

August 10, 2026

ALFALFA FIRE DISTRICT

OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENTS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOARD CONSIDERATION

The Alfalfa Fire District operates as a volunteer fire district supported by a part-time manager/fire chief. This operational model reflects the financial limits of our regular tax base and defines the scope of services the district can safely and affordably provide.

First and foremost, we express our profound gratitude to our volunteer firefighters. They are the true heroes of our community, and their dedication to our safety is invaluable.

While we recognize that the volunteer Board of Directors has attempted to expand district services through short-term funding opportunities, efforts that were initiated with good intentions, the district has repeatedly failed to analyze the long-term costs and administrative resources required to sustain these expansions. Consequently, the board has overextended its management capacity, bypassed critical legal requirements, and placed the financial and physical safety of the district in jeopardy.

Specific areas of concern include:

- Deploying personnel and aging equipment out-of-state for wildfire response to generate revenue, leaving our immediate taxpayers vulnerable and accelerating the wear on equipment nearing the end of its serviceable life.
- Utilizing primary emergency vehicles for commercial, out-of-district medical transports. This practice leaves our community without an ambulance and down two vital personnel, without a clear cost-benefit analysis regarding the administrative overhead required for insurance, hospital, estate, and legal billings.
- Operating an active training facility without securing the necessary local building and occupancy permits, exposing the district to immense liability.
- Constructing a dormitory, exterior deck, and exit stairways completely outside of the mandatory regulatory process, lacking both building permits and occupancy certification.

To protect our firefighters, our taxpayers, and the structural integrity of the Alfalfa Fire District, the board must immediately halt these unpermitted expansions, address outstanding legal non-compliance, and return its focus to the core, sustainable services our community relies upon.

FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF FAILURES OF THE BOARD THAT REQUIRE IMMEDIATE CORRECTION:

AUDIT REPORTS TO THE STATE: The District is currently facing a critical regulatory crisis due to repeated failures to comply with basic state financial oversight.

- The board failed to submit mandatory annual financial audit reports to the State of Oregon as strictly required under Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) Chapter 297.
- This administrative failure has occurred consecutively for three years, ignoring multiple official warning letters sent by the state to the board following the first missed deadline.
- Because of this prolonged neglect, the state has issued a formal notice to the county to initiate the legal dissolution of the district.

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- This failure is not a minor administrative oversight. It represents an existential threat to the district's legal existence and its ability to protect the community.
- The district remains delinquent on the 2024 and 2025 reports.
- The 2026 report is due in December 2026. Failure to submit this upcoming report will prompt the state to issue an immediate third dissolution mandate to the county.

TRAINING FACILITY: The district appears to operate a black smoke training facility behind the station. The facility consists of six shipping containers bolted together and stacked two high and is used for live smoke training purposes by the district, the community college, Bend Fire and Rescue, and possibly others.

- The county building department shows no records of building permits or occupancy permits for the facility so it appears that it is being operated illegally.
- The District projects an income of \$2,000 per year from the community college, but none from other agencies. There is no reporting available on income from the use by other agencies.
- The costs to pay training personnel construct, operate, manage and maintain the facility have not been disclosed.

NON-COMPLIANT AND FINANCIALLY VIABLE CROOK COUNTY ANNEXATION: The board's attempt to expand the district's boundaries into Crook County bypassed necessary voter engagement, violated statutory mileage limits, and created immediate illegal tax liabilities. The board also appears to have promised Juniper Acres residents a new fire station and apparatus.

- The board failed to properly inform or engage existing district electors. While meeting agendas listed "Discuss Juniper Acres," they omitted the legally consequential words "annex" or "annexation."
- Under Oregon boundary change rules (ORS 198), fire district annexations are limited to seven road miles from the existing district. This statutory cap would limit any legal annexation to roughly one-third of Juniper Acres, yielding a meager \$4,500 in new tax revenue.
- The boundary change that the District submitted to the State of Oregon exceeded legal annexation limits severalfold. The board attempted to absorb 70,000 acres in Crook County, including territory on the east side of the Prineville Reservoir.
- Much of this unauthorized 70,000-acre expansion consists of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. This land generates zero local tax revenue, forcing local taxpayers to subsidize protection for federal acreage that is already funded through federal taxes.
- The expansion offers virtually no practical benefit to Juniper Acres residents. Emergency response times exceed 40 minutes, the distance is too far to qualify homeowners for fire insurance discounts, and the tax yield cannot fund a new station, equipment, or management.
- By failing to follow the mandatory legal steps for a boundary change or expansion, the district filed non-compliant paperwork with the state. This administrative failure has caused numerous Crook County residents to be illegally taxed.

NEPOTISM AND STATE INVESTIGATION: The board's hiring practices appear to have violated basic conflict-of-interest standards, exposing the district to severe regulatory scrutiny and ongoing state investigation.

- The fire chief appears to have hired his wife as a full-time district employee. According to a letter from the chief to the state, this hiring action was executed with the explicit consent and approval of the Board of Directors.
- The salary for this full-time position was funded using the proceeds of a state grant, raising serious compliance questions regarding the proper allocation of public grant funds.
- As a direct result of this hiring arrangement, it is reported that the Alfalfa Fire District is currently under active investigation by the state for nepotism and ethics violations.
- Allowing a conflict-of-interest hiring of this magnitude violates standard public ethics laws, jeopardizes future state grant eligibility, and creates massive legal and financial liabilities for the district.
- The Oregon State Fire Marshals office, Citing multiple ongoing investigations including the nepotism charge, decided not to grant a summer wildfire grant to the district

UNSUSTAINABLE AMBULANCE SERVICE AND COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS: The board's implementation of an ambulance transport service relies on volatile funding, creates local coverage gaps, and operates at a financial deficit.

- The ambulance service is entirely funded through short-term state grants. It has no permanent funding mechanism within the district's regular tax base, making its long-term survival impossible.
- The district is only authorized to provide Basic Life Support (BLS). It lacks the certification, advanced equipment, and specialized personnel required to provide critical Advanced Life Support (ALS).
- The district spent \$43,000 on a single motorized gurney. This massive capital outlay was made without a clear return on investment or a sustainable budget to back it up.
- The district conducts commercial, out-of-district transport services between Redmond and Bend. During these long trips, our community is left entirely unprotected, with zero local ambulance coverage and two vital personnel away from the district.
- The board estimates an annual income of just \$15,000 from these transports. Simply paying off the loan for the \$43,000 gurney completely wipes out nearly three full years of this projected revenue. It is not clear if personnel are paid for services on these transports.
- It is not clear if the board launched this program with any consideration for the management costs required to handle complex medical billings, collections, and legal correspondence with insurance companies, hospitals, and estates.

LADDER TRUCK: The acquisition of a ladder truck represents an egregious misuse of district resources, as this specialized apparatus serves no practical function within our rural community.

- Ladder trucks are designed for high-density urban areas. They are utilized for second-alarm responses to multi-story high-rise buildings and expansive commercial roofs—neither of which exist within the Alfalfa Fire District.
- A ladder truck requires a continuous, high-volume connection to a pressurized municipal fire hydrant system to operate its elevated master streams. Our district entirely lacks the hydrant infrastructure necessary to support this vehicle.

- To put this acquisition into perspective, the City of Prineville—which features a significantly larger population, commercial core, and multi-story structural footprint—does not own or operate a ladder truck because their infrastructure does not justify it.
- Purchasing and maintaining an urban aerial apparatus consumes vital maintenance funds and occupies valuable bay space that should be dedicated to brush trucks, tenders, and engines suited for a rural tax base.

DENIAL OF PUBLIC RECORDS ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY VIOLATIONS: The board fails to comply with mandatory transparency standards, actively withholding critical financial and governing documents from the public website.

- While the district uploads basic meeting minutes to its public website, it fails to include the vital supplemental documents distributed and discussed during those meetings.
- Taxpayers are blocked from digital oversight because the board does not post the financial ledgers, budgets, and expense reports that correspond with public meeting agendas.
- Official resolutions—which carry the weight of local law—are passed and noted in minutes, but the actual written text of these policies is entirely withheld from the website.
- Failing to make these foundational records accessible alongside meeting minutes is a violation of Oregon Public Records Law (ORS Chapter 192), denying electors of their statutory right to monitor local government and exposing the district to formal legal penalties.

VIOLATIONS OF OREGON PUBLIC MEETING LAWS AND ASSET MISMANAGEMENT: The board has consistently compromised public oversight by failing to provide adequate notice, hiding meeting access, introducing unlisted agenda items, and possibly liquidating public assets in secret.

- The board routinely posts different versions of meeting agendas on physical community bulletin boards than what they upload to the public website, creating confusion and spreading contradictory information.
- The district abruptly shortened its public notification window. It formerly provided a transparent seven-day advance notice for agendas and on-site signage, but has recently reduced this timeline to a bare-minimum 48 hours, limiting the community's time to prepare.
- The physical "Meeting This Wednesday" notification sign is posted late – or not at all if a meeting occurs on a different night of the week, failing to give a consistent and reliable alert to residents.
- Online meeting links are buried deep within uploaded PDF files as impossibly long text strings. To ensure open access, a standardized, static virtual shortcut must be prominently featured on the homepage of the Alfalfa Fire District Website.
- The board regularly introduces, debates, and passes resolutions that were omitted from the published public agenda, a practice that deprives taxpayers of their right to witness or testify on local policy decisions. One example is a resolution from a recent meeting to pour concrete floors in the training facility boxes.
- Published topics are obfuscated to hide significant actions from public scrutiny. The board lists abstract resolution numbers with no written descriptions, or uses brief phrases like "Discuss Juniper Acres" instead of explicitly disclosing a massive, 70,000-acre territorial expansion.

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- Major fire apparatus and emergency response vehicles appear to be bought and sold with the minimum of transparency and apparently without the mandatory legal requirements for public property disposal, including formal declarations of surplus, professional appraisals, and public auctions.

VOLUNTEERS SERVING AS BOARD MEMBERS:

Serving simultaneously as a Fire District Board member and a volunteer firefighter creates an inherent conflict of interest that compromises objective governance. This dual role disrupts the essential chain of command, resulting in a structural paradox where a board member acts as a policymaker who oversees the Fire Chief, yet simultaneously serves as a volunteer field firefighter who answers to that same Chief. When the board makes critical decisions on the annual budget, gear and equipment allocation, or personal safety rules, these individuals face an unavoidable conflict between the district's broad fiscal responsibilities and their own hands-on operational interests as firefighters. This overlapping authority blurs the lines of accountability, risks creating double standards in training or enforcement, and ultimately damages public trust during a period when the Alfalfa Fire District must prioritize strict financial compliance and absolute transparency.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Make a comprehensive or strategic plan outlining the district's capabilities, goals and objectives. Revisit the plan annually and include it as the foundation for the budget process. Examples of planned improvements to include:
 - a. In lieu of physical ambulances, Provide comprehensive medical kits including AEDs to be stored at volunteers homes within the district and in a response vehicle stored at the station
 - b. Install 10,000 gallon fire water storage cisterns at the fire station and throughout the district.
2. Inventory all existing apparatus and a list of apparatus that the district should acquire to best serve the needs inside the district boundaries.
3. Create at least one annual 1st class newsletter that would also serve as public notice of the planned critical dates for the budget process.
4. Create a budget calendar. The budget calendar would include planned dates for each critical date of the budget process as mandated by state law including:
 - a. Public notice annual mailer (mid March)
 - b. Appointment of Budget Officer and Budget Committee (mid April)
 - c. Distribution of first draft of the budget (end of April)
 - d. Budget Committee Meeting (mid May)
 - e. Budget Hearing (mid June)
 - f. Budget resolutions to the county (early July)
5. Revise district policies to limit out of district responses only to adjacent districts where the AFD has existing mutual aid agreements.

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6. Return to seven day advance public notice for meetings. If special meeting times do not align with the current red neighborhoods signs indicating "This Wednesday" make special alternate accommodations as needed.
7. All items handed out at public meetings to be posted to district website along with the meeting minutes (or video) no later than one week after public meetings. Typical items include financial records (bank statements and general ledger reports), chiefs report and resolutions.
8. Update district policies to exclude volunteer fire fighters from being board members.
9. Sell the ladder truck.
10. Sell both ambulances.
11. Sell the motorized gurney.
12. District apparatus shall not be stored off site without appropriate contractual agreements and insurance coverage.

DISTRICT ELECTORS IN SUPPORT:

John Brooks, Deschutes Rd
Ole Olsen, Deer Ln
Ian Walker, Cultus Ln
Dave Henneman, Cultus Ln
Robin Rudiger, Fremont Rd
Whitney Griffin, Bachelor Ln
Megin Brooks, Deschutes Rd
Brent Sullivan, Cultus Ln

Sarah Linden, Cultus Ln
Gabriele Mimler, Alfalfa Market Rd
Denis Sieben, Cultus Ln
Roxy Andrade, Cultus Ln
Ted Rudiger, Fremont RD
Val Shewell, Juniper Rd
Justin Wilks, Elk Ln
Frank Spiecker, Alfalfa Market Rd