



**VISTA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
Board of Directors Meeting
Minutes – April 8, 2026**

These minutes reflect the order in which items appeared on the meeting agenda and do not necessarily reflect the order in which items were considered.

BUSINESS SESSION – REGULAR AGENDA

CALL TO ORDER

President Ploetz called to order the regular meeting of the Vista Fire Protection District Board of Directors at 1:00 PM at the “Smart Space” conference room located at 450 S. Melrose Dr., Vista CA.

a. Roll Call

Directors Present: Elliott, Hill, Miller, Ploetz,

Directors Absent: None

Staff Present: Karlena Rannals, Administrative Manager; Gerard Washington, Fire Chief; and Chris Cardinale, Legal Counsel

President Ploetz announced the resignation of Robert Fougner as a Vista Fire Protection District Director representing Division B effective April 8, 2026. He called for a special meeting on Friday, April 10, 2026 @ 11:30 am.

FLAG SALUTE

Director Hill led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ORAL COMMUNICATION (PUBLIC COMMENT)

Daniel Gomez, Vista Valley Dr, Vista: he updated the board members on the Fire Safe Council of Vista (FSC) activities:

- He reported that they are working on updating the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) from the original document. They are changing the evacuation routes and ensuring that they are correct working in conjunction with the Sheriff’s office.
- The Havens Country Club is designated as a “shelter in place” location.
- They have applied for a \$25,000 grant through the California Fire Foundation. They are also seeking a grant through the San Diego Regional Fire Foundation

Chief Washington requested that the Fire Safe Council let Ms. Rannals know what grants they are applying for so there is no duplication of efforts with his staff. If assistance is requested, she will coordinate through the fire chief for the most appropriate staff member to liaison with.

He is also working with the San Diego County Fire Safe Council staff who is guiding them through the grant application process.

MOTION WAIVING READING IN FULL OF ALL RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES

MOTION BY DIRECTOR ELLIOTT, SECOND BY DIRECTOR HILL, and CARRIED 4 AYES; 0 NOES; 0 ABSENT; 0 ABSTAIN to waive reading in full of all resolutions and/or ordinances.

CONSENT CALENDAR

MOTION BY DIRECTOR ELLIOTT, SECOND BY DIRECTOR HILL, CARRIED 4 AYES; 0 NOES; 0 ABSENT; 0 ABSTAIN to approve the consent calendar as submitted:

- 1. Board of Directors Minutes – APPROVE
 - a. Regular Meeting March February 11
- 2. Payroll Register (Ratify)
 - a. Payroll paid on April 7, 2026 \$7,850.00
 - \$600.53
 - \$8,450.53
- 3. Accounts Payable (Ratify)
 - a. Accounts Payable Check 4394 through 4398 paid April 8, 2026 \$87,457.26
 - b. Auto withdrawals(s) paid February 7 – March 6, 2026 \$1,066.85
 - Total** \$88,524.11
- 4. Receive and File (Information)
 - a. Monthly Reports
 - i) Fire Chief
 - ii) Fire Marshal
 - iii) Effective Response Force Report – February 26
 - iv) Southern Operations Seasonal Weather Outlook – April – July 2026
 - v) Administrative Manager’s Report
 - vi) Correspondence
 - (1) None

DISTRICT BUSINESS

1. Resolution 2026-01

Ms. Rannals summarized the staff report provided. She noted that the Fire District Law is very specific on the process to follow when a board vacancy occurs. In particular, since Divisions were created, that ability to post in three conspicuous places is a challenge in areas that are primarily residential. Working with legal counsel, we developed the resolution that meets the intent of the law and offers transparency. The process includes posting a notice in the paper twice, posting it to the District’s website, and posting it on the public access door of the two closest fire stations to the Division that is vacant. In addition, this resolution would be reviewed every two years to ensure that the process is still appropriate. Staff responded to questions from the board.

MOTION BY DIRECTOR MILLER, SECOND BY DIRECTOR ELLIOTT, and ADOPTED Resolution No. 2026-01 *entitled* A Resolution of the Vista Fire Protection District Establishing Procedures for Appointment to a Board Vacancy Pursuant to California Government Code Section 1780. on the following roll call vote:

- AYES: Elliott, Hill, Miller, Ploetz
- NOES: None
- ABSENT: None
- ABSTAIN: None

ORAL REPORT(S)

1. Fire Chief

In addition to his report, the following information was discussed:

- *Reading Rockets:* Vista Fire Rescue is participating in the Reading Rockets that is starting to gain traction in the local schools. Reading Rockets is a national public media literacy initiative offering free, research-based information and resources on how young kids learn to read. He participated earlier in the day, reading to first graders. A program has been built for second graders starting in the fall. Readers will vary and consist of on duty firefighters, inspectors, and others within the organization.
- *Fire Department Coffee Club:* He was approached last fall to profile Vista Fire Rescue for the month of April. For every coffee bag sold, VFR will receive \$2 and every t-shirt sold, VFR will receive \$5.
- *San Diego Regional Fire Foundation:* he distributed a card noting that there is an opportunity for citizens to support VFR and make a tax-deductible contribution. He has applied for decontamination equipment for each station to support health and wellness. This foundation has also supported the *Ignite Your Potential* program.
- *Organizational Change:* VFR has several vacancies as a result of open positions and retirement. He has the support of the City Manager and Human Resources to reorganize which he plans for the new fiscal year. He will provide details as soon as they become available.

2. Administrative Manager

In addition to her report, she added:

- Please submit your RSVP to the Grand Opening on April 27. This event is not open to the public as the public will be invited in the fall during fire prevention week/month.
- She will be out of the office April 13 – 20. She will be available via email and cell.

3. Legal

- He continues to work with the City of Vista City Attorney's office to develop a Facility Use Agreement. He anticipates having a draft agreement for board review at the next meeting.
- He will participate remotely at the special meeting scheduled for April 10.

4. Board of Directors

- Miller:

He inquired as to what the board needs to do to be informed on new projects that are being planned in the District. Ms. Rannals has been in conversations with the Chief to receive the information in a timelier manner. She will also research how to get added to the notice distribution from the County of San Diego.

He also discussed the importance of proactively addressing vegetation management and wildfire preparedness, particularly along critical evacuation routes such as Gopher Canyon Road and Buena Creek Road. Members emphasized that while the Xylo evacuation analysis has not yet begun and is likely still several weeks away, the District already knows these corridors are high-priority areas due to the volume of residents who rely on them during emergencies.

Board members expressed concern that the District must ensure it is using every available tool to mitigate wildfire risk before the summer and fall fire season. This includes enhanced inspections, proactive code enforcement, vegetation management enforcement, and targeted deployment of available resources. There was consensus that waiting for future studies should not delay reasonable action in known problem areas.

The Fire Chief’s workforce development initiative was discussed as a promising long-term solution. The concept would involve local youth, potentially in partnership with the school district and the California Conservation Corps (CCC), performing vegetation management and related mitigation work within the City and District boundaries. Board members noted this approach could provide a cost-effective alternative to higher-priced contractors while also creating career pathways for local young people.

Several members voiced strong support for the Chief’s efforts, recognizing he has encountered administrative, legal, human resources, and labor-related challenges while developing the program. Nonetheless, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to removing barriers and supporting initiatives that improve public safety.

Concerns were also raised regarding public perception when residents observe vegetation along evacuation routes that appears noncompliant with District standards. Members noted the importance of ensuring inspections, notices, abatements, and visible mitigation efforts are occurring, so the community understands action is being taken.

Board members acknowledged that some progress is already visible, with areas being cleared that had not been maintained for decades. However, they also recognized that many locations involve longstanding neglect and complex issues, such as large eucalyptus trees on private property that may require specialized resources and partnerships to address safely.

The Board concluded that vegetation management, workforce development, and the forthcoming Xylo analysis must work together as an integrated strategy. Members expressed confidence that the District is moving in the right direction and encouraged continued urgency, so the community is better prepared before peak fire season.

- Ploetz: At the conclusion of the meeting, he shared the recognition prepared for Director Fougner in recognition of his 20 years of dedicated service—and all of the work he contributed regarding the contract and many other matters—we felt his efforts deserved to be acknowledged.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEM(s)

No additional items were added to the list.

ADJOURNMENT

President Ploetz adjourned the meeting at 1:48 pm.


Karlana Rannals
Board Clerk


John Ploetz
President