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# FW: March Board meeting



**John Holmes**

Today, 4:42 PM

Jamie Paul

Reply all |

Inbox

The message sender has requested a read receipt. To send a receipt, [click here](#).

Respectfully,

John Holmes | M.S., CFO | Fire Chief  
Illinois Valley Fire District | Josephine County, OR



**From:** Richard Bouchard <brotherbouchard@gmail.com>

**Sent:** Wednesday, February 25, 2026 3:12 PM

**To:** John Holmes <johnholmes@ivfire.com>; Cheryl Azevedo Johnson <cajohnson614@gmail.com>; Jerry Lamb (jlamb@cavenet.com) <jlamb@cavenet.com>; Herbert Skip Tyler <skiptyler@me.com>; Hendricks, Sean <sean@graybackforestry.com>

**Subject:** March Board meeting

Per our previous conversation, there will be no March Board meeting due to lack of quorum

**Illinois Valley Fire District**  
Board of Director - Regular Meeting Agenda  
This meeting may be recorded

March 9, 2026

1. Call meeting to order (silence phones)
2. Flag Salute (remove hats)
3. Roll Call
4. Review of February 9, 2026 minutes
5. Staff Reports
  - Fire Chief Holmes
  - Assistant Chief Ismaili
  - Division Chief Gavlik
  - Battalion Chief Pfeiffer
6. New Business
  - Resolutions:
  - Annexations:
  - Teresa Stover - Hydrant Grant Administrator
  - Ethan Lane – City of Cave Junction Liaison
7. Old Business:
  - Levy Update: Request for Ballot Title (SEL 805) has been submitted; waiting on ballot title approval before submitting Notice of Measure Election (SEL 803) and Explanatory Statement
  - Response to Ryan Hartman and Blake Brown Letters; submitted by Mr. LeMasters
8. Comments
  - Public Comment *(This is the time set for public comment. The Board of Directors will listen and consider all comments for future agenda items. In accordance with HB2560, Public Participation in Electronic Meetings, Facebook Live viewers are invited to submit comments or questions via Facebook and they will be addressed at this time. No voting or action will be taken by the Board of Directors today.)*
  - Board Comment
9. Next scheduled BOD Meeting is April 13, 2026 at 4:00 pm. at Admin Bldg.
10. Adjournment

*(The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. Comments and/or Concerns must be submitted in writing. The Board reserves the right to hold an executive session at this meeting under the authority of ORS 192.660.)*

*Please turn off all Cell phones during this Business Meeting - Thank you*

**Illinois Valley Fire District Administration Office - 681 Caves Hwy. - Cave Junction - OR 97523**



## Illinois Valley Fire District

681 Caves Highway  
Cave Junction, OR 97523  
phone: 541-592-2225 • fax: 541-592-6122  
www.ivfire.com

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### Illinois Valley Fire District Board of Directors Meeting Minutes February 9, 2026

President Bouchard called the meeting to order at 4:00pm and led the flag salute.

**PRESENT:** Chief Holmes, Asst. Chief Ismaili, Div. Chief Paul, Batt. Chief Pfeiffer, Christina Buttram, Lt. Minglana, FF Goodnough, FF Schellenberg

**IVFD VOLUNTEERS:** Charlie Foutch **GUESTS:** Ethan Lane, Chy LeMasters, Donamuree Holmes, Liz Costa, Angela Pfeiffer, Forrest Roth

**ROLL CALL:** Directors Bouchard, Lamb, and Johnson were present. Director Hendrix was excused. Director Tyler was absent.

**REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES:** Motion made by Director Lamb to accept the January 12, 2026 minutes; and seconded by Director Johnson. All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

#### STAFF REPORTS

##### CHIEF HOLMES

###### Fire Defense Board

- I was selected as a panel member on the **Senate Bill 454 Advisory Committee** through the **Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office**. I attended two public meetings and was briefed on the bill's intent and impacts. Monthly meetings are scheduled in person and zoom, through the end of August.

###### OSFM – Red Incident Management Team

- I have a **Three-Year Commitment Confirmation Letter** requiring **Board review and signature**.

###### Training

- I attended **PRO Trauma-Informed Care Training** through the **Resilience Hub**, enhancing awareness and application of trauma-informed practices within the organization.
- I participated in **weekly Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD) training drills**, supporting ongoing operational readiness and personnel development.

###### New Meetings/Conferences Attended

- I attended my second **Executive Fire Officer (EFO)** course at the **National Fire Academy** in late January, continuing advanced leadership and executive development training.
- I attended the **Oregon Fire Chiefs Association Small and Large Fire Districts/Departments Training** in Eugene. The training was well attended and covered several timely topics, including **Paid Leave Oregon** and **Workers' Compensation** considerations impacting fire districts.
- I attended the **Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) Planning Section Winter Meeting**, focusing on statewide planning coordination and upcoming initiatives.

###### Ongoing and Informative Meetings Attended

- **Oregon Fire Chiefs Association** – Monthly Business Meeting (online)
- **Rogue Valley Fire Chiefs Association** – Monthly Meeting (in person)
- **Hydrant Grant Coordination Meetings** – Coordination meetings with Assistant Chief Ismaili, Division Chief Paul, and Teresa Stover (online and in person)
- **Rogue River Fire District (FD#1)** – Board of Directors Meeting
- **Illinois Valley Fire Resilience Oversight Group (IVFROG)** – Monthly Meeting

#### **ASST. CHIEF ISMAILI:**

- For the month of December, we had a total of 122 calls: 31 non-emergent: false alarm, good intent/no incident, legal open burns, etc. calls; 12 service/public assist calls, 5 illegal open burn/smoke investigation calls, 1 hazardous condition call, 10 motor vehicle accidents, 55 medical calls, 1 flue fire, 4 large vehicle fires; 1 wildland fire; 1 structure fire (with one FF injury of one of our mutual aid partners). Assisted on 1 call with our mutual aid partners.
- Completed 5 fire and life safety inspections, installed 8 smoke alarms.
- Station 5: The building safety permits are ongoing; Builders are waiting for suitable weather to build the structure.
- The resiliency grant project continues.
- District Boundary Expansions: On going process with the Assessor's Office.
- Attended the hydrant grant meetings.
- He clarified a comment from the public comment meeting from last month in that there are no deaths associated with suicide with district personnel. The only attributable deaths are related to homicide, natural causes, and/or cancer. We provide as many supportive services as able and allowable by law. The accusations that IVFD was not supporting a member of the department are without basis.

#### **DIV. CHIEF GAVLIK: (not in attendance – at the Explorer National Competition)**

- Training Building: Getting the welds inspected and approved by a certified welder for the county permitting process. Planning on applying for the next round of Four Way Foundation grants for the training building.
- Looking to merge the Josephine and Jackson counties radio systems to a single digital trunked system.
- BC Pfeiffer attending the Winter Fire School, and three officers attending Fire Officer II in April.
- Explorers are attending the national competition this month in TN. Full report next month.
- Training for this month will include CPAP & Ventilation Devices, Pumping Operations, Horizontal Ventilation, and Fire Attack Operations.

#### **BAT. CHIEF PFEIFFER:**

- A written maintenance report was submitted in the board packet, and discussed at the board meeting with detail of the maintenance on the fleet, buildings (new float on water tank at Sta. 4), and resiliency trailers (electrical at Sta. 3 has begun).
- Attended DPSST ICS300 training in Salem.

**ADMINISTRATOR PAUL:** no report, financials provided.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

- There was one annexation request:
  - Robert & Kay Bollard Family Trust of 555 Three Mills Rd., Selma – 10.12 acres

Motion made by Director Johnson to approve the annexation requests, seconded by Director Lamb. All in favor, motion passed unanimously.

- Chief Holmes received approval for an additional three years on the OSFM Incident Management Team.
- Hydrant Grant project update presented by Teresa Stover:
  - Pilot Rock Excavation, Inc. signed the contract documents, provided performance and payment bonds, certificates of insurance, and other required paperwork. Chief Holmes signed the contract documents on 1/30/26 and the IVFD attorney certified the contract execution on 1/30/26.
  - Pre-construction conference this month, with notice to proceed following.
  - Legislature short session this month, may reinstate the 13.7% funding reduction.
  - Construction phase is estimated to be 60 days. New estimated start date is likely to be February 2026.
  - A 14<sup>th</sup> disbursement request for engineering and grant administration was provided.
- Ethan Lane – The City of Cave Junction purchased the Junction Inn at auction. Nothing can happen for at least the next six months until the waiting period ends.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

- Levy Update: SEL 805 – Request for Ballot Title has been submitted; once approved, SEL 803 – Notice of Measure Election and Explanatory Statement will be filed.
- Director Bouchard thanked Chy LeMasters for the letter presented at the meeting last month.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

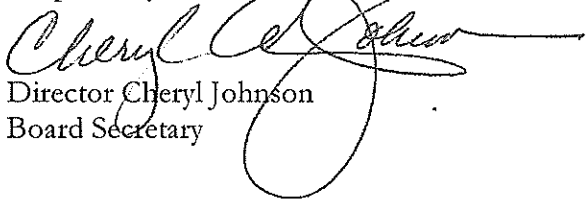
- Chy LeMasters of Cave Junction was allowed his three minutes to share two letters provided by prior firefighters. He also read out loud a summary of the two letters provided to the board.

**BOARD COMMENT:**

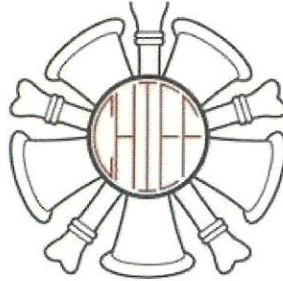
- Director Johnson talked about her expectation of leadership is to do the best job that they can and to improve when mistakes are made. It is her expectation, and likely that of the entire board, that *every member* of this district is treated with dignity and respect, and to treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Director Bouchard emphasized the need to follow protocol for any issue that comes up. The Chief has been working closely with Director Bouchard and the board on updating the handbook and making changes as necessary in wanting what was best for the district. He has worked with the Chief for over five years and is always available to meet when asked. Again, urged everyone to follow protocol. If there are any events of retaliation, it will be dealt with.

The next regularly scheduled BOD meeting will be Monday, March 9, 2026 at 4pm at the Administration building, 681 Caves Hwy., Cave Junction, OR. This meeting adjourned at 4:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Director Cheryl Johnson  
Board Secretary



## **Fire Chief Report**

**Date: 03.09.2026**

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### **Fire Defense Board**

- Nothing to Report at This Time
- 

### **OSFM – Red Incident Management Team**

- Nothing to Report at This Time
- 

### **Training**

- I participated in **weekly Illinois Valley Fire District (IVFD) training drills**, supporting ongoing operational readiness and personnel development.
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### **New Meetings/Conferences Attended**

- I attended the **Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) SB454 Legislative Meeting in person.**
- 

### **Ongoing and Informative Meetings Attended**

- **Oregon Fire Chiefs Association** – Monthly Business Meeting (online)
- **Hydrant Grant Coordination Meetings** – Coordination meetings with Assistant Chief Ismaili, Division Chief Paul, and Teresa Stover (online and in person)
- **Rogue River Fire District (FD#1)** – Board of Directors Meeting

- **International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI)** – Monthly Meeting
- **Illinois Valley Fire Rescue Operations Group (IVFROG)** – Monthly Meeting
- **Williams Fire District** Board of Directors Meeting

**Illinois Valley Fire Protection District**  
**Board of Directors Meeting**  
**Operations/Prevention Notes**  
**03/09/2026**

For the month of February, the Illinois Valley Fire District responded to a total of **101 calls**. Below is the breakdown:

- **Non-Emergent Calls: 19**
  - These include no incidents found, canceled en-route, false alarms, non-hostile smoke investigations, and legal open burns.
- **Public Service Calls: 11**
  - These include public assists, lift assists, water leaks, stand-by incidents, weather incidents, co.-gas-smoke alarms etc.
- **Illegal Open Burns: 9**
  - Resulted in **6 warnings** and **3 citations**.
- **Hazardous Situations: 2**
  - These include powerline issues, fallen trees, fuel leaks, smoke/odor investigations, electrical arcs, and gas leaks.
- **Motor Vehicle Accidents (MVAs): 5**
- **Medical Calls: 51**
- **Mutual Aid: 0** assist to partner agencies
- **Flue Fire: 1**
  - **200 Blk Junction Ave** - Unintentional, caused by excessive creosote in the flue.
- **Large Vehicle Fire: 2**
  - **29000 block of Redwood Hwy** – Undetermined
  - **3000 block of Bear Creek Road** – Undetermined
- **Structure Fire: 2**
  - **29000 block of Redwood Hwy** – Unintentional. This was a large vehicle fire that extended into the structure.
  - **4000 Block of Takilma Rd**- Unintentional. This was a propane leak that met an ignition source at a portable propane heater.

**Fire & Life Safety Inspections:** 1 completed

**Smoke Alarm Installations:** 10 completed

**Project Updates:**

- **Station 5:** Building Safety permits are ongoing. We are still waiting for the builders to find a suitable day to come down and build the structure.
- **Resiliency Grant Project** is underway, and Battalion Chief Pfeiffer will provide updates on this project.
- **District Boundary Expansion:** Is still an ongoing process.

**Meetings Attended:**

- Hydrant Grant (with update to be provided by Teresa Stover)

**Any questions?**

## *Illinois Valley Rural Fire Protection District*

Division Chief / Training Report

March 9, 2026



Ed Sudyka buried the conduit hole and finished the surface with concrete, allowing the stair platform supports to be anchored to the ground. Additionally, Tom McCauley and I welded together a few more window frames. There are still a few more details left to do before they can be installed.

I have been updating the radio programming software with the new radio frequencies in preparation for re-programming all of the district radios before the start of wildland season.

Battalion Chief Pfeiffer, Lieutenant Marler, and Lieutenant Minglana are scheduled to attend the Fire Officer II class offered April 13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>.

The Explorers did an amazing job during the competition in Tennessee. They shared first place with another Post from Galatin, Tennessee, during the all-tie-up challenge and third place on the triple-lay hose drill. There were 1350 attendees represented by seventeen states and forty-two different councils. This group of Explorers also received many compliments for their demonstrated teamwork and communication skills.

Training this month will cover Patient Triage, Hose Lays and Loads, Task Performances, Search and Rescue, and Firefighter Team Challenge.

Respectfully Submitted by Jeff Gavlik, Division Chief

# Maintenance Report- February 2026

All Fleet vehicles up and running, routine maintenance being performed.

Station 3 resiliency trailers now have power.

All District fire extinguisher annual maintenance/tests completed.

All stations bi-annual HVAC maintenance completed.

**TO:** Illinois Valley Fire District Board of Directors and staff  
**FROM:** Teresa Stover, contract project administrator for water and sewer lines extension  
**SUBJECT: Hydrant Project Status Report**  
**DATE:** March 5, 2026

The IVFD water [and sewer] lines expansion will install approximately 1,700 lineal feet [each] of water [and sewer] lines from existing City of Cave Junction main lines on Old Stage Road to the Illinois Valley Fire District Station 1 at 681 Caves Highway (see attached drawing). Four fire hydrants will be installed along the water line; three on Caves Highway and one on the fire station back lot.

IVFD is managing the design, engineering, and construction of the project, with Verdantas (formerly Civil West Engineering) as the engineer and Pilot Rock Excavation as the contractor. Upon completion, IVFD will hand off operation and maintenance of the lines to the City of Cave Junction. The project is funded by an Oregon Lottery direct legislative award, as administered by Business Oregon. The Business Oregon deadline to complete the project is March 2027.

### **Current and upcoming milestones**

#### **• Construction**

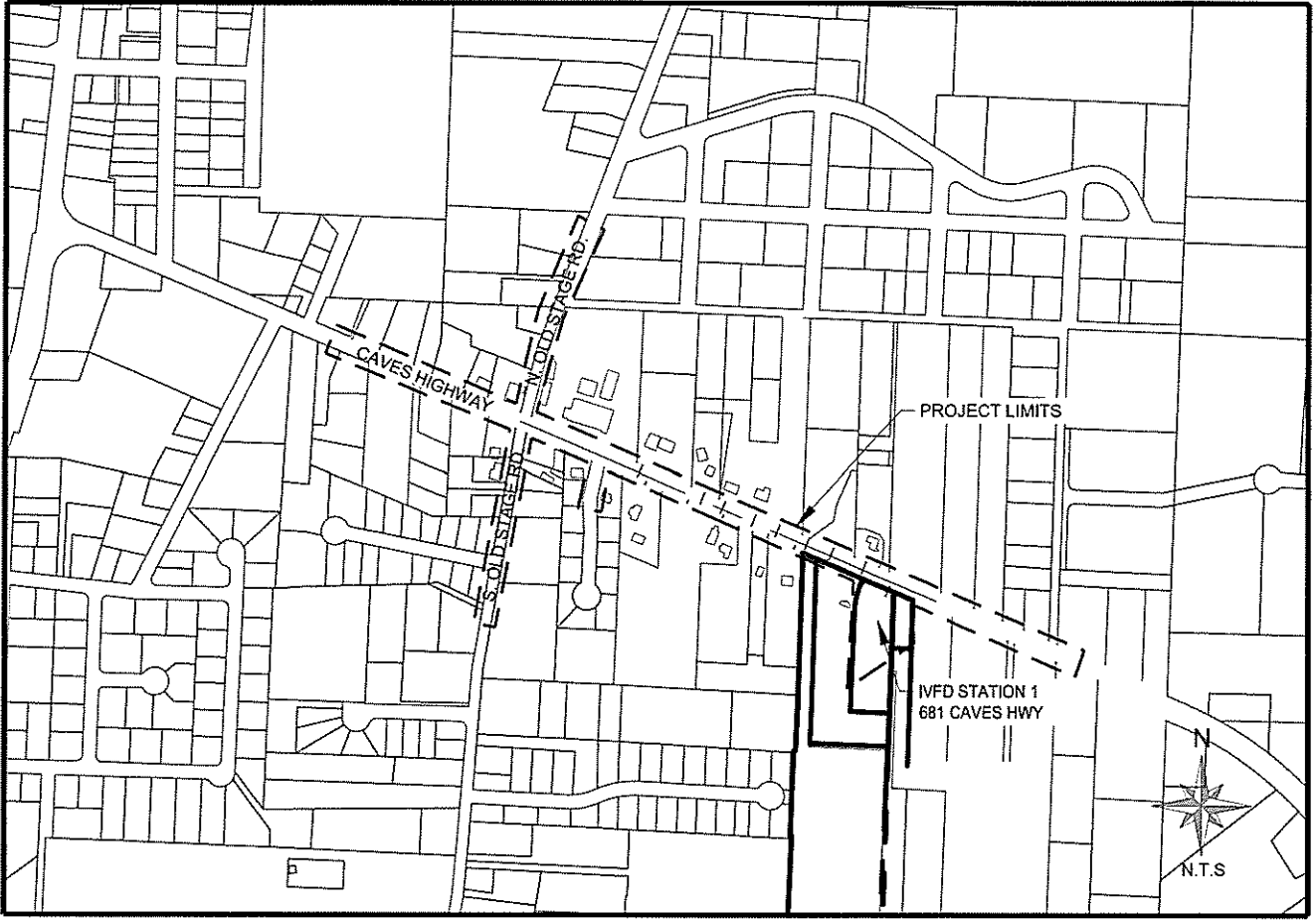
- The Notice to Proceed was signed by Chief Holmes and issued to Pilot Rock on February 10. The notice indicates that construction on site may begin on March 16 and achieve substantial completion 60 days later (May 15).
- Verdantas has scheduled the preconstruction conference to take place 1-3 pm on Wednesday, March 11. Representatives from Verdantas, Pilot Rock, City of Cave Junction, and IVFD will participate.
- Pilot Rock ordered project materials March 4.

#### **• Procurement**

- The Oregon State Legislature is currently in short session February 2 to March 9. It is scheduled to decide whether the grant funding will be reduced by 13.7 percent (\$135K) or reinstated to its full amount. If the funding remains reduced, the full water project with only sewer infrastructure on IVFD property will be built. If full funding is reinstated, a section of sewer line on Caves Highway may be built as funds allow.

#### **• Finance**

- Submitted the 15th disbursement request (attached) for engineering and grant administration.



PROJECT VICINITY MAP



Recipient:

Project Name:

Funding Programs:

Illinois Valley Fire District

Extension of Water and Sewer Lines

Direct Legislative Passthrough

Reporting Period:

12/27/2025

to

1/31/2026

**OBDD Disbursement Request**

Amendment Number 3


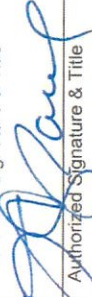
Project Number: C2024039  
 Portfol Loan No.: 7232-01

Request Number: 15

Final Draw?  Yes  No

(A) Activity	OBDD Funds (Enter Whole Dollars Only)				Other / Matching Funds (Enter Whole Dollars Only)				All Funds (J) = [C+D+G+H] Disbursed & Expended
	(B) Approved Budget	(C) Prior Disbursements	(D) Current Request	(E) = [B-C-D] Balance	(F) Approved Budget	(G) Prior Expenditures	(H) Current Expenditure	(I) = [F-G-H] Balance	
Design/Engineering Construction	\$138,000	\$106,749	\$841	\$30,410					\$107,590
Construction	739,698			739,698					
Construction Contingency	68,802			68,802					
Legal Fees	6,000	4,519		1,481					4,519
Permitting and Regulatory Fees	4,000	292		3,708					292
Grant Administration	28,000	23,329	1,085	3,586					24,414
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$984,500</b>	<b>\$134,889</b>	<b>\$1,926</b>	<b>\$847,685</b>					<b>\$136,815</b>
<b>Pending Reduced Budget Maximum:</b>	<b>\$849,451</b>								

Certification: We certify that the data are correct and that the amount requested is not in excess of current needs.

Authorized Signature & Title		Assistant Chief	2/19/2026
Authorized Signature & Title		Administrator	2/19/2026
Jamie Paul		541-592-2225	
Project Contact for Payment Notification		Phone Number	
jamiepaul@ivfire.com			
E-Mail Address			

For OBDD Use Only: I have reviewed this request and approve payment to the above mentioned recipient in the amount(s) listed below.

Dollar Amount	Funding Type	Funding Program
	Loan / Grant / Forgivable	(If more than one source of funds)
\$ _____	_____	_____
\$ _____	_____	_____
\$ _____	_____	_____
\$ _____	_____	_____

**OBDD Disbursement Request**

Amendment Number 3

Recipient: Illinois Valley Fire District      Project Number: C2024039  
 Project Name: Extension of Water and Sewer Lines      Request Number: 15  
 Funding Programs: Direct Legislative Passthrough

**Project Goals (Report for Every Cash Draw)**

Proposed Work Plan	Estimated Completion Date	Results Achieved
1. Execute IGA with Cave Junction	Feb 29 2024	After negotiations and several drafts, the IGA was executed on July 31.
2. Procure Engineer	Mar 31 2024	The Engineering RFP was issued in Sep. Two proposals were opened Oct 8. Contract executed Dec 29.
3. Final Design Complete, including OHA/DEQ approval of plans	Sep 30 2024	100% design completed Mar 18. ODOT review complete. Final changes made to bid documents. Final DEQ approval received.
4. Construction Complete	May 15 2026	IVFD-Pilot Rock Excavation contract executed Jan 30 and Notice to Proceed issued Feb 10. Precon expected soon with construction period of Mar 16 through May 15.
5. Project Closeout	Jun 30 2026	
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

# Notice of Measure Election District

**SEL 803**

rev 01/16 ORS 250.035,  
250.041, 255.145, 255.345

## Notice

**Date of Notice**  
2/26/2026

**Name of District**  
Illinois Valley RFP District

**Name of County or Counties**  
Josephine

**Date of Election**  
05/19/2026

**Ballot Title** Prepare with assistance from the district attorney or an attorney employed by the district.

**Caption** 10 words which reasonably identifies the subject of the measure.

Five Year Local Option Tax to hire and maintain Firefighter/EMT's

**Question** 20 words which plainly phrases the chief purpose of the measure.

Shall District impose 5-year levy, for 2026-2031, in the amount of \$0.99 /\$1,000 assessed value for hiring and maintaining Firefighter/EMTs?

This measure may cause property taxes to increase more than three percent.

**Summary** 175 words which concisely and impartially summarizes the measure and its major effect.

The Illinois Valley Fire District, a volunteer department, was formed by local citizens in 1954. Our Valley continues to grow, and laws requiring volunteer education and commitment have put a strain on the volunteer program. This levy would provide minimum staffing 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to respond to the needs of our Valley residents.

The revenue generated will be for the sole purpose of hiring and maintaining FF/EMT's and NOT to fund any additional money for administration or operations of the district.

Currently, tax payers pay \$0.50 per \$1,000 assessed value for our current Local Option Tax levy for FF/EMT's. If passed this levy would replace the existing Levy for a total of \$0.99 per \$1,000 assessed value. This Local Option Tax would be in addition to current tax rate of \$1.87 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

The estimated tax cost for this measure is an ESTIMATE ONLY based on the best information available from the county assessor at the time of estimate and may reflect the impact of early payment discounts, compression and the collection rate. An impact example for a typical property assessed at \$100,000, would be \$99 per year.

(The proposed rate will raise approximately \$929,120 in the fiscal year 2026-2027; \$956,993 in the fiscal year 2027-2028; \$985,703 in the fiscal year 2028-2029; \$1,015,274 in the fiscal year 2029-2030 and \$1,045,733 in the fiscal year 2030-2031)

**Explanatory Statement** 500 words that impartially explains the measure and its effect.

If the county is producing a voters' pamphlet an explanatory statement must be drafted and attached to this form for:

→ any measure referred by the district governing body; **or**

→ any initiative or referendum, if required by local ordinance.

**Explanatory Statement Attached?**

Yes

No

**Authorized District Official** Not required to be notarized.

**Name**  
Jamie Paul

**Title**  
Division Chief Administration

**Mailing Address**  
681 Caves Hwy., Cave Junction, OR 97523

**Contact Phone**  
541-592-2225

*By signing this document:*

→ I hereby state that I am authorized by the district elections authority to submit this Notice of Measure Election and I certify the above ballot title is true and complete.

  
Signature

2/26/2026

Date Signed



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**Letter to the board.**

1 message

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**Brownie boii** <blakeyboy004@gmail.com> *Blake Brown FF*  
To: paulal97538@gmail.com <paulal97538@gmail.com>

Tue, Feb 3, 2026 at 2:39 AM

Here is my letter to the board in case i miss the live stream. If I happen to miss the live stream could you please make sure this gets read. Thank you.



Letter to the board

Hellen Keller says "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much" a quote I believe every firefighter would agree with. Firefighters don't thrive without the ability to rely upon the whole department. When I started volunteering at I.V. Fire department I was told I was coming into a family-like dynamic. A place where we worked hard for the community then came back and could rely upon and confide in each other. I quickly came to see that was just an image being presented to the public. Behind the doors my eyes were opened.

After my first experience of a very mentally taxing scene I had one brief check in after, to which I was told they assumed I was okay. This was the one and only "check" to ever occur in my time being there. I watched fellow firefighter fall into the same experience over and over. Firefighters are first hand seeing some of the most mentally taxing scenes out there. Mental health wellness checks should be a routine. How are we to expect fire fighters to help others if they are unable to mentally process the traumatic events in which they have witnessed. We have lost many firefighters to the mental strain of this career not just at this fire station, as recently a previous fellow firefighters at I.V. Fire and my friend lost his life (which the station shared nothing in regards to his passing) but across the whole world. This should be a topic that concerns our chiefs but it just seems to be one of the MANY items on their plate that they are willing to disregard.

As much as this career is mentally draining it is also physically draining. It is important for our health to take a period of rest. This helps us replenish energy after scenes along with conserving energy to be ready to perform our best upon arrival. How well can you perform in an emergency after cleaning your whole house? Best guess, not well. During my volunteer shifts if at any moment myself or someone else was spotted resting they would immediately be reprimanded and if anyone defended someone taking a break they would also be reprimanded. I was often informed to clean. A task I see no problem with UNTIL I'm asked to repeat it after I just finished, as I can still not rest or take a break. To repeat, I was tasked to reclean the entire bay and fire engine that I had just cleaned! This became a repeat request. So much so that when I would arrive home I would have to immediately shower again as I still smelt of nothing but chemical cleaners. How safe is it to attempt to put out a fire while being covered in flammable chemicals? You have seconds to get gear on and be onsite to a call and every second wasted matters. This leaves zero time to remove any harmful or flammable cleaning products from off my body.

I shared concerns but at the end of the day I loved helping my community and was willing to deal in order to remain a part of the station. In fact I was wanting to do so as much as possible. I was excited to throw a shot into applying for the available position. While I knew I had a few volunteers who had been there longer and had more certifications than I, I was ready to try. Only to be surprised that someone not in the

group without applying, interviews or expressed interest was hired instead. Not to just me but the others far more deserving this was rather upsetting and unfair situation.

Unfair treatment, bias judgement and improperly placed authority seemed to become my normal treatment. My requests for available volunteer shifts became "unavailable" even though I was fitting volunteering around my busy work, and home life. I would also see once receiving said schedule that those times would in fact be available. I shared that I would be out, with a note, as I was surgically getting multiple teeth removed and would be put under anesthesia. I was told if I didn't arrive to that nights training I wouldn't be allowed to make it up and would not meet my standards and to rethink MY choices. This was said with zero regard for the pain I had been in or the troubles of me getting and waiting for this appointment or the fact that i would be in even more pain and not in a safe mental state after such surgery.

As specifically the chiefs made me feel more ostracized I took a step back in hopes to help replenish my mental welling being. I still love firefighting and didn't want to stop so I just simply stated that i would no longer be available for the chipper program. When it came to this program I have no idea who was actually in charge and who to report to. After stepping away I had multiple days with multiple calls and texts stating they had no volunteers to help with the program and needed me. This came from multiple chiefs, other fire staff and another volunteer all seeming as if they where "running the program" and that I couldn't just stop assisting with it. After a day of many non-stop calls/ message I agreed to go just to make the messages stop. I had made it clear that I wasn't feeling well prior but that wasn't sufficient enough of a reason to not go. Well as one could guess I arrived not feeling well which resulted in a later moment of vomit. Later that day I received a call from a separate fire fighter asking me about "arriving drunk". I was shocked as one... I don't drink. Two... no one of any higher status had contacted me about said report. I personally had to reach out to a chief who then stated that i did appear to have arrived intoxicated and a fellow volunteer and I had looked ragged when we arrived. I stated that I was sick and had previously shared this information. He then stated how the fellow volunteer was an "alcoholic" and "what was he supposed to think when you are who you associate with." I asked if he was accusing me of being an alcoholic. He said "you are who your around". I stated how I don't drink nor is that a fair assumption about anyone nor his position to accuse anyone of being such. I have done nothing but assist that friend/ fellow volunteer get sober for his families sake and that no one especially someone in a boss type position has the right to make those biased judgments and especially not to spread those judgements to other fire fighters at the station.

That was my breaking point. I had been so dwindled down by working at I.V. Fire I didn't even feel like myself anymore. The way the chiefs spoke and handled incidents and brushed other large things under the rug was simply unprofessional and too much to be a part of. I was becoming so angry and hurt. The following day I turned in my

gear...the hardest decision I have had to make. I love almost nothing more than being a fire fighter. If I could see our chiefs actually caring, I.V. Fire actually having a good chief in charge, not one just looking out for his own well being and disregarding those on the front lines. I would be back to volunteering there so fast. But the wounded person they made me become is someone who should have never been made in the first place. Fire fighting was a joy in my life, even the chief himself at one point said " I always come in with the biggest smile ready to take on the day," only for him to turn around and crush that smile and joy. This station needs some serious positive changes or I truly fear for I.V. fire department as a whole and the community that it serves.

09 February 2026

I volunteered with the Illinois Valley Fire District for a little under three years, and while I loved much of that time, I left with serious concerns—concerns I didn't feel comfortable voicing then, largely because I didn't know if anyone else shared them. Seeing others now speak openly about similar experiences has made me feel it's important to share my own.

During my time with IVFD, I felt a strong sense of camaraderie with most of my fellow firefighters. We cared about one another and took pride in our small department. Unfortunately, I never felt that same sense of appreciation from leadership. It often felt like nothing we did was enough—no matter how many shifts we worked (for free) or how many fires we responded to, our efforts went unacknowledged. Instead, I would hear second- or third-hand about issues the Chief had with me. At times, he would attend trainings and speak poorly about people under his breath, just loud enough for us to hear.

I remember being on a fire until three in the morning and coming away with the sense that my presence didn't matter. There was no individual thank-you, no token of appreciation (even a couple slices of pizza would have gone a long way), just silence or criticism. Over time, that kind of leadership creates a culture where volunteers feel disposable rather than valued.

More troubling, though, was the lack of meaningful support around mental health. Early in my time at IVFD, one of my first calls involved a two-year-old who was found in the creek. The only response afterward was a vague comment that "help was available." There was no debrief, no follow-up, and no genuine check-in. We routinely witnessed horrific scenes, yet there was never a structured effort to support firefighters emotionally or psychologically, nor any sense that accepting help would be safe or encouraged.

During my time there, I worked closely with Josh Kazprzak. He was a good firefighter, but like many others, it was obvious to anyone who talked with him that he was struggling with his mental health. Rather than being supported, his role with the department was terminated, and there was no meaningful follow-up from the organization that so often referred to itself as a family. I know individual firefighters reached out to him, but institutionally, he was left on his own. I'm not saying anyone is to blame for his death, but I do believe things might have gone differently if the department had truly acted like the family it claimed to be.

None of this should come as a surprise to those who have volunteered or worked at IVFD, or to those close to someone who has. It may, however, come as a surprise to leadership. We were never genuinely asked how we were doing. There were no exit interviews, and no regular check-ins—monthly or yearly. The one time I tried to be honest about my capacity, after losing multiple family members in a short period of time, I was told to "get my shit together."

Watching people flee from the fire department saddens me, but given these conditions, it also makes sense.

Ryan Hartman