

APPLEGATE FIRE DISTRICT

FY 2026–2027 BUDGET COMMITTEE QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

The following responses are provided to address questions submitted by the Budget Committee regarding the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget. The District appreciates the Committee’s review, feedback, and engagement throughout the budget process.

PERSONNEL SERVICES

100503: DIVISION CHIEFS

Question:

Why are the salaries for the Division Chiefs positions placed in a combined number rather than being separated out by position?

Response:

The Division Chief positions, along with the Shift Supervisor positions, have been consolidated within the budget document as part of an ongoing effort to simplify and modernize the District’s budgeting format.

In addition to simplification, these changes are intended to improve overall transparency, consistency, and clarity within the budget document. As the District’s staffing levels, operational programs, grant activity, and regional partnerships have expanded over the past several years, the budget structure has also become increasingly complex. The District has effectively outgrown the older “small district” budgeting format that had historically been utilized.

This consolidation approach is part of a broader transition toward a more scalable and standardized budget structure that better reflects the size and operational complexity of the organization while still allowing for detailed internal tracking and accountability.

Question:

What portion or percentage of the Division Chiefs and Deputy Chief salary and benefits are reimbursed/funded through Williams Fire?

Response:

Under the Shared Executive Services Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Williams Fire District, Williams Fire reimburses Applegate Fire District through a flat-rate monthly payment structure for executive leadership and administrative support services.

The reimbursement is not tied directly to specific percentages of individual employee salaries or benefits. Instead, the agreement is structured as a shared-services model that helps offset a portion of the overall executive management and administrative workload associated with providing leadership support to Williams Fire District.

The intent of the agreement is to ensure that Applegate Fire District is compensated for executive-level services provided outside the District while also creating operational efficiencies and regional collaboration opportunities between the two agencies.

100505: SEASONAL FIREFIGHTERS**Question:**

Is this an increase in number of seasonal firefighters from last year?

Response:

Yes. The proposed budget reflects an increase in seasonal firefighter staffing compared to previous years.

This increase is associated with the District's ongoing efforts to stabilize staffing levels, maintain operational coverage during fire season, support Station 51 and Station 53 staffing models, and offset the anticipated expiration of six grant-funded positions consisting of two full-time firefighters and four apprentices.

Seasonal staffing has become an important component of maintaining response capability during periods of increased wildfire activity, elevated call volume, and reduced volunteer availability during summer months.

100506: SHIFT OFFICERS**Question:**

Are there any plans in this budget year or next year's budget to hire a 4th Shift Officer for Station 1 coverage?

Response:

At this time, the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget does not include funding for a fourth Shift Officer position.

The District recognizes the operational value and long-term benefit of additional officer staffing; however, current financial conditions and competing operational priorities require the District to prioritize maintaining existing staffing stability and response capability.

The District will continue evaluating future staffing models, operational demands, and long-term financial sustainability as part of ongoing strategic planning efforts.

100510: PREVENTION & FUELS COORDINATOR**Question:**

Is the Prevention Coordinator position a grant-funded position?

Response:

For the past three years, the District has utilized grant funding to partially support a prevention-focused position. At the beginning of the FY 2023–2024 budget year, the District hired a Fire Marshal utilizing a combination of grant funding and operational funding sources. Those grant funds are scheduled to expire at the end of the current budget year on June 30, 2026.

At the same time, the District sought voter approval of the temporary five-year levy increase in November 2023. One of the intended purposes of that levy increase was to allow the District to maximize available grant opportunities while also providing a funding pathway to continue prevention and community risk reduction services beyond the expiration of the grant period.

Going forward, the District anticipates that the Prevention & Fuels Coordinator position may continue to be partially supported through grants, fuels reduction projects, and related external funding opportunities whenever available. However, the District’s long-term goal is to maintain a sustainable Community Risk Reduction and fuels management capability that is not entirely dependent upon grant funding.

The District intends to utilize a balanced funding strategy that combines grant support, project funding, and operational budget allocations where appropriate.

Question:

How would this be a new position since we previously had a Fire Marshal position?

Response:

The proposed Prevention & Fuels Coordinator position is not intended to fully replicate the previous Fire Marshal position. Rather, it represents a restructured and scaled operational model focused primarily on fuels reduction, defensible space initiatives, public education, grant coordination, and community risk reduction activities.

Following the departure of the previous Fire Marshal, the District evaluated operational priorities, financial sustainability, workforce realities, and long-term organizational needs. Through that evaluation, the District determined that a more narrowly focused and operationally scaled position would better align with the District's current needs and available funding.

Compared to the previous Fire Marshal position, the Prevention & Fuels Coordinator role is designed with reduced certification and educational requirements, a lower compensation structure, and a more targeted scope of responsibilities. The District believes this revised structure is more sustainable long-term while still preserving important prevention and fuels-management capabilities.

Additionally, the District anticipates that the revised position structure will result in a larger and more competitive applicant pool than what was experienced during recruitment for the previous Fire Marshal position.

Question:

Is this going to be a long-term contracted position?

Response:

No. The District's intent is for this to be a long-term employee position similar to the District's other employee classifications. The position is not intended to be a contracted position.

The District anticipates continuing to pursue fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation grants that may offset portions of the position's personnel and administrative costs. However, the District intends to continue funding and maintaining the position regardless of grant availability because prevention, fuels reduction, and community risk reduction activities are considered core operational priorities.

100514: VEHICLE STIPEND

Question:

Why is a vehicle stipend budgeted for the Fire Chief for use of his personal vehicle if the Fire District issues him a staff vehicle?

Response:

The Fire Chief employment agreement includes the option for either a District-issued staff vehicle or a vehicle stipend arrangement for use of a personally owned vehicle configured for District response purposes.

At the present time, the Fire Chief does not have a District-issued staff vehicle and has operated under the vehicle stipend arrangement for more than a year while utilizing a personally owned vehicle for District response, travel, meetings, and operational duties.

The stipend option was originally developed as an alternative model intended to potentially reduce District fleet ownership, replacement, fuel, insurance, maintenance, and long-term depreciation costs by shifting those responsibilities to the employee.

The budget continues to include the stipend line item because it reflects the current operational arrangement and preserves contractual and operational flexibility for future vehicle assignment decisions.

Question:

How many district vehicles are assigned to Chief/Admin staff, and what does the district spend annually on stipends, fuel, maintenance, and insurance for those vehicles?

Response:

The District currently owns and maintains six “staff” vehicles utilized for command staff, Student Firefighter Program support, training activities, inspections, meetings, emergency response, and other operational needs.

Administrative and command staff vehicle assignments are based upon operational response responsibilities, emergency callback requirements, travel demands, regional coordination responsibilities, and program support needs.

Vehicle-related expenses are budgeted and tracked collectively as part of the District’s overall fleet operations rather than by individual vehicle assignment. Fleet-related budget categories include fuel, maintenance, repairs, insurance, outfitting, and long-term replacement planning for both firefighting apparatus and staff vehicles.

Question:

With the transition from the previous Fire Marshal position, what is the planned use of the associated district vehicle?

Response:

The specific vehicle previously assigned to the Fire Marshal position, along with two additional half-ton pickup trucks, has already been approved by the Board as surplus property.

The former Fire Marshal vehicle sustained significant operational wear and tear over time, and the District determined that continued investment into the vehicle was no longer cost-effective or operationally practical. As part of ongoing fleet evaluation and replacement planning, the District elected to surplus the vehicle rather than retain it for reassignment.

100533: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION COORDINATOR

Question:

Could you expand on what services are provided by District 3?

Response:

Jackson County Fire District 3 provides regional recruitment and retention support services through a position currently funded 100% by a FEMA SAFER grant. Services provided to participating agencies include recruitment advertising, candidate outreach, applicant screening, hiring support, recruitment coordination, workforce development assistance, and regional collaboration efforts.

The position also assists with improving recruitment processes and applicant quality by helping agencies identify candidates who are a strong fit for operational expectations, professionalism standards, training capacity, and long-term workforce development goals.

This regional partnership allows smaller agencies like Applegate Fire District to leverage specialized recruitment resources and expertise that would otherwise be difficult to independently fund or maintain.

Question:

What results has the district seen from recruitment and retention spending over the past few years?

Response:

Over the past several years, the District has seen measurable improvements in recruitment capability, staffing stability, and workforce development despite continued statewide and national declines in volunteer participation within the fire service.

Historically, the District often struggled to fully fill seasonal and student firefighter positions and frequently accepted nearly all applicants in order to maintain minimum staffing needs. Today, the District regularly receives significantly more applications than available positions for several programs, allowing the organization to be more selective in identifying applicants who best align with the District’s operational expectations and organizational culture.

The District has also seen improvements in staffing consistency at Stations 51 and 53, expansion of the Student Firefighter Program, increased seasonal firefighter recruitment, stronger workforce development partnerships, and improved long-term recruitment sustainability through regional collaboration efforts.

The District believes these investments have significantly improved operational readiness, staffing reliability, and future workforce development.

MATERIALS & SERVICES

100622: OFFICE EQUIPMENT/FURNISHINGS

Question:

It says “replacing several computers,” but the budgeted amount has decreased from last year. Could additional clarification be provided regarding that difference?

Response:

The reduction reflects the fact that several larger one-time technology purchases and infrastructure upgrades were completed during prior budget years, including equipment modernization and operational technology improvements.

While the current budget still includes funding to replace several aging computers, those replacements are part of a phased technology refresh cycle rather than large-scale infrastructure or system upgrades. As a result, the overall budgeted amount is lower than previous years.

The District continues working toward a more sustainable long-term replacement cycle for technology equipment while attempting to minimize large year-to-year fluctuations in expenditures.

100623: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Question:

What are the primary reasons volunteers leave the district, and what retention strategies are being funded to address that?

Response:

Like many volunteer and combination fire agencies throughout Oregon and the nation, the District experiences volunteer turnover associated with employment demands, family obligations, relocation, time commitments, training requirements, burnout, and changing personal circumstances.

Retention strategies supported within the budget include training and professional development opportunities, improved staffing support models, recruitment and onboarding programs, recognition and morale initiatives, modernization of equipment and facilities, enhanced organizational communication and culture, Student Firefighter Program and workforce development pathways, and community engagement efforts designed to strengthen member connection and participation.

The District continues working to strengthen volunteer support systems and organizational sustainability.

100662: IMAGING & SIGNAGE

Question:

This was budgeted for \$15,000 last budget year and another \$15,000 for this budget year. Will this project be completed this budget year, or is it expected to require continued funding in future budget cycles?

Response:

The District's re-imaging and signage modernization project was intentionally designed as a 5- to 7-year phased effort due to the size of the fleet, facility needs, replacement schedules, and overall cost considerations.

The first three years of the project were intentionally structured to complete the majority of the District's primary rebranding and modernization needs, including apparatus graphics, signage updates, uniforms, public-facing materials, and organizational standardization efforts.

The FY 2026–2027 budget is expected to complete a significant portion of the remaining planned upgrades. While future budgets may still include limited maintenance and update costs, the largest phases of the modernization effort are expected to substantially decline following completion of the primary re-imaging project.

Question:

Within the 5–7-year project, what will be included in the next phase of re-imaging/branding?

Response:

The remaining phases of the District's re-imaging and branding project will primarily focus on completing consistency updates across apparatus, stations, equipment, signage, uniforms, and public-facing materials as existing items are replaced, refurbished, or updated over time. Future work may also include additional apparatus graphics, facility signage improvements, replacement of remaining legacy identification materials, and ongoing maintenance or refurbishment of worn branding elements as vehicles and equipment age through their service life.

The overall goal of the project has been to improve organizational consistency, professionalism, public recognition, safety visibility, and overall district identity throughout the organization and the communities we serve.

100670: COLLEGE/STUDENT PROGRAM

Question:

Has the student program reduced costs compared to previous staffing models when factoring in training and turnover?

Response:

Yes. The District believes the Student Firefighter Program has provided a cost-effective method of improving staffing availability, increasing station coverage, supporting emergency response capability, and developing future workforce pipelines compared to relying solely on traditional staffing models.

Over the past two decades, volunteer participation within the fire service has steadily declined nationwide, particularly in rural communities. As a result, the traditional “combination” fire district model built primarily around career and volunteer personnel has evolved significantly. Today, many modern combination agencies rely on a blended staffing model that includes paid permanent personnel, volunteers, paid seasonal firefighters, students, and apprentices in order to maintain adequate service levels and operational readiness.

A significant portion of the District’s Student Firefighter Program is currently supported through FEMA SAFER grant funding, including tuition assistance, training costs, and personal protective equipment (PPE) for participating students. This grant support has allowed the District to expand staffing capacity and workforce development opportunities at a substantially reduced cost to local taxpayers compared to adding equivalent full-time staffing positions.

While the program does require ongoing investments in training, supervision, and onboarding due to the natural turnover associated with educational programs, the District believes the operational benefits, staffing support, and long-term workforce development value significantly outweigh those challenges.

Question:

Has the district looked at the impact the rotating student staffing model has on Shift Officers and Captains from a training and day-to-day operations standpoint?

Response:

Yes. District leadership fully recognizes that student firefighter programs create additional training, mentorship, supervision, and operational management responsibilities for Shift Supervisors.

However, the District also recognizes that the modern fire service staffing environment has changed substantially over the past two decades due to the continued decline in volunteer participation nationwide. The historical combination staffing model built primarily around career and volunteer personnel has become increasingly difficult to sustain in many communities. Modern combination agencies now frequently rely upon a blended staffing approach that includes paid permanent personnel, volunteers, seasonal firefighters, students, and apprentices to maintain operational coverage and response capability.

The District views the additional supervisory and training responsibilities associated with the Student Firefighter Program as an important investment in workforce development, operational resiliency, recruitment, and long-term staffing sustainability. Much of the Student Firefighter Program’s tuition assistance, training expenses, and PPE costs are currently supported through FEMA SAFER grant funding, which helps offset the financial burden associated with developing future firefighters and emergency responders.

District leadership continues evaluating program structure, onboarding processes, staffing assignments, training expectations, and supervisory workload in an effort to balance operational efficiency with workforce development objectives. The District greatly appreciates the efforts of its Shift Supervisors in mentoring and developing future members of the fire service.

MISCELLANEOUS

Question:

Are there any major long-term projects, staffing changes, or expenses planned over the next few years that the Budget Committee should be aware of?

Response:

Several significant long-term projects and strategic initiatives are currently underway or anticipated over the coming years, including Station 51 expansion and infrastructure resilience improvements; solar power and energy-resiliency improvements associated with the training building; wildfire mitigation, fuels reduction, and defensible space initiatives; community risk reduction and prevention programs; continued staffing stabilization efforts; Student Firefighter Program and workforce development initiatives; apparatus replacement and fleet modernization planning; technology and records-management improvements; regional partnerships and intergovernmental collaboration efforts; and long-term planning associated with fluctuating grant funding and staffing sustainability.

The District will continue evaluating operational needs, funding opportunities, infrastructure requirements, and service demands as part of its ongoing strategic planning process.