

June 27, 2026

The Rusk County Emergency Services District #1 met on this date at 9:08 a.m. with Board Member Jiffy Dukes presiding. Board Members present were Gloria Dooley and Wayne Griffith. Board Members absent were David Burks and Curt Collins. As a quorum existed the meeting was called to order and a prayer was offered by Chief Rayford Gibson followed by the pledge to the American flag.

The purpose of this workshop was to review and discuss the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budgets submitted by the volunteer fire departments and emergency service organizations served by Rusk County Emergency Services District No. 1 and to conduct a comprehensive review of the District's reimbursement guidelines for possible revision and future adoption as Board policy.

No action was scheduled or taken during this workshop. All discussions were informational in nature and intended to assist the Board in developing the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 District budget and revised reimbursement policy. Any future expenditures or policy changes discussed during the workshop would require formal consideration and approval by the Board during a properly posted meeting in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act. Representatives from the following agencies attended all or portions of the workshop:

- Carlisle Volunteer Fire Department
- Church Hill Volunteer Fire Department
- Crims Chapel Volunteer Fire Department
- Eastside Volunteer Fire Department
- Kilgore Rescue Unit
- Laneville Volunteer Fire Department
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- Mount Enterprise Volunteer Fire Department
- New Salem Volunteer Fire Department
- Rusk County Rescue Unit
- Tatum Volunteer Fire Department

Departments noted as absent or not participating in budget discussions included:

- Henderson Fire Department
- Kilgore Fire Department
- New London Fire Department
- Overton Fire Department
- Elderville Volunteer Fire Department

Because firefighter training classes were underway, Ms. Dooley advised that representatives would be permitted to enter and leave the workshop as needed to accommodate their instructional schedules.

Public Comments

Micheal Searcy provided an informational update regarding anticipated **Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS)** implementation of recently enacted school safety legislation.

Mr. Dukes advised that DPS representatives had informed him that Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) would soon be distributed to emergency response agencies expected to respond to school-related incidents. Under DPS's current interpretation of the legislation, each responding agency would be required to execute and return the MOU within a thirty-day period.

Discussion followed regarding the practical challenges this requirement could create within Rusk County due to the number of volunteer fire departments providing mutual aid to one another. Commissioners and department representatives discussed concerns that if one participating agency failed to execute the

required agreement, neighboring departments responding under mutual aid could potentially be affected.

Mr. Searcy advised that he had offered the District's assistance in coordinating distribution of the documents and obtaining signatures from participating departments to help ensure compliance within the required timeframe. Commissioners also discussed the possibility of determining whether the District's contractual relationships with volunteer departments could satisfy portions of the requirement; however, it was acknowledged that additional guidance from DPS would be necessary before any conclusions could be reached.

Board members expressed concern that the new administrative requirements represented another unfunded mandate placed upon local emergency responders but agreed that the District would assist departments in any practical manner possible once official guidance and documentation were received. No additional public comments were offered.

Opening Remarks

Before beginning the budget review, Ms. Dooley reminded all department representatives that the purpose of the workshop was to discuss proposed requests and prepare the District's draft budget. She emphasized that **discussion of any item during the workshop should not be interpreted as approval**. Commissioners reiterated that:

- Workshops are conducted solely for discussion and information gathering.
- The Texas Open Meetings Act prohibits the Board from taking official action during a workshop.
- Every reimbursement request, capital project, or budget item discussed would still require formal Board consideration and approval at a future properly posted meeting before any District funds could be obligated.

Department representatives acknowledged the explanation before the Board proceeded into the review of individual department budgets.

3. DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL DEPARTMENT BUDGETS – FISCAL YEAR 2027

Secretary/Treasurer Gloria Dooley advised those present that the Board would review each submitted department budget individually. Departments were reviewed alphabetically to provide consistency and ensure each department had an opportunity to explain anticipated needs for Fiscal Year 2027.

Commissioners referenced each department's submitted budget while comparing proposed expenditures with current-year appropriations, anticipated grant funding, previous Board commitments, and long-term capital planning.

Throughout the review, Commissioners repeatedly emphasized the following principles:

- Discussion during the workshop did **not** constitute approval of any request.
- Inclusion of an item in the District's draft budget would not obligate the Board to fund the request.
- All expenditures would remain subject to future Board approval during the formal budget adoption process.
- Departments were encouraged to aggressively pursue all available Texas A&M Forest Service grants and other outside funding before requesting District assistance.

Carlisle Volunteer Fire Department

Carlisle Volunteer Fire Department was the first department reviewed.

Commissioners began by discussing the department's proposed purchase of six (6) sets of structural firefighting personal protective equipment (PPE). Department representatives advised that the request was tied to an approved Texas A&M Forest Service PPE Grant. The Board confirmed that the grant had already been awarded and discussed the anticipated cost-share responsibility that would remain after grant reimbursement.

The Board determined that because the grant had already been awarded, the PPE purchase should largely be treated as a Fiscal Year 2026 expenditure rather than a 2027 budget request.

Discussion then turned to Carlisle's Rescue Tool Grant. Department representatives advised that rescue tools had already been purchased following Board approval. Commissioners directed that this item be removed from the proposed 2027 budget since the purchase would be completed during the current fiscal year.

Additional discussion included:

Positive Pressure Ventilation Fans

The department requested District reimbursement for battery-operated positive pressure ventilation fans.

Commissioners clarified that the equipment was not included within the department's operating revenues and therefore should be considered a reimbursement request rather than a departmental operating expense.

The Board reminded department representatives that quotations should be obtained and presented to the Board prior to purchase so reimbursement eligibility could be considered before funds were committed.

Station No. 2 Bay Expansion

One of the largest capital requests involved construction of an additional apparatus bay at Carlisle Station No. 2.

Department representatives advised the estimated construction cost for the building addition was approximately **\$48,000**, with an additional concrete apron expected to cost nearly the same amount. Commissioners estimated the total project could approach **\$100,000** after site preparation, concrete work, and other associated expenses.

Department representatives advised volunteer members planned to contribute labor and donate portions of the site preparation work to reduce project costs.

Board discussion focused on the operational need for the expansion. Commissioners acknowledged that Station No. 2 currently required apparatus to be moved in order to access vehicles parked behind one another. Adding a second drive-through bay would improve response efficiency and reduce delays when responding to emergency calls.

The Board generally agreed the request addressed a legitimate operational concern but reiterated that no approval was being granted during the workshop.

General Discussion

Commissioners reviewed the remaining operating budget and discussed anticipated bunker gear replacement costs, academy expenses, and projected maintenance items.

No additional concerns were identified.

The Board then proceeded to the next department.

Church Hill Volunteer Fire Department

Building Improvements

The department requested funding for construction of a covered awning over the concrete apron in front of the apparatus bays.

Commissioners questioned the estimated project cost of approximately **\$27,000**, asking whether the proposal involved only an awning or additional structural work.

Department representatives explained that the request would provide covered protection across the front of the station to improve firefighter operations during adverse weather.

Commissioners requested that detailed construction estimates be obtained before the project could receive future consideration.

Apparatus Tires

Church Hill requested replacement tires for one engine.

Department representatives explained the tires would exceed NFPA recommended service life during the coming fiscal year.

Commissioners discussed tire replacement schedules used throughout the District.

Several Board members noted that while tires often appeared serviceable, age—not tread wear—frequently determined replacement due to safety concerns.

Examples were discussed where apparently good tires had failed solely because of age.

The Board agreed apparatus tires should continue to be monitored according to recognized safety standards.

General Discussion

Commissioners reviewed the balance of the department's operating budget and found no significant concerns requiring additional discussion.

Crims Chapel Volunteer Fire Department

PPE Grant

Crims Chapel advised the Board that it had received approval for a Texas A&M Forest Service PPE Grant covering multiple sets of structural firefighting gear.

Commissioners discussed anticipated District cost-share obligations once grant funding was applied.

The Board expressed support for departments maximizing available grant funding whenever possible.

LED Bay Lighting

Crims Chapel requested reimbursement assistance for replacement of the station's apparatus bay lighting with LED fixtures.

Discussion centered on whether existing fixtures could be retrofitted by bypassing ballasts instead of complete replacement.

Commissioners noted that if retrofitting proved practical, project costs could be significantly reduced.

Department representatives indicated the budget reflected the highest possible estimate and acknowledged actual costs might be substantially lower depending upon installation methods.

Apparatus Tires

The department also requested replacement tires for one apparatus.

Commissioners advised that broader discussion regarding District participation in apparatus tire replacement would occur later during review of the reimbursement guidelines so that all departments would be treated consistently.

General Discussion

Commissioners found the remainder of Crims Chapel's proposed budget to be reasonable and consistent with current operational needs.

The Board then proceeded to Eastside Volunteer Fire Department.

Eastside Volunteer Fire Department

Building Maintenance

Commissioners discussed the department's request for approximately **\$12,000** in anticipated building maintenance and repair expenses.

Department representatives explained the amount represented a contingency figure for several possible projects, including construction of a covered awning and other facility improvements that might become necessary during the fiscal year. They advised the Board that they did **not** currently anticipate requesting reimbursement from the District for those expenses and intended to utilize departmental funds before seeking District assistance.

Commissioners acknowledged the explanation and noted the request was appropriately included for long-range planning purposes.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The department discussed anticipated PPE purchases and advised that applications had been submitted for Texas A&M Forest Service PPE grant funding.

Department representatives explained that the budget reflected replacement of two sets of structural firefighting gear should grant funding not fully satisfy anticipated needs.

Commissioners reiterated their expectation that departments continue pursuing all available grant opportunities before requesting District reimbursement.

Training Grant and Training Props

Discussion then centered on the department's Training Equipment Grant.

Department representatives explained that they hoped to combine multiple Training Equipment Grants with neighboring departments in order to purchase a larger, regional live-fire training prop rather than each department purchasing smaller individual props.

Commissioners expressed support for the concept of regional cooperation.

Discussion included:

- Combining multiple \$10,000 grants toward one larger purchase.
- Potential construction of additional storage facilities at the District training grounds.
- Expansion of the District's training center.
- Opportunities to host outside training classes and generate additional revenue.
- Long-term development of a self-sustaining regional firefighter training facility.

Board members noted that once the primary live-fire control system was acquired, future training props could generally be added at substantially lower cost.

Commissioners recognized the proposal as a long-term investment that could benefit all volunteer departments within the District.

Kilgore Rescue Unit

Because Kilgore Rescue operates differently than most volunteer departments, Commissioners discussed only those items expected to involve District participation.

Department representatives advised that their primary anticipated request would involve cost-sharing for a future brush truck assigned to Station No. 2 for service within the Rusk County portion of the response area.

Commissioners discussed establishing a placeholder within future District capital planning in anticipation of a possible request.

No commitment was made regarding the amount of future participation.

Discussion also addressed possible future consideration of major equipment repairs.

Commissioners clarified that while any department may present requests to the Board for consideration, no department should assume reimbursement merely because a request is submitted.

Each request would continue to be evaluated individually based upon operational necessity, District priorities, and available funding.

Laneville Volunteer Fire Department

PPE Grant

Department representatives advised they had submitted applications for Texas A&M Forest Service PPE grant funding and anticipated adding one new firefighter during the coming year.

Should grant funding not be awarded, the department anticipated requesting District reimbursement for one set of structural firefighting gear.

Commissioners encouraged the department to continue aggressively pursuing available grants before utilizing District funds.

Training Equipment

Discussion continued regarding Training Equipment Grants.

Department representatives confirmed they intended to participate in cooperative purchases with neighboring departments whenever possible.

Commissioners again emphasized the value of regional training resources and discussed the advantages of purchasing larger shared training props rather than multiple smaller individual units.

General Discussion

No significant concerns were raised regarding Laneville's operating budget.

Commissioners complimented the department's planning and noted the budget appeared reasonable based upon anticipated operational needs.

Mount Enterprise Volunteer Fire Department

Grant Participation

The Board noted that Mount Enterprise had not yet submitted applications for available Texas A&M Forest Service PPE and Rescue Tool Grants. The department anticipated 3 new sets of bunker and dual/cert gear would be needed for new members in 2027.

Commissioners strongly encouraged department representatives to immediately submit all eligible grant applications.

Board members emphasized that every department should pursue every available grant opportunity unless specifically prohibited by grant requirements.

Commissioners explained that grant applications typically require very little time to complete and represent one of the most effective methods of reducing the District's future financial obligations.

Apparatus Tires

Discussion followed concerning replacement of tires on one engine.

Department representatives advised the tires were approximately ten years old and remained the original equipment supplied with the apparatus.

Commissioners recommended replacement occur as soon as practical and encouraged the department to obtain pricing through approved government purchasing programs to reduce costs.

Covered Parking

The department requested consideration for construction of covered parking adjacent to the station.

Department representatives explained the structure would primarily protect firefighters' privately owned vehicles during emergency responses.

Commissioners discussed the request at length.

While acknowledging the convenience such a project would provide, several Commissioners expressed concern that approving covered parking at one station could establish a precedent leading to similar requests from every department within the District.

The Board concluded that detailed estimates should be obtained before any future consideration and emphasized that no decision had been made regarding District participation.

Rescue Tools

Department representatives advised their hydraulic rescue tools had experienced operational issues during emergency incidents.

Commissioners encouraged immediate application for available Rescue Tool Grant funding and discussed the advantages of transitioning toward battery-powered rescue tools as existing hydraulic equipment aged.

Several recent incidents involving equipment reliability were discussed as examples supporting eventual modernization.

PPE Replacement Planning

Commissioners also discussed the department's long-term PPE replacement schedule.

Board members recommended development of an inventory tracking system documenting manufacture dates and expiration dates for all structural firefighting gear.

Such a system would allow departments to stagger future purchases and avoid simultaneous expiration of multiple sets of equipment.

Commissioners noted that maintaining accurate inventory records would improve long-term budgeting while enhancing firefighter safety.

General Budget Workshop Discussion

Throughout review of the first seven departmental budgets, Commissioners consistently emphasized several recurring themes:

- Departments should aggressively pursue grant funding before requesting District reimbursement.
- Major purchases should be supported by written quotations whenever possible.
- Cooperative purchasing between departments should be encouraged.

- Regional assets often provide greater value than duplicating expensive equipment at every station.
- Departments should continue planning for long-term replacement of PPE, apparatus tires, rescue equipment, and major capital assets.
- Workshop discussions were intended solely to assist in preparation of the District's proposed budget and should not be interpreted as approval of any individual request.

With discussion of Mount Enterprise complete, the Board proceeded to review the remaining departmental budgets.

New London Volunteer Fire Department

The Board noted that **New London Volunteer Fire Department** had not submitted a proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget despite multiple requests from District staff.

Secretary/Treasurer Gloria Dooley advised that attempts had been made to obtain the budget through both electronic mail and text messaging; however, no budget had been received prior to the workshop. Commissioners acknowledged that, without a submitted budget, the Board was unable to conduct a meaningful review of anticipated departmental needs.

Discussion noted that New London had recently been awarded a **Texas A&M Forest Service Rescue Tool Grant** during the current fiscal year. Commissioners anticipated that any District cost-share associated with that grant would likely be addressed as part of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget rather than the upcoming fiscal year.

Although no formal budget discussion could occur, Commissioners considered establishing a contingency amount within the District budget should New London later request assistance associated with its approved grant.

No action was taken.

Overton Volunteer Fire Department

Commissioners also noted that **Overton Volunteer Fire Department** had not submitted a proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget for review.

As with New London, the Board acknowledged that no meaningful discussion could occur without budget information from the department.

It was anticipated that Overton would continue receiving its regular operational funding; however, no additional capital or reimbursement requests could be evaluated during the workshop due to the absence of supporting documentation.

New Salem Volunteer Fire Department

The Board next reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget submitted by **New Salem Volunteer Fire Department**.

Training Equipment Grant

Department representatives advised they had recently received a Texas A&M Forest Service **Training Equipment Grant** and were in the process of identifying equipment to maximize the grant award.

Commissioners discussed possible purchases including laptop computers and other training-related equipment.

Department representatives confirmed that they anticipated utilizing the grant funding without requesting additional District reimbursement.

Communications

Discussion briefly addressed the department's operating expenses associated with communications equipment.

Department representatives advised that certain communication costs were currently being funded directly by the department due to operational needs unique to their response area.

Commissioners acknowledged the explanation and indicated no changes were necessary at that time.

Personal Protective Equipment

The department projected the need to purchase approximately three additional sets of structural firefighting gear during Fiscal Year 2027 due to anticipated membership growth.

Commissioners again encouraged prompt submission of PPE grant applications before relying upon District reimbursement.

Fire Suppression Blanket

The department requested consideration for purchase of an electric vehicle fire suppression blanket.

This request generated extensive discussion among Commissioners and department representatives regarding the rapidly increasing number of electric vehicle fires encountered by emergency responders.

Topics discussed included:

- Current limitations of commercially available fire blankets.
- The inability of fire blankets to permanently extinguish thermal runaway battery fires.
- Long-duration cooling requirements associated with lithium-ion battery incidents.
- Emerging national best practices for handling electric vehicle fires.
- Practical limitations facing rural volunteer departments.

Commissioners discussed reports from departments in other states utilizing specialized water application systems, portable containment devices, and shipping containers (Conex boxes) designed to immerse damaged electric vehicles.

Several participants expressed concern regarding ownership, transportation, hazardous waste disposal, and liability associated with those systems.

General consensus developed that the District should continue monitoring technological developments before making significant investments in specialized electric vehicle suppression equipment.

Commissioners also discussed the possibility of strategically placing fire suppression blankets at selected departments serving major highway corridors if future operational experience demonstrated sufficient need.

No decisions were reached.

Rusk County Rescue Unit

Previous Budget Items

During review of the proposed budget, Commissioners identified several projects that had already been funded or approved during Fiscal Year 2026.

Those items included:

- Rescue boat acquisition.
- Structural firefighting gear previously approved by the Board.

Department representatives acknowledged those items should be removed from the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 budget to avoid duplication.

Emergency Generator

The department requested consideration for installation of an emergency backup generator.

Discussion focused on anticipated installation costs, utility connections, and whether propane or natural gas would provide the most practical long-term solution.

Commissioners recognized the operational value of maintaining uninterrupted emergency communications during extended power outages and agreed the request warranted future consideration after detailed cost estimates became available.

Parking Lot Improvements

One of the department's principal capital requests involved resurfacing or replacing the station parking lot.

Department representatives explained that the existing gravel surface routinely became muddy following rainfall and created operational difficulties for emergency apparatus.

Commissioners discussed whether asphalt or reinforced concrete would provide the greatest long-term value.

Additional discussion addressed ownership of the property and the need to resolve property issues before committing substantial District funds to permanent improvements.

Board members generally agreed that concrete would likely provide the best long-term investment despite higher initial construction costs and requested updated estimates before future Board consideration.

Command Vehicle Improvements

The department also requested replacement of the command vehicle's air conditioning system and installation of a retractable awning.

Commissioners discussed various repair options, including replacement rooftop units and possible installation of a mini-split air conditioning system.

Department representatives advised the awning would improve operational efficiency during prolonged incidents and community events.

Commissioners requested additional cost information before considering the request during the budget process.

Tatum Volunteer Fire Department

Station Kitchen Renovation

The department requested consideration for renovation of the station kitchen and adjacent restroom facilities.

Department representatives explained that portions of the building were more than four decades old and required modernization.

The proposed renovation included:

- New cabinetry.
- Updated countertops.
- New flooring.
- Interior finish improvements.
- Plumbing upgrades.
- Kitchen appliances.
- Bathroom improvements.

Commissioners expressed concern that the estimated project cost appeared unrealistically low based upon the anticipated scope of work.

The Board recommended obtaining detailed contractor estimates before the project could receive meaningful consideration.

Discussion also addressed legal considerations associated with investing District funds in facilities owned by entities other than the District.

Commissioners agreed those issues would require additional review before moving forward with significant building renovations.

Rescue Equipment

The department requested additional hydraulic rescue rams to supplement its existing rescue equipment.

Department representatives explained that recent extrication incidents demonstrated operational advantages gained by having multiple rescue rams available simultaneously.

Commissioners encouraged the department to apply immediately for available Texas A&M Forest Service Rescue Tool Grant funding.

Board members also discussed the long-term benefits of eventually transitioning toward battery-powered rescue tools as older hydraulic equipment reached the end of its useful service life.

Grant Participation

Commissioners noted that Tatum had not yet submitted all available grant applications.

As discussed with previous departments, the Board strongly encouraged immediate submission of all eligible grant requests, emphasizing that grant funding remained the District's most effective method of reducing future taxpayer expenditures while improving firefighter safety.

General Budget Workshop Observations

Upon completion of the departmental budget review, Commissioners reflected on several common themes that had emerged throughout the workshop.

The Board expressed appreciation for the efforts of volunteer firefighters to identify operational needs while actively pursuing outside grant funding.

Commissioners emphasized that long-term financial planning remained essential to maintaining emergency response capabilities throughout the District.

Recurring priorities identified during the workshop included:

- Expansion of regional training opportunities.
- Continued pursuit of Texas A&M Forest Service grants.
- Planned replacement of personal protective equipment before expiration.
- Timely replacement of aging apparatus tires.
- Development of regional cascade air systems.
- Improved inventory tracking for PPE and equipment.
- Continued evaluation of electric vehicle firefighting technologies.
- Responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds while maintaining operational readiness.

With completion of the departmental budget review, the Board recessed briefly before reconvening to conduct a comprehensive review of the District's reimbursement guidelines.

DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF DISTRICT REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

Following a brief recess, Secretary/Treasurer Gloria Dooley reconvened the workshop and advised those present that the Board would conduct a comprehensive review of the District's reimbursement guidelines.

Ms. Dooley explained that the existing guidelines were originally developed in **2013** and had been amended several times over the years. As a result, portions of the document had become outdated, repetitive, and inconsistent with current District operations.

She advised that the Board's objective was to review the document line-by-line, identify needed revisions, and ultimately convert the guidelines into a formal District policy following review by legal counsel.

Commissioners agreed the guidelines should clearly define the financial responsibilities of both the volunteer departments and the District while providing flexibility for unusual circumstances.

Department Responsibilities

The Board first reviewed those expenses expected to remain the responsibility of each department. Commissioners discussed each section individually.

Routine Vehicle Maintenance

The existing guideline required departments to pay for routine vehicle maintenance up to a specified dollar amount.

After considerable discussion, Commissioners agreed the current monetary limit was no longer realistic because of increased maintenance costs.

Examples discussed included:

- Oil changes
- Fuel filters
- Air filters
- Scheduled preventive maintenance
- Commercial engine servicing

Commissioners noted that servicing a single fire engine could now exceed \$2,000.

Rather than attempting to establish an arbitrary reimbursement threshold, consensus developed that departments should remain responsible for routine maintenance regardless of cost.

The Board also agreed the language should specifically identify routine preventive maintenance rather than simply referencing "vehicle maintenance."

Apparatus Tires

One of the lengthiest discussions involved responsibility for apparatus tires.

Commissioners distinguished between:

- Large apparatus (engines and tenders)
- Smaller apparatus (brush trucks, command vehicles and support vehicles)

Board members recognized that replacement tires for large apparatus had become a significant financial burden due to escalating costs.

Several departments reported engine tires costing approximately **\$4,000 per apparatus**, while routine preventive maintenance for heavy apparatus continued to increase annually.

Commissioners also discussed National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommendations regarding tire replacement based upon age rather than tread wear.

Examples were shared of apparently serviceable tires failing solely because they had exceeded their recommended service life.

Although opinions varied regarding future funding responsibility, the general consensus was:

- Departments should continue funding routine maintenance on smaller vehicles.
- The District should continue evaluating participation in replacement of tires for major apparatus serving District-wide emergency response needs.

No final policy decision was made during the workshop.

Building Maintenance

Routine building maintenance and ordinary repairs were discussed.

Commissioners agreed departments should continue maintaining their facilities through normal operating budgets.

Examples included:

- Minor electrical repairs
- Heating and air conditioning repairs
- Water heater repairs
- Overhead door repairs
- Routine maintenance items

The Board distinguished these repairs from major capital improvements or insurance losses that might justify future District participation.

Training Expenses

Commissioners reviewed reimbursement of training expenses.

Discussion centered on the increasing cost of firefighter education, travel, lodging, and miscellaneous expenses not covered by grant funding.

The Board agreed departments should continue paying ordinary training expenses while recognizing that extraordinary training opportunities could be considered individually by the Board when appropriate.

Commissioners emphasized that successful completion of training should continue to be required before reimbursement requests would be considered.

Minor Equipment Purchases

The Board discussed reimbursement requests involving relatively inexpensive tools and equipment.

Commissioners expressed concern that departments had increasingly requested reimbursement for routine purchases despite receiving increased annual operational funding.

Examples discussed included:

- Hand tools
- Small power tools
- Ordinary station supplies
- Minor maintenance items

Several Commissioners stated that departments should reasonably be expected to purchase such items from their operating budgets rather than seeking reimbursement from the District.

Consensus developed that reimbursement requests involving relatively small expenditures should be discouraged.

Financial Stewardship Discussion

A substantial portion of the workshop involved broader discussion concerning the District's responsibility to taxpayers.

Commissioner **James "Jiffy" Dukes** noted that over the past several years the District had significantly increased annual allocations to volunteer departments while simultaneously assuming responsibility for additional operating expenses such as:

- Property insurance
- Vehicle insurance
- Workers' compensation insurance
- Radio infrastructure
- Major capital equipment

He observed that many departments had accumulated substantial financial reserves while continuing to request reimbursement for relatively minor expenditures.

Commissioners estimated that volunteer departments collectively maintained reserve balances totaling well over **one million dollars**.

Discussion emphasized that taxpayer funds should remain actively supporting emergency services rather than accumulating unnecessarily in reserve accounts.

Commissioners repeatedly stated they wished to fully support volunteer departments while also maintaining responsible stewardship of public funds.

Several department representatives acknowledged the Board's concerns and recognized the need to balance operational flexibility with fiscal responsibility.

Comparison with Other Emergency Services Districts

Commissioners discussed practices observed in other Texas Emergency Services Districts.

Board members noted that many districts with significantly larger budgets operate under far stricter reimbursement policies.

Examples included:

- Departments operating solely within approved annual budgets.
- Few, if any, reimbursement requests outside the adopted budget.
- Greater emphasis on departmental financial planning.
- District participation focused primarily on capital improvements rather than routine operating expenses.

Commissioners recognized that Rusk County ESD No. 1 operates differently because of the unusually large number of volunteer departments receiving District support.

Nevertheless, the Board agreed that some additional financial structure appeared appropriate as the District continued to grow.

Proposed Thresholds for Reimbursement Requests

Commissioners discussed establishing minimum dollar thresholds before reimbursement requests could be presented to the Board.

Several alternatives were considered.

Topics included:

- Annual cumulative spending thresholds.
- Minimum individual reimbursement amounts.
- Distinguishing ordinary operating expenses from extraordinary repairs.

After discussion, the Board generally favored discouraging reimbursement requests involving very small expenditures.

Commissioners discussed establishing a minimum reimbursement request of approximately **\$1,500**, while recognizing that emergency situations would continue to be evaluated individually.

No final action was taken.

Prior Approval Requirements

One area receiving unanimous support involved obtaining Board approval **before** major expenditures were incurred.

Commissioners explained that departments should not purchase expensive equipment and then assume reimbursement would automatically follow.

Instead, departments should:

- Obtain written quotations.
- Present the request during a Board meeting.
- Receive Board approval before obligating District funds whenever practical.

Commissioners recognized emergency repairs occasionally prevent advance approval but agreed that planned expenditures should normally receive Board authorization beforehand.

This requirement would improve budgeting while reducing misunderstandings regarding reimbursement eligibility.

Grant Maximization

The Board again emphasized that departments should aggressively pursue every grant for which they are eligible.

Commissioners expressed frustration that several departments had failed to submit applications despite being eligible for substantial grant funding.

Board members encouraged department officers to seek assistance whenever necessary and reiterated that District personnel would gladly assist departments with the application process.

The Board concluded that maximizing grant participation remained one of the most effective methods of improving firefighter safety while minimizing the financial impact upon local taxpayers.

General Consensus

Although no formal action was taken, Commissioners generally agreed that the revised reimbursement policy should:

- Clearly define departmental responsibilities.
- Require prior Board approval for major expenditures whenever practical.
- Encourage long-term financial planning.
- Promote greater consistency among departments.
- Continue supporting major capital improvements while expecting departments to fund ordinary operational expenses.
- Protect taxpayer resources without reducing emergency response capabilities.

Secretary/Treasurer Dooley advised that the proposed revisions would be incorporated into a rewritten policy document and forwarded to the District's legal counsel for review before being presented to the Board for formal consideration at a future meeting.

With no further discussion regarding the reimbursement guidelines, the workshop proceeded toward adjournment.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY, BOARD DIRECTION, AND ADJOURNMENT

Workshop Summary

Upon completion of the review of all departmental budgets and the proposed revisions to the District reimbursement guidelines, the Commissioners summarized the primary objectives that had guided the workshop discussions.

The Board emphasized that the District remains committed to providing volunteer fire departments with the equipment, facilities, training, and financial support necessary to deliver effective emergency services throughout Rusk County. Commissioners recognized the continued dedication of the volunteer firefighters and acknowledged the increasing financial challenges associated with apparatus maintenance, personal protective equipment, training requirements, inflation, and emergency response. At the same time, Commissioners reaffirmed their responsibility as elected officials to exercise sound stewardship over taxpayer funds. Throughout the workshop, the Board consistently sought to balance operational needs with long-term financial sustainability while ensuring that District resources continued to be allocated fairly among all participating departments.

Several recurring themes emerged during the workshop.

Financial Stewardship

Commissioners discussed the importance of maintaining a balance between District assistance and departmental financial responsibility.

The Board noted that over the past several years the District had substantially increased annual departmental funding while also assuming responsibility for numerous expenses previously paid by individual departments, including:

- Property insurance
- Vehicle insurance
- Workers' compensation insurance
- Radio infrastructure
- Major apparatus tires
- Various capital improvement projects
- Grant cost-share assistance

Commissioners agreed these investments had significantly strengthened emergency services throughout the District.

The Board also acknowledged, however, that departments should continue utilizing reasonable portions of their annual operating budgets and reserve funds for routine operating expenses rather than relying upon District reimbursement for every purchase.

Long-Term Capital Planning

Throughout the workshop, Commissioners emphasized the importance of planning several years into the future.

Departments were encouraged to continue identifying anticipated needs early so that major expenditures could be incorporated into future District budgets rather than addressed as emergency requests.

Examples discussed included:

- Apparatus replacement
- Structural firefighting gear replacement schedules
- Station improvements
- Generator installations
- Rescue equipment modernization
- Training facilities
- Regional cascade air systems

The Board concluded that advance planning would improve budgeting while allowing the District to better coordinate capital expenditures among all participating departments.

Grant Participation

Commissioners again stressed that available grant opportunities remain one of the District's most valuable financial resources.

Departments were encouraged to:

- Apply for every grant for which they are eligible.
- Coordinate grant-funded purchases whenever practical.
- Maximize grant awards before requesting District funding.
- Seek assistance from District personnel whenever necessary during the application process.

The Board noted that successful grant participation has enabled departments to obtain millions of dollars in equipment over recent years while minimizing the financial burden placed upon local taxpayers.

Standardization

Another recurring objective discussed throughout the workshop was greater consistency among departments.

Commissioners expressed the desire to establish reimbursement policies that apply fairly and uniformly across the District while still allowing flexibility for unusual circumstances and legitimate emergencies. The Board agreed that clearly defined policies would improve budgeting, reduce misunderstandings, and provide both Commissioners and department officers with consistent expectations regarding future reimbursement requests.

Direction to Staff

Secretary/Treasurer Gloria Dooley advised that all comments and recommendations developed during the workshop would be incorporated into revised reimbursement guidelines.

The revised document will:

- Reflect the consensus reached during workshop discussions.
- Remove outdated language.
- Eliminate duplicate provisions.
- Clarify departmental and District responsibilities.
- Be forwarded to the District's legal counsel for review.
- Return to the Board at a future properly posted meeting for formal consideration and possible adoption as official District policy.

Likewise, comments made during the departmental budget review will be incorporated into preparation of the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 District budget prior to presentation during the regular budget process.

Appreciation

Commissioners thanked the department representatives who attended the workshop and participated in the discussions.

The Board expressed appreciation for the professionalism displayed throughout the meeting and for the willingness of department officers to discuss both operational needs and financial responsibilities in an open and cooperative manner.

Commissioners also acknowledged the firefighters who participated while simultaneously attending training classes conducted at the District facility, recognizing their continued commitment to improving emergency services throughout Rusk County.

Adjournment

There being no further business scheduled for discussion, the Special Called Workshop concluded.

As previously noted throughout the meeting, **no motions were made, no votes were taken, and no official Board action occurred**, as the meeting was conducted solely as a workshop for discussion and budget development in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gloria Dooley

Secretary/Treasurer

Rusk County Emergency Services District No. 1

Approved by the Board of Commissioners on _____.

David Burks

President

Rusk County Emergency