

# **HIGHLAND RESCUE TEAM AMBULANCE DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES**

Highland Station  
317 South Lookout Mountain Road  
July 15, 2025  
2:30 p.m.

## **CALL TO ORDER**

President McCarthy called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

## **PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

Director Garlasco moved to approve the June 2025 meeting minutes. Director Jones seconded. Unanimously approved.

## **ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT (Laura Cardon)**

### *June Medical Billing Report*

The district billed \$47,134 for 31 transports in June, which is higher than June 2024 (25 transports billed \$38,387). \$22,134 in payments was received in June 2025. \$1,792 was written off to collections, which was the second month in a row with write offs being less than \$2,000. The outstanding balance for bills did increase to \$111,407.

Year to date, payments have increased and the outstanding balance continues to decrease. This indicates more efficient billing practices and may be a result of more engagement from the district with the billing company.

Medicare patients make up the highest proportion of Highland's patients year to date at 47% of patients. Systems Design West (SDW), the district's medical billing company, did warn of revenue decreases for Medicare payments due to changes at the federal level. SDW provided the district with a calculator to predict revenue changes, and the district would see a less than one percent decrease in payments in 2025.

Days in accounts receivable increased significantly to 93 days year to date. SDW researched outstanding bills to ensure no abnormalities were contributing to the increase. No billing abnormalities were found and all outstanding bills were being processed through insurance normally.

Director Kasinec commented that days in accounts receivable can fluctuate for a variety of reasons, both positive and negative, and he was unconcerned with this variation.

In June, the board requested more information about the collections settlement campaign performance. As Ms. Cardon reported, the collections company (BC Services) predicted \$5,000 could be recovered from a settlement campaign. \$1,700 has actually been recovered more than halfway through the campaign. When Ms. Cardon asked BC Services why the recovered funds were lower than predicted, BC Services responded that most of the district's accounts do not have email addresses attached to them. Patients tend to respond better to email communication versus physical mail.

Ms. Cardon added she did not know whether the district's billing company currently collected email addresses with bills. Chief Fager added that email addresses are part of the hospital's report that the billing company should have access to. The board asked Ms. Cardon to ensure the billing company is collecting this information going forward and that it was sent to the collections company as well.

Additionally, President McCarthy requested that email addresses be matched with collections accounts retroactively as possible.

#### *Legislative Update from the Colorado Special District Association*

Ms. Cardon recently attended a workshop with the Colorado Special District Association (SDA) where a state legislative update was given. There was no additional legislation passed concerning property taxes. House Bill 25-1088 was unfortunately vetoed by Governor Polis, but the SDA predicted it would be back in the next legislative session.

#### *2025 Community Open House*

The 2025 Highland Community Open House will be held August 9, 2025 from 11 am - 2 pm at the district's station. Following the 2024 open house, the board requested more marketing activity to improve community attendance.

Ms. Cardon reported that more than 1,200 people attended Foothills Fire Department's recent pancake breakfast, and she met with Foothills Auxiliary President Ronda Cameron to learn more about their marketing efforts.

Based on Mrs. Cameron's recommendations, Ms. Cardon has worked with Deputy Chief Brown to purchase additional banners to advertise around the district; organized additional vendors like a dog adoption event and face painters; printed significantly more flyers and will work with crews on shift to display them in local businesses; and worked with the district Public Information Officer to increase Facebook advertising.

President McCarthy asked whether Foothills also benefitted from having more in-district members that promote the event, as well as whether the different time of day impacted Highland's event negatively.

Chief Fager responded that the event time and date have both been extensively discussed, and different options have been tried without more success. Chief Fager acknowledged that Foothills does have significantly more in-district members, which could help promote the event.

Assistant Chief Telgener added that Mrs. Cameron is "a force" and that the Auxiliary begins planning the event nearly a year in advance.

Chief Fager added that the Foothills event is also primarily marketed as a fundraiser, which could impact attendance as well. Deputy Chief Brown asked the group whether philosophically the Highland event was a fundraiser or a community event.

The board agreed that the Highland event should, for now, remain a free community event. Director Garlasco added that Foothills' marketing efforts do seem much more visible.

The board offered additional advice on the best areas to hang banners and flyers, as well as local homeowner associations (HOAs) and newsletters to promote the event to.

### **FINANCIAL REPORT (Christina Jantzef)**

#### *June Financial Memo*

Medical bill payments are below budget year-to-date. However, property tax income is at 73% of budget, putting the district's total revenue at 53% of budget as of June 2025.

Total expenses are just below target, at 47% of the budget. Operating expenses are below target. Safety and training expenses are above target due to timing. Additional expenses will be offset by grant income which has not yet been received, including a scholarship for Ms. Cardon to attend the SDA conference; grant funds for the district's whole blood program; and the Colorado Resource for Emergency And Trauma Education (CREATE) program will ultimately offset the district's attendance of Emergency Medical Services Association of Colorado's conference.

#### *2024 Audit*

Ms. Jantzef expressed her dissatisfaction with the auditor performing the district's annual audit for 2024 financials. The 2024 report is due to the state in 16 days, but the auditor has yet to complete even a draft report.

Ms. Jantzeff asked the board to appoint Director Kasinec to approve the final audit report on behalf of the district, assuming there are no unexpected findings, so it can be submitted to the state on time without calling an additional board meeting.

Director Kasinec asked if both he and President McCarthy could be authorized to review it and approve the final audit. Ms Jantzeff said yes.

President McCarthy asked for a motion to approve Director Kasinec and President McCarthy reviewing and approving the final audit report without a meeting of the full district board. Director Garlasco made the motion. President McCarthy seconded the motion. Unanimously approved.

Ms. Jantzeff told the board they would still receive the draft copy as soon as she had it. She reiterated that the delay is due to the auditing company, not because of any issues with the district's financials. Ms. Jantzeff scheduled all meetings early in the process and provided all requested information in a timely manner.

Director Kasinec asked Ms. Jantzeff to provide feedback on this performance to the company.

Chief Fager asked if there was a deadline on the contract with the auditing company. Ms. Jantzeff said yes and added that if the state deadline is missed, the auditors must address the state on the district's behalf to request an extension.

Chief Fager asked that the next contract explicitly define financial consequences for delivering a draft report later than May 1, 2026. Ms. Jantzeff agreed and said she would be requesting a different individual auditor for 2026.

Director McCarthy asked if there have been other performance issues with the current auditor. Ms. Jantzeff responded that the auditor is new to working with the district, but not new to the auditing firm.

### **CHIEF'S REPORT (Chief Bob Fager)**

Year to date, the district has received 374 calls for help and transported 168 patients. This puts the district on track for a slightly slower year. However, summer is the district's busiest season and typically results in more calls through August.

#### *Staffing Update*

One probationary member has been terminated due to performance. One EMT has become a paramedic and is in the process of clearing as an ALS provider.

#### *Whole Blood Program Update*

The district received a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration grant totaling just over \$14,000 to support the launch of a prehospital whole blood program. The funding will cover essential equipment and provide enough supplies to get the program up and running. The grant also comes with an agreement with St. Anthony Hospital to accept any unused blood back before it expires to be used in the hospital, so no blood is wasted.

The district is targeting a go-live date of November 1, 2025. Chief Fager remarked this program will save lives in our district and is a big deal for Highland.

The district will be one of the first 300 agencies in the country and the sixth in the state of Colorado. Director Kasinec commended Chief Fager and the district's work.

Chief Fager continued that a big reason the district got the grant was because of the district's prime location on Interstate 70 to rendezvous with other mountain agencies coming east to the hospital. The benefits of the program will reach far beyond the district's boundaries.

Whole blood is particularly important for patients who are losing a lot of blood because it replaces all parts of blood, including clotting factors. Currently, EMS providers can only replace blood with saline, which is not the same. Saline dilutes those clotting factors and reduces overall blood in the body.

President McCarthy asked how long the district has been working toward this. Chief Fager answered it's been a years-long process. The board expressed excitement about the arrival of whole blood and commended the district's dedication to securing this critical resource.

#### *Radio Grant Update*

The district was notified it has received the Emergency Medical and Trauma Services Branch grant from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The grant is for approximately \$40,000 to support the purchase of new multi-band portable radios. The grant was 50% matching grant. With this funding, the district expects to purchase 25 new radios.

The district's radios have been used and repaired for years and are beginning to fail. The new radios will replace these aging units as well as allow crews to carry just one radio that is programmed for multiple frequencies. Currently, crews must carry two radios on every call to communicate effectively with neighboring agencies.

#### *Multi-District Consolidation*

For years, the surrounding EMS and fire districts have discussed merging districts without any actionable outcomes. Talks have renewed between Evergreen Fire Protection District, Foothills Fire Protection District, and Genesee Fire Protection District. Because Evergreen

provides EMS services as well as fire services, Highland has become part of the merger discussion since it provides EMS services in Foothills and Genesee's districts.

Chief Fager reiterated that any material decision will be years away. The chiefs of all four districts agree that it's a good idea to budget for a feasibility study. The districts discussing consolidation will commission a study to evaluate the financial feasibility of consolidation versus the districts staying independent.

Each district would pay for their portion of the study based on their respective tax revenue. Chief Fager said the most valuable outcome is information about how to consolidate and potential benefits of doing so. However, the decision is ultimately up to the board.

Director Kasinec asked where the renewed conversations originated. Chief Fager responded that the previous Foothills chief was very vocal about consolidating, but could not come to an agreement with Genesee. Discussions were renewed when Genesee did not have a chief. That chief moved to Evergreen's department, and called together all the district chiefs most recently to renew consolidation discussions.

Assistant Chief Telgener added that volunteerism for the other districts is very different from Highland. Highland is delaying its next membership class because the district is so fully staffed, while the other districts are scrambling for more volunteers.

Director Cooper asked which other districts provide EMS. Deputy Chief Brown responded that Highland is the only standalone EMS service. Chief Fager added that Evergreen also provides EMS as a fire-based service. In order for Genesee and Foothills to merge with Evergreen, Highland has to be included. If only Genesee and Foothills were to merge, the discussion would not involve Highland.

Director Kasinec asked about the financial status of the other districts. Chief Fager responded that is a primary outcome of a feasibility study.

Director Garlasco asked Chief Fager to provide the feasibility study from the Highway 285 corridor of districts that recently merged for the board's reference. Director Garlasco expressed concern over the differences in culture between the departments, and that Highland builds financial reserves much more aggressively than the other districts. Director Kasinec, Deputy Chief Brown, and Chief Fager acknowledged their agreement with these concerns.

Chief Fager reiterated that ultimately, the district needs to do what's right for its community. Ideally, Highland could scale up what the district does well separately from the fire agencies.

President McCarthy asked if there was a chief for EMS and fire at Evergreen. Chief Fager responded that there is a district chief as well as a fire chief and EMS chief. Evergreen's EMS program also depends more on paid employees.

President McCarthy asked to confirm any potential consolidation was on a five year timeline. Assistant Chief Telgener answered that the other districts would like to move more quickly, that five years is more realistic.

Director Kasinec added the district should think through the what and how of scaling and potentially merging regardless of timeline.

Director Garlasco expressed that Highland should communicate staffing and patient care best practices that must be implemented alongside any feasibility study findings.

Chief Fager clarified that the Highland district board must vote for any merger for it to happen. The board can also decide to take the question to the voters.

Chief Fager continued that If the board votes for consolidation, the board would vote for one of two options. The first is creating a fire authority. All the districts delegate to one authority that gets all the income, and each individual district essentially becomes a pass-through. This is a reversible option. The second option is to consolidate and become one new district. Each individual district dissolves and the new district must adopt the lowest mill levy, unless it goes to a vote of the people. Highland's mill levy is 3.5 mills, which is less than half of the other districts. Fire departments can't operate on that low of a mill levy, so the matter would go to a vote of the people to adopt a feasible mill levy for the new, consolidated district. .

The board agreed that the district owes it to the constituents to participate and pay for the feasibility study. Director Gralasco emphasized that at the end of the day, the board vote will be for the best care of the community for both fire and EMS.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

*Facility Update (Deputy Chief Brown, Director Garlasco)*

Mount Vernon has made some minor changes to the septic easement document that have been reviewed by the district's attorney. The district's attorney made some minor, final changes for the board to review. President McCarthy said the changes were very minor and recommended the district should move forward with the Mount Vernon agreement as-is in a show of good partnership.

Director Kasinec confirmed that the changes were inconsequential. President McCarthy confirmed that the changes concerned Mount Vernon keeping control over ecological management for the land parcel and maintaining control over a fenceline currently

containing horses. The district's attorney amended the indemnity obligation, but the attorney hadn't originally included it in the district's first draft, so it was not critical.

Director Garlasco stated that the second review by our attorney was only to make sure there were no significant issues and that the board felt confident going forward.

Director Garlasco made a motion to approve the terms of the easement agreement as provided by Mount Vernon and without the second review changes from the district's attorney. Director Cooper seconded the motion.. Unanimously approved.

The board commended Deputy Chief Brown for a job well done.

Deputy Chief Brown asked the board if potential merger discussions should delay moving forward with other project plans for the station. The board responded that there was no need to delay the project.

Chief Fager added more will be known about any potential merger before getting very far into the project. Even if the districts do consolidate, the current station is ideally situated to continue future services out of this location.

President McCarthy agreed with continuing on in this direction due to the phased approach of the project.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There is no public comment.

#### **ADJOURN**

President McCarthy moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:17 p.m. Director Jones seconded. Unanimously approved.