Jefferson County Fire and EMS
Budget Committee Meeting Minutes
May 13th, 2026

Jefferson County Fire & EMS
Budget Meeting Minutes
Date: May 13th, 2026
Time: 5:36 p.m.
Location: Station 1701- 765 S. 5th St. Madras Or. 97741

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1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by the Board President, Scott Leeper.

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2. Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Star Todd

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3. Roll Call

Board Members Present: Vice President Kim Stout, Secretary Ryan Boyle, President Scott Leeper, Director Ben Anderson

Board Members Absent: None.

Budget Committee Members Present: Star Todd, Albert sickens, Trevorr Beaver

Budget Committee Members Absent: Travis Feigner

Staff Members Present: Chief Skaar, DC Lepin, Admin Assistant LeeAnn Bowman, AP Heather Mehlberg, Finance Manager Kristal Hughes, Volunteer Rick Allen

Staff Members Absent: N/A.

Community Members: None.

Zoom Attendees: None.

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4. Agenda Approval / Adjustments:

Motion: President Scott Leeper Motioned to approve the agenda as printed.

Seconded: Albert Sickens seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

5. New Business

a. Appoint Budget Committee Members-

Motion: President Scott Leeper nominated Starr Todd as the Budget President.

Second: Secretary Ryan Boyle seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

Motion: Budget Member Treavor Beaver nominated Albert Sickens as budget Vice President.

Second: Secretary Ryan Boyle seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

b. Open Public Hearing- The Budget Hearing was opened. Budget Officer Chief Skaar presented the budget message to those in attendance.

Vice President Sickens asked when the fiscal year begins. Chief Skaar stated that the fiscal year starts on July 1.

Vice President Sickens asked whether cash flow has been consistent. Chief Skaar responded that it has been consistent over the last several months. He elaborated on the district's revenue sources, explaining the difference between collections from older billing accounts and current billing activity, as well as where the district's revenue is being generated.

Vice President Sickens commented that the board shares concerns regarding ongoing cash flow. There were no additional questions at that time, and Chief Skaar continued his presentation of the budget message.

Chief Skaar noted that the district is currently operating with approximately 15.5 FTEs, while the proposed budget funds 17 FTEs. The vacant positions have not yet been filled. He reviewed the FTE comparison chart, which illustrated a decline in staffing levels over time.

Chief Skaar continued reviewing the budget figures. He stated that he has been working closely with Heather Mehlburg and Kristal Hughes on preparing the budget and related financial documents. Based on current cash projections, the district is estimating a beginning fund balance of approximately $731,000. He emphasized that this figure is a projection based on currently available information.

Chief Skaar reported that the district remains on track to meet the projected $1.8 million in user fee revenue. Director Stout asked what the average monthly revenue had been. Chief Skaar stated that the average is approximately $154,000 per month. He noted that there is currently a difference of approximately $20,000 to $30,000 attributable to back billing and that the exact amount recovered through those efforts is still being determined.

Chief Skaar explained that the district was required to write off approximately $2.6 million in claims due to timely filing limitations. He stated that the district may have been able to collect between 40% and 60% of those claims had they been submitted within required timeframes.

DC Lepin reported that the district has successfully recovered payment on some older accounts, including claims paid by Warm Springs and the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office. However, several insurance companies and other agencies, including correctional facilities, declined payment on older claims. DC Lepin stated that he has reviewed approximately 127 cases out of roughly 800 outstanding cases that are being evaluated for possible recovery.

Chief Skaar noted that any additional revenue recovered from these efforts will improve the district's financial position.

Chief Skaar stated that the district will continue promoting the FireMed program and continued reviewing the budget message.

Director Beaver asked whether the district would begin charging for burn permits. Chief Skaar stated that the district does not plan to charge for burn permits and that the Night Shade system is being used for nuisance burning and related activities.

Vice President Sickens asked for clarification regarding the term "conflagration." Chief Skaar explained that a conflagration assignment occurs when district personnel respond to large incidents and receive reimbursement funding from the state. He noted that revenue from conflagration assignments is budgeted conservatively because the number of assignments each year is unpredictable.

Vice President Sickens confirmed that the proposed budget funds 17 FTEs. Chief Skaar responded that it does. He stated that the district is currently operating with approximately 15.5 FTEs, and any future staffing increases would be directed toward line personnel. The district's goal remains staffing five personnel per shift, which is currently being achieved through a combination of part-time staffing and overtime.

Chief Skaar noted that there are always unforeseen expenses that arise throughout the year.

Director Beaver asked whether the increase in gross wages reflected wage increases. Chief Skaar stated that the increase was primarily due to scheduled step increases.

Vice President Sickens asked why $35,000 appeared twice in the budget. Chief Skaar explained that one amount represents the OSFM Grant, while the other represents a VFA Grant, and that they are budgeted in separate categories.

Chief Skaar stated that he has some concerns regarding the potential cost of legal services associated with upcoming union negotiations and acknowledged that those expenses are difficult to estimate during the budgeting process.

Vice President Sickens asked whether there would be significant costs associated with placing the new engine into service. Chief Skaar stated that the district has set aside approximately $100,000 to $150,000 for anticipated equipment, outfitting, and related expenses.

Director Stout asked how the beginning fund balance was calculated. Kristal Hughes explained the methodology used, including monitoring account balances, tracking cash flow fluctuations, and accounting for anticipated EMS revenue. Chief Skaar added that while the projected beginning fund balance provides stability for the coming fiscal year, it does not necessarily resolve long-term financial challenges beyond the current budget cycle.

Kristal Hughes further clarified that the district has not yet realized all anticipated revenue sources and that financial projections will continue to be monitored and adjusted as additional information becomes available.

C. Citizens Input- Rick Allen stated that he appreciated the work that went into preparing the budget and felt that the projected revenue estimates were reasonable. He noted that, in previous years, the district had overestimated revenues and underestimated expenditures.

Allen referenced comments made by Mike Ahern approximately one year ago regarding the district's declining financial position. He stated that the district continues to experience financial challenges and pointed to the long-term financial projections included in the budget document. He noted that the district is currently repaying a loan over a three-year period and expressed concern that the district's financial position is being supported by borrowed funds.

Allen emphasized that the Board will need to address these financial challenges proactively and continue evaluating long-term funding solutions. He noted that if the district decides to pursue a levy, it could take one to two years before additional revenue is realized.

He also expressed concern regarding the district's limited capital reserves, stating that adequate funding is necessary to replace equipment and address unexpected expenses, whether minor purchases or larger capital needs.

Allen further noted that the district has an upcoming labor contract negotiation and that the associated costs remain uncertain. He encouraged the Board and Budget Committee to carefully consider these financial obligations and their potential impact on future budgets.

He stated that further reductions in staffing could negatively affect service delivery, potentially resulting in slower response times and reduced operational capacity. Allen encouraged the Board to continue addressing these issues proactively rather than delaying difficult decisions

Allen concluded by acknowledging that, despite the challenges, there are many positive aspects within the organization and that the district's goals are achievable with continued planning, support, and commitment. He expressed his support for Chief Skaar and thanked everyone for their efforts.

There were no further comments.

D. Close Hearing- Public hearing was closed at 7:10 pm.

E. Budget Committee Review of 2026/2027 Budget- Kristal Hughes continued presenting the proposed budget.

President Starr Todd asked whether Chief Lepin had identified any equipment or purchases that would need to be made immediately. Chief Lepin responded that there was nothing that came to mind at that time.

President Todd asked why Chief Skaar was not receiving compensation at the interim position rate. President Leeper stated that he had previously asked Chief Skaar if the Board could discuss the matter. President Leeper explained that Chief Skaar did not wish to pursue the discussion at this time due to the district's current financial condition and budget constraints. President Leeper noted that Chief Skaar preferred to focus on the district's current operations and financial priorities. He further commented that Chief Lepin has taken on significant responsibilities.

Chief Skaar stated that the district cannot currently afford additional compensation adjustments and that there are several other financial priorities that need to be addressed.

Director Beaver asked whether the district could budget for future equipment purchases. Chief Skaar stated that equipment needs are monitored throughout the year and that purchases are evaluated based on available funding and operational necessity. He explained that if equipment, such as computers, fails unexpectedly, the district must make those purchases as needed. He also noted that the district continually pursues grant opportunities to help offset equipment and staffing costs.

Chief Skaar reported that the district is currently pursuing a grant that could fund three positions for five years. While there is no guarantee the grant will be awarded and it is not included in the current budget, receiving the grant would significantly benefit the district by increasing staffing levels without adding those personnel costs to the district's budget.

Kristal Hughes stated that she has been working with other fire districts and noted that the district could complete a supplemental budget process in the future to separately account for GEMT revenues if needed.

President Todd asked whether the Board and Budget Committee were comfortable leaving the budget as proposed given the district's limited financial reserves.

Director Beaver responded, "Do we have a choice?"

Kristal Hughes stated that the district's primary alternative at this time would be obtaining a tax anticipation loan.

Director Albert asked whether the district planned to sell the older engine once the new engine was placed into service. Chief Skaar stated that the intent is for the new engine to serve as the primary response apparatus, while the current first-out engine would be retained as a backup second-out engine.

President Todd asked whether committee members wished to meet again after further review of the budget.

Director Albert stated that he had reviewed the budget when it was distributed and that his questions had been answered.

President Leeper stated that he felt more comfortable with the proposed budget because the numbers appear more realistic than in previous years. While acknowledging that the financial outlook is challenging, he stated that he believes the district is moving in the right direction.

President Todd asked whether the district would still need to pursue a tax anticipation loan.

Kristal Hughes stated that the Board would make that determination at the June Board meeting. She explained that the decision would depend on whether the district has sufficient cash reserves to operate through November. Based on current projections, the district has approximately $750,000 available and monthly expenditures of approximately $250,000 to $300,000. She noted that if additional revenue is not received by September or October, the district may need to delay payment of certain expenses. However, if EMS revenue continues at its current pace, the district should be able to meet its obligations.

Director Boyle stated that historical revenue trends indicate the district should receive the anticipated EMS revenue.

President Todd asked for an update regarding dispatch funding and payments.

Chief Skaar explained that several options are being evaluated. Currently, dispatch services are funded through a county billing structure, with costs shared among various stakeholders. He stated that organizations such as the Madras Police Department, the Forest Service, and the district are reviewing how costs are allocated and whether the current cost-sharing arrangement remains appropriate. He noted that these discussions began during initial meetings with the county and remain ongoing.

F. Consider motion to approve the 26/27 Budget- VP Albert Sickens motioned to accept the budget as present with following changes - move 25k from contingency to capt outlay 6128042. Setting the permanent tax rate at 1.1847 per 1000 and setting general obl. bond rate at .5383 dollars per thousand.

G. Second- Board president Leeper seconded.

H. Vote by committee member- Unanimously.

I. Additional Comments or Announcements- No additional comments or announcements.

6. Adjourn Mtg.- 7:41 pm

Signers:

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Budget President **Recording Secretary**