

Ridgway Fire Protection District
Special Meeting
May 5th, 2025

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at 5:04 by board chair, Christen Williams, at the Ridgway Fire Department located at 251 N. Railroad Street, Ridgway, Colorado. Also, in attendance were board members Terry Schuyler and Jamie Gomez; ex-officio board member Chris Bolane; District Administrator Katy LaSala; legal counsel Bo Nerlin; RFD Captain Adam Kunz; and RFD Wildland team member Jeff Tunnicliff.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA INCLUDING ADDITIONS & DELETIONS

Discussion of RV Site Lease for Plumbing Trade at the District Training and Maintenance Facility was added to New Business.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- MOTION by Schuyler to approve the 3/17/25 minutes with the suggested edit to remove “the” in front of “Nerlin” under the *Discussion of upcoming board vacancies*. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORT

Financials were discussed with LaSala noting that this year’s loan payment for the District’s Training and Maintenance Center had been made and that two single resource invoices for wildland assignments had been submitted.

- ❖ MOTION by Schuyler to approve financials as presented. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

OLD BUSINESS

Board Update on the Chief’s Evaluation Document

The board reviewed the results of Chief Miller’s annual evaluation. Both Williams and Bolane met with the Chief to discuss the feedback, and a draft list of goals for the upcoming year is being created. These goals will be formally shared with the Chief prior to public disclosure.

It was also noted by Williams that the Chief has requested additional administrative support, which the board agreed is a reasonable and necessary step to help him succeed in meeting these expectations. The evaluation process will continue with the Chief completing staff evaluations, which are required before finalizing compensation adjustments and processing the retroactive pay increase discussed in prior meetings.

Continued Discussion of the New SMPA Rate Structure and Update of Actions Taken to Mitigate Electrical Usage

The board revisited the new rate structure implemented by San Miguel Power Association (SMPA). The two options available are Time of Use (TOU) and Time of Day (TOD) rates. Without board action, the district would default to the TOU rate.

After reviewing recent usage data and considering the solar setup at each facility, it was determined that the TOU rate is the most appropriate option. The Training Facility, which does not currently have solar power, would not benefit from switching to TOD.

LaSala noted that an Alternative Power Enterprises representative has begun installing additional energy monitors to collect more detailed usage data, which will help evaluate the rate structure going forward. It was also noted that recent high energy bills were partly due to depleted solar bank credits, which had been affected by underperforming panels.

- MOTION by Schuyler to adopt the default "Time of Use" rate for both RFPD facilities. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

Continued Discussion on a Potential District Newsletter

The board expressed support for launching a district newsletter to improve communication with the community and increase transparency. The current concept involves quarterly publication, with each board member contributing content on a rotating basis. Proposed standing sections include:

- Incident stats and call totals
- Upcoming events and training
- News from the Board (guest column)
- Project updates or community highlights

The format would include a mix of standard updates and a featured topic or voice each month. Distribution methods will include email, Facebook, and the district website. Cost-effective delivery will be prioritized. No action was taken.

Update on the Verizon Equipment Decommissioning on and in the Building

Kunz shared that Verizon representatives recently visited the firehouse to assess removal of their equipment but have not yet begun the physical decommissioning. They are coordinating with contractors to ensure the building remains intact during removal.

LaSala stated Verizon has committed to issuing a final lease payment, covering the last five months of equipment use, and communication with their local representative has been consistent and responsive.

The board discussed future use of the soon-to-be-vacated equipment room, with Schuyler suggesting that it be converted to a communications backup space—possibly housing a small battery system to support radio and internet in case of generator failure. While no grant funds are currently available, similar setups have been implemented through partnerships with SMPA and may be pursued in the future. No action was taken.

Update on Building Repairs from January's Water-Main break and Flooding

Kunz reported that repairs from the January flood are nearly complete, with baseboards and ventilation work expected to finish by Thursday, May 15.

The board discussed potential office reconfiguration—possibly keeping Administrator upstairs for better lighting and giving the downstairs office to the officers. Security and storage considerations were noted.

Williams requested that the District install spray foam insulation in the ceiling to prevent future pipe freezes. The board emphasized completing freeze prevention work by fall.

Update and Progress Regarding the Intergovernmental Agreement Establishing Ouray Fire Protection District Authority

Nerlin provided an update on the current status of the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) aimed at establishing the Ouray Fire Protection District Authority. A work session with the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is scheduled for Wednesday, May 14 at 10:00 AM at the county courthouse, with a remote participation option available. Nerlin and Chief Miller will attend on behalf of the Ridgway Fire Protection District, and additional board participation was encouraged to demonstrate support and engagement.

The session agenda includes:

- An overview of where the IGA process currently stands
- A presentation from OCEMS Chief Nate McCullough on envisioned emergency response operations across the county under the proposed authority
- A collaborative discussion with stakeholders from EMS, county officials, and partner agencies
- Public comment

The draft IGA has been circulated to surrounding agencies, though formal feedback is still pending. The board emphasized that no decisions have been finalized, and the draft is intended to generate discussion and seek agency buy-in—not present a predetermined outcome. Transparency and collaboration are central to the process moving forward.

Nerlin noted that 2025 is envisioned as a critical year to finalize the IGA, with the goal of transitioning into more concrete governance discussions afterward. These include identifying board representation for the new authority, establishing bylaws, determining financial contributions, and developing operational command structures.

There was robust discussion among board members regarding:

- Preserving each district's identity and history (e.g., traditions like Ridgway's 4th of July and Pancake Breakfast events)
- Ensuring all stakeholders have a seat at the table in both operational planning and governance
- Developing a structure that allows for local leadership to remain involved
- The anticipated chain of command, with a consolidated Chief, Operations Chief, and District Battalion Chiefs overseeing field activity
- Using existing personnel and infrastructure efficiently without overburdening current staff

Nerlin concluded that while there are still logistical hurdles—such as equipment, facilities, finances, and staffing—the framework being developed offers a promising path toward a more unified and efficient fire protection service across Ouray County.

Update on the 2025 Special District Election

LaSala provided the board with the outcome of the May 2025 Special District Election and identified that one vacancy remains on the Board of Directors. Three individuals submitted self-nomination forms: Schuyler, Kraft, and Lichtenbelt—leaving one seat unfilled.

To ensure transparency and inclusivity, the board agreed to publicly solicit letters of interest from community members interested in being appointed to the open board seat. Katie will submit a notice to the local newspaper inviting interested individuals to submit a letter of interest by May 30, 2025.

Board members expressed a desire to create a neutral and fair selection process, avoiding the appearance of favoritism. All candidates—whether previously self-nominated or newly applying—will be invited to participate equally. A brief interview process will follow, and the board will make a formal appointment at the June 16, 2025 meeting.

Additionally, it was noted that newly elected board members will be sworn in at the June meeting, providing them with the opportunity to participate in the appointment process. The district has 60 days from the election date to fill the vacancy per legal requirements.

CHIEF'S REPORT

While Chief Miller submitted a written report for board review, several key updates were discussed in more detail during the meeting:

- **Training Grounds Progress**

Kunz noted that substantial work has been completed at the training grounds to prepare for upcoming hands-on exercises. Dirt work has raised and leveled uneven terrain that previously caused drainage issues, creating a safer and more usable training environment. The board viewed recent drone footage showing the improvements, which included the installation of a concrete pad designated for live fire training, extrication scenarios, and future infrastructure like a training tower and helicopter landing zone.

- **Extrication Training Preparation**

Per Kunz, staff are actively preparing for a major extrication training event, which will utilize the upgraded grounds. This training is expected to involve multiple agencies and is being positioned as a significant step in increasing readiness and interagency coordination. Officers and volunteers are coordinating logistics to ensure the site is fully functional in time.

- **Wildland Deployment Readiness**

Per Tunnichiff, the wildland program is ramping up earlier than usual this year. The Chief and team have been working to streamline resource mobilization, develop reliable dispatch contacts, and pre-position crews for efficient out-of-state deployment. The board heard updates on partnerships with key contacts in Texas and has a goal of maintaining equipment in the field while rotating crews through travel-friendly deployments during January or February 2026.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion and Possible Action Regarding an Agreement Between the Ridgway Fire Protection District and Dalwhinnie Farms for Septic System Repairs at 22327 Highway 550

Nerlin elaborated on the status of the septic system repair at the Training Center. As part of the purchase agreement, Dalwhinnie committed to helping fund the septic system cleanup and repair.

Chief Miller is actively working with a contractor to obtain a final bid for pumping and repair work. Board members agreed on the importance of setting a clear target completion date and proposed aiming for full project completion by August 31, 2025. The item will be added to the June meeting agenda for follow-up, with the expectation that the District will have contractor estimates in hand by that time.

Discussion of RV Site Lease for Plumbing Trade at the District Training and Maintenance Facility

The board considered a proposal from Mike and Chantel Messer as relayed by Tunnichiff from Chief Miller, residents seeking temporary housing at the district's training grounds while they work through a land purchase

and development process. In exchange for staying on-site in their fifth-wheel trailer, the Messers offered to contribute professional plumbing labor to the District.

The board expressed general support for the concept, recognizing the District's ongoing need for plumbing work in multiple areas, including a small boiler room and outdated fixtures. While the District would cover material costs, the labor would be provided as a trade for temporary site access, offering mutual benefit.

Discussion included:

- Ensuring proper hookups (electric and water), and confirming whether the site can legally accommodate an RV stay
 - Drafting a temporary site lease agreement and a waiver of liability to protect the district
 - Considering the value of services being exchanged and establishing a minimum contribution (e.g., 8–10 hours/month at standard rates) to ensure fairness
- ❖ MOTION by Schuyler to authorize the board president to negotiate a formal lease agreement with Mike and Chantel Messer, with a time-bound arrangement that could be extended month-to-month if necessary. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

The Chief and staff will also review zoning and septic considerations to ensure compliance.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

- ❖ MOTION by Schuyler to Adjourn until 5/19/2025. Second by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:16 pm.

Respectively Submitted,
-Katy LaSala