack of awareness can make understanding ballot measures or funding decisions confusing for the public.

Comment from Vice Chair Mark Bonella: There are a lot of costs built into public safety that most people don't see. For example, the mandatory 911 fees run by the City of Grand Junction are increasing by about 6% each year. Agencies like the Fire District have no choice but to pay for that system, so it's a real cost, but it's largely invisible to the public because it just comes as a bill. Then there are the ambulance write-offs: calls for which the

## **Lower Valley Fire Protection District**

### **Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

District doesn't get paid at all. Those can add up to a significant number, and most residents don't realize that not every call generates revenue. These costs, mandatory fees and unpaid calls, impact the District's budget, even though they're not immediately obvious to the community.

Citizen Comment/Question: Are you also referring to the amounts you write off as contractual adjustments, where the billed charges aren't fully collected due to agreements with insurance?

Answer from Billing Specialist Mahea Rodriguez: These write-offs are essentially mandated by contract with our government payers under "no surprise billing" rules. We can only collect what they agree to, like a co-pay, but if they say they'll pay \$100 on a \$1,000 bill, we have no choice but to write off the remaining \$900. Trying to collect more would be considered insurance fraud. Medicare and Medicaid negotiate the rates that we are bound to, and they're also our largest payers. Many private insurers follow Medicare's lead, so most of what you see listed as contractual adjustments is government mandated. There are some true write-offs, like for bankruptcies or deceased patients, but those are minimal in comparison.

Comment from Chief Katzenberger: When the District applies for a grant, they look at what we're billing versus what we actually charge. For example, we might want to charge \$1,200 for ambulance transport, but the grant or payer says the average we should charge is \$1,500. So we're mandated to bill a higher amount, even though they'll only reimburse \$1,200. This means the "write-up" is essentially forced: we have to list the higher charge, but we only get paid the lower, negotiated rate. It's a bit frustrating because it creates a gap between the cost of providing the service, fuel, equipment, personnel, and what we actually collect. People with good insurance might end up paying the higher amount, while government payers or underinsured patients pay the lower amount. In other words, the system forces us to charge more on paper than we actually receive, which can feel unfair, but it's part of how grants and reimbursements are structured.

Comment from Secretary/Treasurer Jesse Mease: I just wanted to share a perspective as a District resident. My wife makes a point of filling out every community survey that comes our way. Last night, we received one from School District 51 about a \$32 million mill levy override they're considering for the November ballot due to a budget shortfall. Stories like this are part of why I think a sales tax approach for the Fire District and City isn't a bad idea. It's a way to meet funding needs in a fair and consistent way across the community, rather than relying solely on grants or one-time measures. It's something tangible that supports essential services while keeping the process transparent and accessible to residents.

Citizen Comment/Question: Is the district allowed to do any independent fundraising?

Answer from Chief Katzenberger: Yes, we can accept memorial donations or fundraising contributions, but those funds must be designated for a specific purpose, which can make budgeting a bit challenging. Historically, the District held several fundraising events when we were primarily volunteer based. However, since 2016, when we transitioned to a fully staffed department, our call volume has grown to over 2,000 per year. With our staff already working at full capacity responding to calls, it's become much more difficult for them to organize or participate in additional fundraising events beyond their regular duties.

Chief Katzenberger continues, stating that LVFD does pursue grants whenever possible, but there's never a guarantee, we might apply for ten grants and only get one, or none at all. Our firefighters put in the effort to go after every opportunity they can. There is some potential for fundraising, but it's not something we would build into the core budget. We've tried social media campaigns, civic group partnerships like the Lions Club and

**Lower Valley Fire Protection District**  
**Workshop Meeting – April 2, 2026**

---

Rotary, and Chamber events, but we tend to get the same small group of participants each time. We're always open to ideas on how to improve community engagement and fundraising, and we also try to make everything transparent by posting board meetings online.

Chief Katzenberger adds that we've also worked with a few local HOA's, like the Primrose subdivision, and have been invited to speak at their meetings a couple of times. Engaging with HOA's is another way we try to connect with the community and share information about the Fire District. We also have a Community Outreach Committee, led by our Fire Marshal, whose focus is public education and connecting with the community. These staff members have assignments outside of emergency calls specifically to improve community engagement and education. In addition, our social media has recently been refreshed and is now partly managed by a new staff member with a more creative approach. She's increased engagement by animating posts and making them more accessible, moving beyond the straightforward, fact-based updates we used to share.

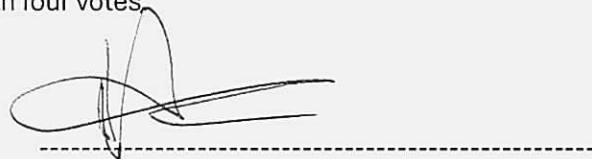
So, between the Outreach Committee, social media efforts, and our participation with HOA's and community groups, we're always looking for ways to get information out to the public. We appreciate any ideas for additional forums or ways to engage the community. Any suggestions from residents are more than welcome.

**Chief Katzenberger** concluded the Q&A workshop by thanking all citizens and participants for taking the time to attend and engage in tonight's public forum.

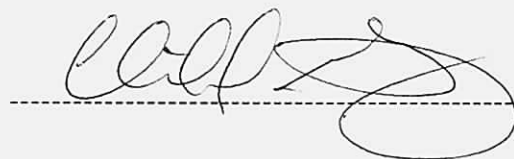
**ADJOURNMENT**

**Mark Bonella** made a **motion** to adjourn. All in favor with four votes.

  
-----

  
-----

  
-----

  
-----