

Lower Valley Fire Protection District

September 10, 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 Mark Bonella at 18:00. Advance public notice of this meeting is posted in three separate public spaces and online at www.lowervalleyfire.com. In attendance are the following board of directors: Mark Bonella (President), Jesse Mease (Vice President), Cullen Purser (Treasurer), Cliff Gray and Jeff Phillips. Others in attendance: Fire Chief Matt Katzenberger, Deputy Chief Gary Mulkey, Diana Manzanares (Office Manager), Mahea Rodriguez (Billing Specialist), Captain Thomas Creel, and Fruita resident, Scott Ryplewski.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Jeff Phillips led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CITIZENS COMMENTS/REQUESTS

Fruita resident **Scott Ryplewski** attended the meeting as an interested citizen. **Mr. Ryplewski** stated that he has lived in the Fruita area for approximately a year and a half and is interested in becoming more involved in the community and learning how local public organizations operate. He noted that he previously served on the Board of Directors for Indian Hills Fire Protection District near Morrison, Colorado.

Mr. Ryplewski stated that he was attending to observe and learn and had no specific public comment. He thanked District personnel and firefighters for their service and complimented LVFD's community engagement and social media presence.

DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Jesse Mease motioned to accept the regular board meeting minutes from 08/13/2026; seconded by **Cullen Purser**. **Motion** was passed with five votes.

APPROVAL OF EXPENSES

Diana rendered the information reporting the expenses from August 1, 2026, through August 31, 2026, totaled \$158,902.24.

Cullen Purser made a motion to accept the bills for August 2026; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. **Motion** was passed with five votes.

APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORTS

Diana reports that the total balance in our bank accounts, including cash on hand as of August 31, 2026, is \$4,609,070.57. The interest accrued for the month of August 2026 is \$14,365.49. The YTD interest accrued is \$100,810.85. The Mesa County Statement of Collections for the month of August 2026 totaled \$69,492.54.

Cliff Gray made a **motion** to accept the financial statements for August 2026; seconded by **Cullen Purser**. **Motion** was passed with five votes.

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APPROVAL OF AMBULANCE BILLING RESOLUTIONS

Mahea reports that the billing write-offs for August 2026 totaled \$146,905.40. There were 24 accounts sent to collections, which totaled \$21,277.46.

Jesse Mease made a **motion** to approve the resolutions and collection write-offs for August 2026; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. **Motion** was passed with five votes.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Mahea reported that the ambulance revenue we received in August 2026 totaled \$105,079.76.

Collections Update: **Mahea** reported that the current outstanding balance actively in collections for 2026 is \$100,090.37. Since the District began utilizing A1 Collection Services in late 2024, the total outstanding balance currently in collections is \$271,242.84.

Diana reminds the Board that the 2026 SDA Annual Conference will be held in Keystone, CO, September 15–17, 2026. Registration is now open, with a fee of \$415 per person for in-person attendance and \$175 per person for virtual attendance.

FIRE CHIEF REPORT

Chief Matt Katzenberger discussed future apparatus replacement needs and the possibility of refurbishing and re-chassisng Engine 31 rather than purchasing a new engine. Engine 31 is experiencing increasing mechanical issues and is the next apparatus identified for replacement.

Chief Katzenberger reported that a new, minimally customized engine is approximately \$900,000, while a customized engine could cost approximately \$1.5 million with a lead time of up to five years. By comparison, refurbishing and re-chassisng Engine 31 is estimated at approximately \$500,000 and could potentially be completed within the same calendar year. The process would include a new chassis and powertrain, along with refurbishment of the existing body and custom cab, including interior finishes, cabinetry, roll-up door components, and an updated LED lighting package.

He continues, stating that SVI, located on the Front Range, performs this type of refurbishment and has been used by neighboring departments. Grand Valley Fire is currently beginning the refurbishment of a similar 2005 apparatus, providing the District with a comparable local reference. An additional refurbishment option is available in Henderson, Nevada.

Chief Katzenberger recommended delaying the previously authorized sale of the District's 2005 Engine 32 so it can remain in service as a reserve apparatus while Engine 31 undergoes refurbishment. Engine 32 is currently estimated to have a resale value of approximately \$100,000–\$140,000. Once Engine 31 is returned to service, Engine 32 could then be sold as previously planned. The proposed refurbishment and associated funding were also discussed with the Budget Committee for consideration in the 2027 budget. **Chief Katzenberger** requested Board concurrence with postponing the sale of Engine 32 until the Engine 31 replacement/refurbishment process is complete.

Vice President Jesse Mease asked whether the refurbished engine would be expected to provide another 20 years of service or whether, given the District's current lag in apparatus replacement, it would transition into a 12-to-17-year replacement cycle.

Chief Katzenberger responded that there is no reason the apparatus should not provide another 20 years of service following the proposed re-chassis and refurbishment. The existing Pierce custom cab and body are constructed primarily of aluminum and remain structurally sound. A new chassis would

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address concerns associated with the aging drivetrain, mechanical components, and electrical systems.

As part of the process, the pump, plumbing, and other existing components would be thoroughly inspected and either rebuilt, reconditioned, or replaced as necessary. A representative would conduct a comprehensive inspection of the apparatus and provide a customized quote identifying required work and optional improvements. This would allow the District to select additional work based on condition and need. The refurbishment would also replace the aging electrical system and control modules with current components, eliminating a growing maintenance concern with the existing apparatus.

Director Cliff Gray asked whether the emissions systems could be deleted. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that emergency vehicles may qualify for an exemption under state statute; however, finding a shop willing to perform the work can be difficult due to potential liability if the apparatus is later sold and no longer used as an emergency vehicle. He noted that this has also been explored for District ambulances, with limited options available.

The Board discussed whether formal action was necessary to delay the previously authorized sale of Engine 32 and determined that no additional motion was needed. There was no opposition to retaining the apparatus during the refurbishment process.

The Board expressed support for exploring the re-chassis and refurbishment option, including the opportunity to evaluate the experience of neighboring departments utilizing SVI. The significant increase in the cost of new apparatus was also discussed, with current customized engine pricing exceeding \$1 million compared to approximately \$320,000–\$370,000 when the District's existing engines were originally purchased.

Ambulance Update: **Chief Katzenberger** reported that the new ambulance is scheduled for delivery in the week of December 15th. A shipping quote has been requested, as the approximately \$3,000 delivery cost may be more practical than sending personnel to retrieve the ambulance, particularly given winter travel conditions. If shipped, the District would complete a virtual delivery process like that used for the new water tender.

The ambulance purchase will be paid from the 2026 budget; however, reimbursement through the provider grant is not expected to be received until 2027. As a result, the expenditure will be reflected in 2026, with the corresponding grant revenue recognized in 2027.

Loma Station Update: **Chief Katzenberger** reported that the Loma Station improvement project remains delayed with the Mesa County Building Department. The County has requested occupancy information and original building plans dating back to the 1980s, despite the project involving only non-load-bearing interior wall removal and plumbing and electrical modifications.

Fire Marshal Travis Holder has been following up with the County regarding the required demolition permit. With the project delayed for approximately two months, additional follow-up with County representatives will be made if the permitting issue is not resolved.

Automatic Aid Agreement: **Chief Katzenberger** updated the Board on ongoing discussions regarding the automatic aid agreement with the City of Grand Junction, which has been in place for more than 20 years. Discussions began approximately a year ago but have been delayed by leadership changes within the Grand Junction Fire Department.

The City of Grand Junction recently terminated its longstanding agreement with the Grand Junction Rural Fire Protection District. The impact this may have on LVFD's automatic aid agreement remains unclear, as most of the area bordering LVFD within the current automatic aid response area lies

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within the Rural Fire District rather than Grand Junction city limits. Future discussions regarding automatic aid may therefore need to occur with the Rural Fire District rather than the City.

It was also noted that Clifton Fire has discontinued automatic aid with Grand Junction, although mutual aid agreements remain in place. Grand Junction appears to be moving toward a jurisdictional response model in which each agency is primarily responsible for incidents within its own boundaries.

Chief Katzenberger noted that there are portions of the LVFD response area where automatic aid continues to provide a practical benefit due to station proximity. One example is the north side of Baseline Drive on the Redlands, where Grand Junction Station 5 is significantly closer than LVFD Station 31.

Further review identified inconsistencies between dispatch response lines and established District boundaries, with some response areas differing by approximately one-quarter to one-half mile. As currently configured, Grand Junction resources are being dispatched to some incidents within LVFD boundaries without LVFD being paged, including calls near the west entrance of the Colorado National Monument and traffic incidents along Highway 6 & 50 near 21 Road.

LVFD proposed adjustments intended to better align responses with jurisdictional boundaries, including having each agency provide ambulance response within its respective jurisdiction. Grand Junction subsequently provided proposed revisions that would eliminate LVFD automatic responses into Grand Junction's area while increasing Grand Junction responses within LVFD's area. Concern was expressed that this would create an inequitable automatic aid arrangement rather than a reciprocal response agreement.

The Board also discussed potential financial implications of agencies routinely responding outside their jurisdictions, including reimbursement provisions when an agency exceeds established thresholds for responding to another agency's calls for service.

If a mutually beneficial automatic aid arrangement cannot be reached, the District may consider terminating the agreement and returning to jurisdiction-based response while maintaining applicable mutual aid. The discussion also highlighted the potential need for a future evaluation of District boundary lines, particularly in areas where another agency's station is substantially closer and LVFD resources must travel past that station to reach property within the District.

Dispatch Response Boundaries: The Board continued discussion regarding discrepancies between District boundaries and the response areas currently programmed into the dispatch system. Adjusting certain response areas could provide more logical coverage; however, existing GIS and dispatch boundaries must also be corrected.

The current automatic aid agreement was signed in 2021, with the previous agreement dating to 2012. Based on available records, the Redlands response boundary appears to have been adjusted by approximately one-quarter mile in 2012. Additional changes appear to have occurred between 2012 and the present, although documentation supporting those changes has not been located.

Dispatch operates according to the response parameters established by the participating agencies and existing agreements. If the automatic aid agreement with Grand Junction is terminated, LVFD would be able to establish the appropriate response configuration within its own jurisdiction. **Chief Mulkey** currently has a change order pending with dispatch to modify portions of LVFD's paging and response configuration. Additional changes involving the automatic aid areas are awaiting either an updated agreement or notification that the existing agreement has been terminated.

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Chief Katzenberger reported that he has not yet received a response to LVFD's concerns regarding Grand Junction's proposed changes and questioned whether continuing the automatic aid agreement would be beneficial under the proposed response matrix.

Grand Junction has recently staffed an ambulance at Station 7, near 23 and H Roads; however, it is primarily utilized for interfacility transport rather than 911 response. No fire apparatus or fire suppression personnel are currently staffed at that station.

COEMS Medicaid Reimbursement: **Chief Katzenberger** reported that the District's Colorado Medicaid cost certification reimbursement for the current reporting period is approximately \$61,000, more than double the amount received for the previous year. The prior year's reimbursement has not yet been received; however, the reporting portal has already opened for the next fiscal year, and staff will begin the next reporting cycle.

SAFER Grant Update: **Chief Katzenberger** reported that FEMA is expected to begin announcing SAFER Grant awards in phases beginning the following day, with the District anticipating notification soon thereafter. Several 2027 budget decisions will depend on whether the District receives the grant.

Once official notification is received, an additional Budget Committee meeting will be scheduled to discuss the SAFER Grant outcome, updated insurance information and comparisons, and other budget considerations.

DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF REPORT

Apparatus Update: **Deputy Chief Mulkey** reported that Engine 31 required replacement of an EGR valve after the check-engine light came on while returning from a radio repair. The replacement part was difficult to locate and cost approximately \$2,500, in addition to associated repair costs. Engine 31 has since been returned to service.

The new Engine 32 has been placed in service and is assigned to Station 32. It is temporarily at DW Wrench undergoing installation of an additional step but is otherwise officially in service.

Staffing Update: **Deputy Chief Mulkey** reported that all members hired in January have successfully completed their probationary requirements and required testing. All are now working regular shifts.

Employee Physicals: Annual employee physicals are scheduled to begin the following day and will continue over approximately five weeks. The District is working through a few remaining details with the medical evaluation provider. All personnel will participate in the physical evaluation process.

High School Academy: **Deputy Chief Mulkey** reported that the High School Academy has begun, with District personnel assisting with instruction. The program is being operated this year in accordance with CTE requirements to evaluate and establish the program for future years. The necessary requirements have been completed for the program to become eligible for Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding beginning next school year.

Captain Thomas Creel has taken a lead role in coordinating the Academy, including program planning, instruction, attendance tracking, and other administrative requirements. The current year's program is funded through a Western Colorado Community Foundation grant and is therefore being provided at no cost to the District.

Four students are currently participating in the Academy. A fifth student enrolled in the program did not report at the beginning of the school year and did not participate.

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Department Training: **Deputy Chief Mulkey** reported that group training will resume in September following the cancellation of the July training. Upcoming department-wide training includes rope rescue training in September, burn tower training in October, and vehicle extrication training in December. Backfill personnel will be utilized as needed to maintain District coverage while crews participate in off-site and specialized training

Call Volume: August call volume was 6% higher than August 2025. Year-to-date call volume is approximately 1% higher than the same period last year, keeping the District on pace with 2025, which was its busiest year to date. Call types remain generally consistent with previous years.

FIRE MARSHAL REPORT

Fire Marshal Travis Holder was not present at the meeting; however, he provided the Board with a comprehensive YTD report on Fire Prevention activities for review.

OFFICERS REPORT

None.

LOCAL 5265 - UNION REPORT

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

OLD BUSINESS

Loma Hall: No updates.

Sales Tax IGA: **Chief Katzenberger** reported that the latest draft of the Sales Tax Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the City of Fruita was distributed to the Board for review the previous week. The language previously requested by the District was restored, and he had no remaining concerns with the agreement as presented. Upon Board approval, the IGA will be forwarded to the City for consideration at an upcoming City Council meeting. Following approval by both entities, **President Mark Bonella** and the Mayor of Fruita will execute the agreement.

President Bonella requested clarification regarding the administrative fee provisions in Section 3(B), specifically whether the fee could increase after the first year. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that the City remains subject to statutory limitations and that the administrative fee is capped at 1%. As sales tax revenue increases, the dollar amount of the administrative fee may increase; however, the percentage remains limited to 1%. District legal counsel reviewed the provision and advised that the statutory limitation adequately addresses the concern.

President Bonella continued his review of the agreement and requested clarification regarding the termination provisions. Discussion centered on language allowing the agreement to terminate if the District ceases providing fire protection and emergency services within City limits or if the City determines, following consultation with the District, that those services are no longer being adequately provided. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that additional statutory and voter-approved requirements apply and that termination of the agreement does not, by itself, repeal the voter-approved tax. Any repeal of the tax would require the applicable voter approval process.

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The Board also discussed the reporting requirements contained within the IGA. **President Bonella** questioned whether the requirements created unequal accountability between the City and District, as the District is required to provide specific information regarding its use of sales tax revenues while the City's reporting requirements within the agreement are more general. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that the City, as the entity collecting taxes, is responsible for state compliance reporting and therefore requires specific information from the District. The City is also required to account for its use of the sales tax revenue through its own state reporting, audits, and financial reports. Language requiring the City to provide the District with a summary of revenues, expenditures, and performance outcomes was restored to the agreement as previously requested by the District. The reporting requirements are not expected to materially change the information LVFD already reports publicly.

Additional discussion addressed eligible expenditures and accountability for ensuring sales tax revenues are used for their voter-approved public safety purposes. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that both entities remain accountable for the appropriate use and reporting of the funds. Because the City collects the tax, the District provides its required information to the City for inclusion in the City's compliance reporting to the State.

President Bonella also noted and expressed appreciation for the inclusion of language addressing the relationship of the parties, which had previously been requested by the District. Following the discussion and clarification of his questions, **President Bonella** indicated that he was comfortable with the agreement as presented.

The Board further discussed what would occur if the City sought to discontinue the agreement or sales tax in the future. **Chief Katzenberger** explained that discontinuation of the voter-approved tax would require the applicable repeal process and could not be accomplished simply by ceasing distributions to the District. Because the tax was implemented by the City, the City could initiate a repeal; however, the matter would ultimately be subject to the required voter process, providing the District with an opportunity to communicate its position to the public.

Jesse Mease made a motion to approve the Sales & Use Tax IGA; seconded by **Jeff Phillips**. Motion was passed with five votes.

ADJOURNMENT

Mark Bonella made a motion to adjourn the Regular Board Meeting at 19:00.
All in favor with five affirmative votes.

