

ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Agenda Statement – April 27, 2026

Agenda Item #4

Agenda Title:

Approval of Agenda

Submitted by:

Sandra Smith, President

Background Information:

N/A

Attachments:

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda | <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes | <input type="checkbox"/> Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> Contract | <input type="checkbox"/> Map |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Board Action Needed

A motion to (approve, deny, or modify) the Agenda for the April 27, 2026, board work session meeting.

Sandra Smith	Yes	No
Scott Dorman	Yes	No
Ryan Leahy	Yes	No
Jeff Robbins	Yes	No
Jon Smith	Yes	No

**ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
BOARD WORK SESSION**

Monday, April 27, 2026

3:00 pm

AGENDA

1. CALL TO ORDER – President Sandi Smith
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - Chief Jones
3. ROLL CALL - Rebecca Gelsinger
4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
5. ITEMS OF BUSINESS
 - a. Discussion/briefing re: Financial Independence
6. ADJOURNMENT

The Mission of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District is to provide the citizens of and visitors to the Estes Valley with superior fire prevention, fire protection, and emergency services in a safe and efficient manner.

“The Mission of the Board of Directors of the Estes Valley Fire Protection District is to establish policy, goals, strategies, and financial leadership that are the foundation for the long-term sustainability of the District.”

ESTES VALLEY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Agenda Statement – April 27, 2026

Agenda Item #5

Agenda Title:

Discussion/briefing re: Financial Independence

Submitted by:

Sandra Smith, President

Background Information:

Discussion on financial independence research, staff report from February, and presentation.

Attachments:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agenda | <input type="checkbox"/> Minutes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution | <input type="checkbox"/> Contract | <input type="checkbox"/> Map |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Board Action Needed

A motion to (approve, deny, or modify) the Agenda for the March 9, 2026, board work session meeting.

Sandra Smith	Yes	No
Scott Dorman	Yes	No
Ryan Leahy	Yes	No
Jeff Robbins	Yes	No
Jon Smith	Yes	No



Estes Valley Fire Protection District

Financial Independence

EVFPD Work Session: April 27, 2026

Objectives for today

- Discuss the four-step process for District financial independence
- Discuss “why” in detail with emphasis on “needs.”
- Preview “how.”
- Discuss a potential project timeline
- Discuss giving directions to staff on future actions.

Special note: There is an agenda item on the regular meeting agenda for the Board to take action or to give staff direction arising from the work session discussion.

What has been done so far...

Reviewed past
documents of
District/Town work
sessions

Met with the Town
Administrator and
Police Chief

Previous Board
Discussions



Acquired updated
sales tax information
from the County

Met with three
consultants

Met with four other
Fire Districts and
discussed with them
their recent sales tax
experience

Observations from what we know from our research

- Community & public engagement are critical
- Past issues will require special information and engagement efforts
- Variability in local conditions
- Must have why and needs tied down before how, plan, and action
- Fire is typically one of the highest supported services and revenue initiatives
- Timing is about right for fall 2027 election
- Higher turnout is better for revenue initiatives
- Odd-year elections have lower turnout
- Consultants are important for success
- Some districts have been successful with fast-track elections
- Some significant failures
- Task Force/Advisory groups have been found to be helpful
- Active oppositions contribute to the failure of initiatives

SUMMER 2026	FALL 2026	WINTER 2026/2027	SPRING 2027	SUMMER 2027	FALL 2027	
WHY		HOW			PLAN	
 Survey		 Survey			ACTION	

Why does this need to be done?

- **WHY** the District should have long-term financial independence
 - Ability to plan for the future
 - Control of revenue
 - Direct connection between residents and property owners and services



Why does this need to be done? Cont'd

- Ongoing discussions with the Town about reallocating sales tax funding currently shared through the IGA to address evolving town needs
 - New public safety facility. Important to us for the new dispatch center, local emergency operations center, and training rooms



Why does this need to be done? Cont'd

- Current and emerging long-term funding needs
 - Past strategic plan
- Other Fire Districts
 - Evans Fire Protection District



History

Why was the District formed?

- Need for increased and consistent funding
- Prior to the District, a small amount of town funding and fundraising
- No formal defined boundaries outside town
- Increasing calls for service, especially outside town
- No way to ask for dedicated tax funding without forming a District



History cont'd

Past attempts (from the 2014 strategic plan history)

- 2004, attempt to form district, 5 mills, **FAILED**
- 2006, attempt to form a rural fire district with a contract with the Town, 4.25 mills, **FAILED**
- Subscription system, **FAILED**
- 2009, second attempt to form the District, 1.9 mills, **PASSED**
 - Estes Valley Fire Service Task Force
 - Funding strategy, 50% property tax, 50% sales tax (IGA with the Town)
 - Passed after the Mall fire
- 2023, add 2.9 mills, add a small number of paid firefighters, wildfire risk reduction, fire prevention, new station, **FAILED**





What are our
needs?

Operations & Services

- Replace Town sales tax support (1A is separate)
 - \$1.3 million, approximately quarter-cent sales tax
- Support and grow our volunteer system
- Improve community risk reduction, general fire prevention
- Facilities and logistics support
- Emergency preparedness with the Town/others
- Wildfire response

ALL ABOVE HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS STRATEGIC PLANS

Capital Replacement

- Fire apparatus
- Light vehicles
- Major equipment
- Office consolidation
- Training center improvements and expansion
- Fire station 1 expansion/renovation/replacement
- Station 2

MOST OF ABOVE HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS STRATEGIC PLANS

“How” do we do this?

- Decisions on new/or independent funding
 - Type of tax
 - Property or Sales tax
 - Mill Levy
 - How much
 - When
- Are there other funding sources?



“How” do we do this? cont’d

- Public information and external communications strategy
 - Social Media
 - Community & special event tables
 - Service Clubs & other community organizations presentations
 - News Media contact
 - High quality video & photos
 - Website
 - Fire Station Open Houses
 - Citizen Fire Academy
 - Newsletters



“How” do we do this? cont’d

- Consultant
 - Design and implementation of public information and engagement
 - Surveys
 - Election design
- Legal
 - Ballot
 - Voter Lists
 - Statutory Requirements
 - Timeline
 - Costly



Estimated Costs

- \$5,000 per month for consultant
- \$30,000 surveys
- Legal???
- Election preparation???
- Total +/- \$150,000 over two years

Staff Report

To: Estes Valley Fire Protection District Board of Directors

Fr: Warren Jones, Interim Fire Chief

Re: 2027 tax election update

Date: February 23, 2026

Summary and Purpose

In December of 2025 the Board decided not to pursue a tax election in 2026. Our board minutes reflect that an election be conducted after a new permanent fire chief is hired, a new strategic plan is developed, and the organizational reorganization has been completed. While not explicitly stated, I think most conversation has been around a 2027 election for a new district sales tax. The most important objective would be to add a new sales tax, so that our tax revenue is fully independent of the town. My understanding is that this will allow the town to use the sales tax revenue they now contribute to us, for their new public safety facility. It's also important to recognize that opportunities to increase tax funding do not come often. So, we should consider our other needs for the foreseeable future in addition to replacing the town sales tax.

The town is currently in the process of acquiring land for the construction of their new public safety facility. The plan recently presented to the Town Board of Trustees has the land acquisition and financing occurring in 2027, with construction beginning in 2028 and occupancy by the police department in 2030. This schedule is faster than I think we anticipated. While the town's need to build a new public safety facility and our desire to become financially independent are separate issues, they are related and we should seek to move forward in a coordinated manner that meets the needs of both organizations and enhances the potential for success for both projects. Moving forward with a tax initiative in 2027 seems to be the most logical path for us and the town.

A new public safety facility has obvious advantages for the town. It also has advantages for us as a regional fire and emergency services provider. It will include a new and expanded dispatch center, an emergency operations center and training rooms for all public safety and emergency service agencies. Additionally, it will provide the opportunity to support the growth of all public safety and emergency services in the larger Estes Valley. I believe it is in our best interests to support the town's plans for this new facility and move into the future in the spirit of cooperation that we now enjoy.

The purpose of this briefing is to describe my research so far and propose possible actions for the rest of this year and into 2027. As I'll discuss later, this has direct impact on the

recruitment and selection of our permanent fire chief. This report concludes with three recommendations for moving forward.

It's important to recognize that any tax election is a large and complicated undertaking. It took multiple elections to establish the district, and we had a failed mill levy increase election in 2023. Also, in the last year we experienced several challenges that may impact our ability to focus resources and attention on a tax election. To be successful we'll need a full organizational commitment and well-developed and executed election strategy.

Five critical issues for consideration

Election timing: A tax election can occur either in May at the regular district election or in the general election in November in 2027. Both would require a mail election and in the case of November, coordinated with the county. Generally, the formal process begins four months before an election with board adopting a resolution calling for an election. My research indicates that the actual process should start up to a year before the election. This typically includes developing the need, surveys to test community support, communicating the need to the community, preparing our internal organization, following all the required legal steps, and transitioning to an actual campaign. My experience has been that this will be an intensive and time-consuming process for staff, our volunteers and board. It could also include use of one or more election consultants, as well as a significant amount of legal work.

The main advantages of the November election are higher turnout, less cost due to cooperation with the county and more time to prepare. The disadvantage is that our issue may get lost in the larger issues at the state and national levels. This could be especially damaging if there are multiple tax questions on the ballot. The main advantage of a May election is that we would not compete with others and voters would be faced with a purely local issue. The disadvantages are that the turnout would be lower, the cost would be higher due not being able to share costs, and a shorter time to prepare. In our case there will also be two board seats up for election which could cloud the waters if there are candidates running on a platform related a tax initiative.

If we target November 2027 this process should start late this year, if May, it should start this summer. In either case the cost will be more than \$50,000 if consultants are used. This doesn't include the cost of a campaign which must be supported by donations to a separate issue committee as required by state law. If we start this year, we could spread the cost over two years.

What type of tax: My understanding is that most of the conversation so far has been around establishing our own sales tax. Preliminary analysis last year indicates that it would

require a .25% of a one percent of sales tax to replace the amount of funding provided by the town through our IGA. Our other needs as described below could add another .25%, or a total of .5% of a one percent of sales tax. Because most of the sales tax is paid by visitors, this would seem to be the most logical approach. I've been told that 83% of sales tax here is paid by visitors. If this is the case the actual sales tax increase paid by residents would be far lower than .5% of one percent. In regard to property tax, our mill levy (2.069) is very low and increasing the mill levy could also be considered.

What do we need: Replacing the town's IGA contribution of \$1.288 million is obvious. However, there may be other needs that could be addressed by a tax increase. Our preliminary analysis of apparatus replacement indicates that we should be contributing at least \$500,000 per year into a dedicated capital replacement fund. If we don't develop a consistent revenue stream for apparatus replacement, we will face increasing maintenance costs at best, and complete fleet failure at worst. In my experience the lack of a funded capital replacement program is the root cause of future fiscal crisis. Another capital need is renovation of Station 1 to accommodate office consolidation, reduce congestion in our apparatus bays and increase parking. If our volunteer system remains as effective as it is today, it's unlikely that we'll have large increases in personnel costs in the foreseeable future. However, there may be other operational needs that will improve the support of our volunteer system.

Organizational commitment: My experience has been that to be successful any tax election must have full and unequivocal organizational support. For us this includes the board, paid staff and volunteers. Internally this will require a well-developed and demonstrated understanding of, and support for the need. Externally there is a powerful argument that a modest new sales tax paid mostly by visitors will support overall improvement in public safety in the form of a new police facility, make us fully independent from the town and address our critical capital needs. Our internal argument must be equally powerful.

Public information, communications and advocacy: Underlying all issues above is developing a powerful communications strategy to build support (and reduce opposition) within the community, our partner agencies and our own personnel. Our communications capacity was decimated last year by the unexpected loss of key personnel. We are working now to rebuild this capacity but even returning to our previous levels of external communications will not be sufficient to support such a major effort as a tax election.

Decisions are needed on the following points

- Decide on timing and type of tax

- Decide on the amount of a new sales tax or property tax increase
- Develop our financial needs in addition to replacing the town sales tax
- Develop an internal strategy that insures complete organizational commitment
- Develop an external communication strategy to garner community support
- Consider contracting with an election consultant(s)

Impact on recruitment of a permanent fire chief

Our plan is to have a permanent fire chief on board this fall, probably October. If we target a November 2027 election this will allow the new chief to be involved in the early stages of planning and be well integrated into the district and community by the time of the campaign. If a May election is chosen, the new chief will come in after the planning has begun and may not be fully integrated by the campaign in the spring of 2027. In either case a 2027 election will require the new chief to be well versed in elections, a new category of strategic recruitment criteria.

Recommended actions

Work session: Schedule a work session to discuss the five critical issues described above. This could include preliminary discussion with an election consultant, our legal counsel and possibly representatives of other districts that have experience with successful tax initiatives. A key point of discussion could be our funding needs in the foreseeable future. Based on the outcome of this work session a decision could be made at a subsequent regular meeting on timing, type of tax, amount based on our financial needs in the foreseeable future, and master schedule.

April might be a good time for this work session. The staffing issues we're working on now should be resolved, the reorganization should be complete, the fire chief process will be well underway, and it will be before the beginning of the 2027 budget process.

Accelerate the fire chief recruitment and selection process: The recruitment and selection consult discussed in a previous agenda item projects a four-month process. Starting as soon as possible in March could lead to a selection of a final candidate in late June. Adding an additional month before an actual start date, this could bring in our permanent fire chief as early as August. This would be especially important if a May 2027 election is desired.

Build a robust communications strategy: This could include a number of programmatic approaches including aggressive use of social media, information on and promotion of our services, recognition of the importance of our volunteer system, production of high quality visual and printed materials, information distribution at public events (many are already

planned), presentations at local community organizations, regular media contact and a citizen fire academy. A part of the approval of our new administrative structure was the anticipation of one or more part-time positions to address special administrative needs. This could be one such need.