

Ridgway Fire Protection District
Regular Meeting
October 20, 2025

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Meeting called to order at 5:10 PM by Board Chair, Christen Williams, at the Ridgway Fire Department located at 251 N. Railroad Street, Ridgway, Colorado.

Also in attendance were Board Members Pam Kraft and Jamie Gomez; Ex-Officio Board Member Chris Bolane; RFPD Pension Board Members Jesse LaSala and Tyler Ferguson; Fire Chief Chris Miller; Legal Counsel Bo Nerlin; District Administrator Katy LaSala; and RFD Volunteer Firefighter and Wildland Specialist Cash House.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA INCLUDING ADDITIONS & DELETIONS

No changes were made to the agenda.

PAUSE OF REGULAR MEETING FOR PENSION BOARD MEETING

- ❖ MOTION by Kraft to temporarily adjourn the regular meeting to hold a RFPD Pension Board meeting.
- SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

Meeting temporarily adjourned at 5:11 PM.

RESUMPTION OF REGULAR BOARD MEETING

The RFPD Board reconvened their regular meeting at 5:31 PM.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- ❖ MOTION by Gomez to approve the 9/15/2025 minutes as presented. SECOND by Kraft. ALL IN FAVOR.

APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL REPORT

District Administrator LaSala provided an update noting that wildland assignment reimbursements from DFPC continue to be processed slowly, with approximately \$50,000 received this month out of more than \$200,000 owed. A payment of \$10,000 was made to FPPA for pension contributions as discussed in the Pension Board meeting. Several vehicle repairs and maintenance invoices were processed as part of the month's larger expenses. A transfer of \$300,000 from the checking account to the health plan savings fund was executed as planned.

- ❖ MOTION by Kraft to approve the September 2025 financials as presented. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

OLD BUSINESS

2025 Budget Amendment Discussion

The Board reviewed the proposed amendment to the 2025 budget. The original budget was adopted with an ending fund balance of \$686,049 compared to an amended ending fund balance of \$724,882. The \$49,083 variance reflected the difference between the original and amended allocations.

Highlighted budget adjustments were reviewed, including a \$100,000 backfill from wildland surplus revenue and several budget amendments exceeding \$10,000. Amendments also included increases of \$30,000 to *Operating Equipment* and \$20,000 to *Repairs & Maintenance*, both supported by wildland revenue backfill. In addition, \$50,000 was added to *Capital Outlay: Equipment* for the down payment of a Type 3 wildland engine.

- ❖ MOTION by Kraft to accept Resolution No. 2025-04 and approve the 2025 Budget as presented. SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

2026 Budget Discussion

Chief Miller and the Board conducted a line-by-line review of the proposed 2026 budget, focusing on staff payroll adjustments and the rising costs of operating equipment, turnout gear, and communications systems. Staff wages increased by \$78,250 due primarily to proposed Wildland Coordinator and Engine Captain positions. Administrative position costs will be split with EMS through an MOU arrangement, reducing Fire District expenses from \$55,000 to \$38,500. Health insurance costs increased by 18% through the Public Sector Healthcare Cooperative.

The property development budget of \$47,000 includes \$20,000 for training center improvements and facility maintenance projects. The Board discussed the challenge of replacing safety equipment amid competing priorities; LaSala noted that the turnout gear replacement schedule could require 16 new sets due to 10-year expirations and personnel increases.

After discussion, the Board directed LaSala to increase the *Turnouts* line item by \$17,000, bringing the total to \$32,000. The Board expressed satisfaction with the remainder of the budget and instructed LaSala to make the adjustments and bring the revised draft to the next regular meeting for final approval.

Wildland Expansion and District Administrator Role Proposals

RFD Volunteer Firefighter and Wildland Specialist Cash House addressed the Board, outlining his 21 years in fire service, prior leadership roles in Boulder County, and extensive experience developing wildland operations and mitigation programs. House explained that Ridgway Fire's wildland division has matured to where formal staffing and structure are needed to sustain deployments and revenues.

The proposal contemplates two new positions—a full-time Wildland Coordinator and a full-time Engine Captain—to strengthen readiness, retention, and year-round capacity. House highlighted the value of a mitigation crew to provide seasonal employment continuity (fuel reduction on private/public lands), support qualifications progression, and stabilize staffing for long-duration engine assignments. He described apparatus lifecycle concerns and the financial impact of keeping an aging Type 6 in service, noting that prudent investment in a Type 3 engine and planned crew rotations can yield reliable assignment revenue.

Board discussion covered training timelines for Engine Boss qualifications, apparatus availability and procurement lead times, and the outlook for increased reliance on cooperators amid federal agency changes. Consensus remarks emphasized that personnel are the most critical piece and that the proposal aligns with the department's long-term goal to expand wildland capacity while maintaining community response. Further discussion regarding the proposals will occur at the next regular meeting.

Update on Authority Progress

Attorney Nerlin reported that a meeting is scheduled for 9:00 AM next Friday with representatives from multiple fire districts, Ouray County and legal counsel. A follow-up county meeting will be held on November 6th at 2:00 PM to continue discussions regarding the formation of a regional fire authority.

Update on RUSA Property Owners Meeting

Attorney Nerlin reported speaking with Scott Middleton following the recent RUSA annual meeting, noting that minutes will be distributed soon.

Update on RUSA Property Listing

District Administrator LaSala reported that she had spoken with Charles Mueller regarding the commercial listing of the RUSA property and noted that market activity remains slow. Nerlin observed that, despite limited movement, the District remains in a good position with Mr. Mueller and will continue monitoring market trends.

CHIEF'S REPORT

Chief Miller reported that overall call volume continues to increase as the year progresses. Training and staffing activities remain steady, with personnel engaged in regular drills and ongoing community response efforts.

NEW BUSINESS

Request to Extend the Messer Lease Agreement

Chief Miller noted that the Messer lease agreement, initially set to expire at the end of September, requires an extension to allow completion of pending infrastructure projects including trench work and propane tank relocation. The requested extension will carry the lease through November 30, 2025.

- ❖ MOTION by Kraft to approve the extension of the Messer Lease Agreement through November 30, 2025.
SECOND by Gomez. ALL IN FAVOR.

Request to Renovate the Prior Verizon Equipment Room into an Office

Due to the extended length of the meeting, no discussion or action was taken on this item. The matter will be carried forward and discussed at the next regular meeting.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

- ❖ MOTION by Gomez to Adjourn. Second by Kraft. ALL IN FAVOR.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:34 PM.

The next regular monthly meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2025.

Respectively Submitted,

-Katy LaSala