



## REGULAR BOARD MEETING

Station #1 • 2860 Southwest Drive • Sedona, AZ • Multi-purpose Room  
Tuesday, March 17, 2026 • 3:00 PM

### MINUTES

#### I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

##### A. Salute to the flag of the United States of America and a moment of silence to honor American men and women in service to our country, firefighters, and police officers.

Pursuant to notice, a Regular Meeting of the Sedona Fire District (SFD) was called to order by Board Chair Helen McNeal at 3:04 PM on Tuesday, March 17, 2026. A quorum of the Board was present and the meeting, having been duly convened, proceeded with business. Ms. McNeal led the Pledge of Allegiance. A moment of silence was held for 12 law enforcement officers that died nationwide since the last Board meeting.

##### B. Roll Call of Board Members

**Board Present:** Helen McNeal, Chair; Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk; Diana Christensen, Scott Springett, Lance Waldrop Members.

**Others Present:** Ed Mezulis, Fire Chief; Kirk Riddell, Deputy Fire Marshal; Gabe Buldra, JVG Director of Finance (remote); Jeff Wassell, Battalion Chief; Tomas Montoya for BPCWS, PLLC.; Christi Weigand, Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief (remote); Scott Schwisow, Project Manager; Josh Clouch, User Support Technician. Jayson Coil, Assistant Fire Chief; Jordan Baker, Division Chief; and Buzz Lechowski, Division Chief, were absent.

#### II. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS/STAFF RECOGNITION

##### A. 15 Years of Service

- Gregory Eberlein, Captain/CEP/TRT
- Kai Kincheloe, Engineer/CEP

Captain Eberlein and Engineer Kincheloe were not present at the meeting. Chief Mezulis recognized them for their 15 years of service with the Sedona Fire District. He highlighted their noteworthy career credentials and thanked Mr. Eberlein and Kincheloe for their service to the District. Their 15-year service pins will be given to them at a later date.

#### III. BUDGET WORKSHOP

Gabe Buldra discussed the budget timeline, noting that staff completed all budget worksheets and JVG is compiling them. Wednesday, May 6, at 2:00 pm was the agreed-upon date to conduct the detailed Budget Workshop. Mr. Buldra confirmed the Board will be provided with a detailed budget book prior to the meeting.

#### IV. REGULAR BUSINESS

##### A. Public Forum/Call to the Public

- 1) Public Comments
- 2) Possible Executive Staff Response to Public Comment



Members of the public were not present at the meeting.

**B. Consent Agenda: Discussion/Possible Actions**

**1) Regular Meeting Minutes – February 17, 2026**

**Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk, moved to approve the Consent Agenda, to include the February 17, 2026, Regular Meeting minutes. Helen McNeal, Board Chair seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by the Board with no discussion.**

**C. Financial Report and Updates – Gabe Buldra, JVG Director of Finance**

**1) Discussion/Possible Action: Review and possible approval of the February 2026 Monthly Financial Report.**

Mr. Bulda reviewed the February 2026 Monthly Financial Report (see the Board packet and presentation). February total revenue was \$552.8K, \$68K under budget. A \$16.5K property tax collection variance and a separate ambulance revenue hit were noted; however, both yield no year-to-date concerns. Expenses totaled \$1.79M, over budget by \$40K (Mr. Buldra noted that the reports inaccurately reflected \$67K). Personnel expenses totaled \$1.437M and each variance was reviewed with the Board. Year-to-date expenses are at \$19.256M, over budget by \$1.033M. The District has expended 66% year to date, with 34% remaining. Personnel is the highest cost at 85% of total costs, followed by operations at 6%, communications at 5% and managerial at 4%. Total cash on hand is \$2.28M, an increase of \$1M over the prior year. Other assets increased from \$23.9M to \$26.7M, reflective of capital assets. Liabilities increased from \$33M to \$34.2M, driven by payroll expenses, accruing employee leave, and some growth in net pension liability of ASRS and PSPRS.

**Lance Waldrop, Board Member, moved to approve the February 2026 Monthly Financial Report. Diana Christensen, Board Member, seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by the Board with no further discussion.**

**D. Monthly Staff Report**

**1) Operations Activities – Assistant Chief Jayson Coil**

**Chief Mezulis updated the Board for Assistant Chief Coil as follows:**

- A three-year engineer promotional list was established with the recent completion of the Engineer Assessment Center.
- Chief Coil is working on a performance management rollout, an update to the learning management system, and other tools for employee evaluations.

**Fire Season Outlook**

- The Western United States is entering the fire season with average temperatures above 30 degrees and near-absent snowpack throughout the Southwest and Colorado. Fire activity is expected all over the place. Additionally, “unknowns”, such as severe reductions in federally available resources, concerns about the qualification system, contract worker resource constraints, and the combining of federal firefighting resources into a singular unit are challenges that add to those associated to mother nature.



## HR

- The Engineer’s test is wrapping up. The Firefighter Assessment starts in the next couple of weeks; SFD has one vacancy, with one additional expected in the coming weeks.

## Battalion Chiefs

### **Facilities/Logistics – Jeff Wassell**

- Initiated a phased replacement of structural hose.
- Apparatus and equipment remain in good condition with minor repairs.
- Assisting with the new station preparation, e.g. compressors and logistical matters, so they may be priced out.

### **Wildland – Todd Miranda**

- Crews completed pack tests. SFD is waiting for the State to issue red cards, the certification to go on wildland deployments. Wildland hose and equipment testing is underway to ensure everything is ready to go.
- Attended the Northern Region Cooperator’s meeting with Assistant Chief Coil, which is to meet new individuals within the region and discuss (fire) season predictions, resourcing, and planning.

### **Technical Rescue – Eric Lewis**

- Commended for managing big incidents, including supporting the Yavapai County Sheriff with a rescue.
- Chief Mezulis noted short notification times from the Sheriff’s Office related to complex search and rescue incidents.

## Administration

- Reviewing, validating, and centralizing contracts, as requested by the Board.
- Assisting with Station #5 proposal drafting.
- Decluttering utility accounts, working on liability waivers, and evaluating District insurance policies.

Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk, asked Chief Mezulis to clarify his previous report related to federal government funding for wildland. He stated he could not, but explained federal firefighting resources are centralizing, which affects the command structure and changes operations.

## **2) Community Risk Reduction Activities – Deputy Fire Marshal Kirk Riddell**

### **Deputy Fire Marshal (DFM) Kirk Riddell updated the Board as follows:**

- A letter of approval was received from the State Fire Marshal (regarding approval of the 2024 International Fire Code amendment proposal).
- CRR is in the process of hiring a new inspector that was a previous candidate interviewed in June of 2025.
- Firewise requests are expected to increase. HOAs are starting to schedule with SFD. The City of Sedona is collaborating with the District. Twelve individuals are involved with Firewise assessments. The public is joining the initiative and looking at their own property and cleaning up. DFM Riddell was commended by the Board for building a relationship with the City and its



employees, noting that the Council voted to make it an initiative. Diana Christensen, Board Member, asked how many Firewise assessments were residential. DFM Riddell offered to provide that information (in the future). Lance Waldrop, Board Member, asked if any investors had reached out for Firewise assessments. DFM stated they have not.

- Ten major commercial project plan reviews have started or are ready to launch. DFM Riddell noted that they are very time consuming, e.g. one hotel may require all three inspectors.
- Helen McNeal, Board Chair, stated that a breakdown of the Firewise commercial and residential assessments may be useful to review.
- CRR performed three fire inspections involving a flat-top electric stove, a space heater with a makeshift extension cord, and a self-ignited forklift fire.
- Upcoming events: Car seat event with Verde Valley Fire, Wildland Public Presentation, Alarm Walk at the Rainbow Mobile Home Park, and COCODONA (in May).

### 3) Operational Support – Division Chief Buzz Lechowski

Chief Mezulis updated the Board for Division Chief Lechowski as follows:

#### EMS

- Ambulance budget and pricing are challenging due to what is going on nationally.
- SFD is trying to figure out the new DEA mandates for narcotic storage and transport. ADOH must adopt rules and regulatory mechanisms to implement the federal rules. There is no direction at this time.
- Chief Mezulis attended the Sedona Emergency Department dedication event to Debby and Bill Johnson.

#### Fleet

- Future capital planning is underway. An ambulance is in the queue and an engine is budgeted for this year. A class action lawsuit against the manufacturers resulted in a different pay structure. Building time has decreased from 30 to 36 months. A proposal may be brought to the Board if cheaper pricing can be captured, where a reduced rate over the course of three or four years is possible, versus a large annual payment.

### 4) Training and Preparedness – Division Chief Jordan Baker

Chief Mezulis updated the Board for Division Chief Baker as follows:

#### Training

- Jordan carried the bulk of the engineer's test for two solid weeks.
- Working diligently on the training center upgrades with monies approved through the Chief's Association. All items approved to get done were completed with money left over. A new cover is wired, allowing apparatus to be charged and in a better state of repair at the training center. Chief Mezulis has entered into discussions with the City of Cottonwood and Yavapai College regarding IGAs with each agency that expire in 2027. The purpose of the discussions is to ensure the land can be used for decades to come, e.g. a current 90-day notice to vacate the property in the contract with the City of Cottonwood.
- The firefighter exam and first RAM Program gathering are coming up. RAM is scheduled for March 26<sup>th</sup>.



**E. Fire Chief Report – Fire Chief Ed Mezulis**

**Financials**

- JVG discussed the Budget Workshop process and preliminary work is underway to fine tune the Facilities budget and identify capital needs.

**Capital Projects**

- The radio project is ongoing, including replacement of the airport tower. The airport is supportive of SFD needs, including building a wider tower.
- The City was not comfortable with how the lot lines were drawn for the Uptown parking because of ADA compliance. An engineering company is working on new drawings to submit to the City, putting SFD in a better position to determine if the excess property should be sold.
- Station #4 progress continues. A LEA 30% drawing review meeting was held, and the station price is still hovering around \$16M. Subcontractor pricing is a “best estimate” from Phoenix contractors. The next step is pushing towards 60% drawings, where subcontractors submit more true bids. For example, in November of last year, steel was \$275.00 a pound and now it’s \$350.00 a pound. A public presentation will be held Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>.
- The Station #5 request for the Slide Rock location was denied by the State. A meeting with their executive team is scheduled in April to identify hang-ups. A different property location may be an option. It is across the street and was a dumping ground. The property would require excavation, due to the location.

**V. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- A. Possible vote to go into Executive Session for legal advice pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3), to give instructions to legal counsel pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(4), and for consultation with the designated representative to consider its position and instruct its representative in reference to negotiations for the purchase of real property pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(7), regarding the possible instruction to authorize the Fire Chief to enter into negotiations for the property purchase of the Navajo Drive parcel.**
- B. Possible vote to go into Executive Session for legal advice pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) and to give instructions to legal counsel pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(4), regarding possible instruction to authorize the Fire Chief to proceed with the Annex remodel.**

Helen McNeal, Board Chair, moved to go into Executive Session for legal advice pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3), to give instructions to legal counsel pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(4), and for consultation with the designated representative to consider its position and instruct its representative in reference to negotiations for the purchase of real property pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(7), regarding the possible instruction to authorize the Fire Chief to enter into negotiations for the property purchase of the Navajo Drive parcel.

Ms. McNeal further moved to go into Executive Session for legal advice pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(3) and to give instructions to legal counsel pursuant to A.R.S. § 38-431.03(A)(4), regarding possible instruction to authorize the Fire Chief to proceed with the Annex remodel.

Lance Waldrop, Board Member, seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

Executive Session began at 4:00 PM.



The public session was reconvened at 4:49 PM.

**VI. DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION**

- A. Possible approval to authorize the Fire Chief to enter into negotiations for the property purchase of the Navajo Drive parcel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-805(B)(2)(b).**

The Board had no further comments or discussion following the Executive Session.

**Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk, moved to approve to authorize the Fire Chief to enter into negotiations for the property purchase of the Navajo Drive parcel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-805(B)(2)(b). Diana Christensen, Board Member, seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by the Board with no further discussion.**

- B. Possible approval to authorize the Fire Chief to proceed with the continuation of the Annex remodel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-282(A)(2).**

The Board had no further comments or discussion following the Executive Session.

**Helen McNeal, Board Chair, entertained a motion to authorize the Fire Chief to proceed with a cost analysis on the Annex remodel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-282(A)(2). Lance Waldrop, Board Member, so moved. Ms. McNeal seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by the Board with no further discussion.**

- C. Possible approval to initiate procurement for professional legal services of general counsel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-805(B)(11).**

Ms. McNeal noted that the Board had previously requested the Fire Chief review all outside services. This includes the procurement of legal counsel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-805(B)(11). Ms. McNeal asked if there were further comments from the Board. Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk, clarified that the reasoning is that it has been a long time since such services were procured. Chief Mezulis reiterated that the Board requested review of all outside services and that Mr. Whittington (Board Attorney) announced in December he was stepping into a consulting role. He further stated that it is in the best interest of the District. The Board can contribute information as to what services they wish to procure, as this is a Board Attorney position. A RFQ was drafted with what staff think the Board wants. SFD staff will work towards a document ready to publish and subsequently develop evaluation criteria. Chief Mezulis clarified that the motion is to authorize the initiation of the procurement process, not to approve the draft document submitted in the Board packet materials.

**Helen McNeal, Board Chair, moved to approve to initiate procurement for professional legal services of general counsel, pursuant to A.R.S. § 48-805(B)(11). Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk, seconded. The motion was passed unanimously by the Board with no discussion.**



Approved by the SFD Fire Board on 4/21/26.

## SEDONA FIRE DISTRICT

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### VII. BOARD MEMBER UPDATES AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

#### A. Board Schedule Adjustments

Ms. McNeal reiterated that the Budget Workshop Meeting is scheduled for May 6, 2026, at 2:00 PM and the proposed International Fire Code adoption will occur at the April Regular Board Meeting. A copy of the code amendments document will be sent to the Board in advance of the April meeting.

### VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 PM.

/S/ Original signed by Corrie Cooperman on 4/21/26

Corrie Cooperman, Board Clerk

Date