

# MONTECITO FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

## Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors

Held at Montecito Fire Protection District, 595 San Ysidro Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93108 on March 23, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Director van Duinwyk called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

**Present:** Director van Duinwyk, Director Lee, Director Easton, Director Pennino, Director Copus. Chief Neels and District Counsel Mark Manion were also present.

- 1. Public comment: Any person may address the Board at this time on any non-agenda matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Montecito Fire Protection District. (30 minutes total time allotted for this discussion.)**

There were no public comments at this meeting.

- 2. Candidate Interviews for Appointment of the New Director.**

Chief Neels provided a staff report regarding the Board vacancy and requested that the minutes reflect the Affidavit of Posting/Notice of Vacancy in Office is on file with District records.

- a. Chris Albertson
- b. Jason Copus
- c. Jenelle Williams

The Board of Directors interviewed Mr. Albertson, Mr. Copus, and Ms. Williams. Director van Duinwyk called for public comment. Stephen Dougherty, former Board, provided a comment in support of Jason Copus.

- 3. Appointment of the New Director.**

After careful consideration, the motion to appoint Jason Copus as a Board Director made by Easton, seconded by Director van Duinwyk and unanimously passed.

- 4. Administer the Oath of Office to the New Director.**

Administrative Assistant Godlis administered the Oath of Office to Jason Copus. The Board took a break at 2:45 p.m. The Board reconvened at 2:55 p.m.

- 5. Appointment of Finance Committee member for the remainder of 2026. (Strategic Plan Goal 8)**

Director Lee nominated Director Pennino as a Finance Committee member, seconded by Director Easton. There were no further nominations and unanimously passed.

- 6. Receive a presentation from Jeff Small of Capitol PFG regarding the District's pension and OPEB funding strategy; consider approval of a \$7 million discretionary payment to CalPERS, consisting of \$3.5 million from the General Fund and \$3.5 million from the District's PARS Pension Trust; and consider approval of the recommended OPEB funding plan. (Strategic Plan Goal 8)**

Fire Chief Neels introduced Jeff Small from Capitol PFG. Mr. Small presented the District's pension and OPEB funding strategy to the Board. The Board received and filed the report.

Motion to approve the \$7 million discretionary payment to CalPERS, consisting of \$3.5 million from the General Fund and \$3.5 million from the District's PARS Pension Trust and the recommended OPEB funding plan made by Director Pennino, seconded by Director Easton, and unanimously passed.

Motion to approve an OPEB funding strategy of \$1.5 million annually for three years, beginning in Fiscal Year 2026-27, made by Director Lee, seconded by Director Easton, and unanimously passed.

**7. Presentation regarding Long-Term Financial Outlook. (Strategic Plan Goal 8)**

Fire Chief Neels presented the Long-Term Financial Outlook to the Board. The Board requested Finance and Administrative Manager Nahas to present the Long-Term forecast at the April Board meeting to address their questions. The Board received and filed the report.

**8. Consider the request from a Board member to attend the 2026 California Special Districts Association Leadership Academy Conference. (Strategic Plan Goal 8)**

Motion to approve the request for two Board members to attend the 2026 California Special Districts Association Leadership Academy Conference made by Director Lee, seconded by Director Pennino, and unanimously passed.

**9. Approval of Minutes of the February 23, 2026 Regular Meeting.**

Motion to approve the minutes of the February 23, 2026 Regular meeting made by Director Lee, seconded by Director Easton, and motion carried. Director Copus abstained from the vote.

**10. Fire Chief's report.**

Fire Chief Neels provided an update on recent fire prevention and mitigation efforts, including the Neighborhood Chipping and the Annual Weed Abatement Programs. Crews have completed maintenance on fire roads in the district, including Hot Springs Fire Road and Romero Canyon Fire Road. The Department continues to coordinate with the Forest Service, Trails Foundation, and Edison on the fire roads projects. Staff are also working with the Forest Service and law enforcement partners to address issues related to trash accumulation and reports of harassment along the Hot Springs Trail.

Fire Chief Neels shared updates regarding the California Fair Plan and ongoing efforts related to the Fire Risk Reduction Community designation. The District is planning to apply for a Fire Risk Reduction Community grant in 2027. Montecito remains a recognized Firewise Community, organized into north and south zones. The District has received feedback from residents noting potential insurance cost savings associated with the community's Firewise designation.

**11. Board of Director's report.**

There were none to report.

**12. Suggestions from Directors for items other than regular agenda items to be included for the April 27, 2026 Regular Board meeting.**

There were none to report.

The Board adjourned to closed session at 4:25 p.m.

**13. CLOSED SESSION:**

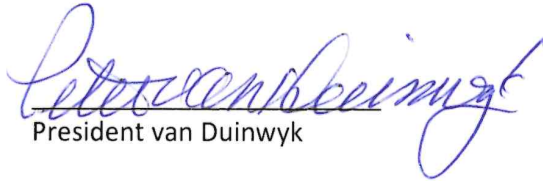
- a. **CONFERENCE WITH LABOR NEGOTIATORS (Government Code section 54957.6)**  
**Agency designated representatives: Director Lee and Director Pennino**  
**Unrepresented employee: Fire Chief**

The Board reported out of closed session at 4:45 p.m. with no reportable action.

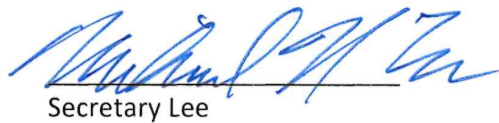
- 14. That the Board appoint Brian Fallon as the Fire Chief and that the Board approve and authorize the Board President to execute the Fire Chief Employment Agreement between the Montecito Fire Protection District and Brian Fallon. (Strategic Plan Goals 1-8)**

Motion to appoint Brian Fallon as the Fire Chief and authorize the Board President to execute the Fire Chief Employment Agreement between the Montecito Fire Protection District and Brian Fallon made by Director van Duinwyk, seconded by Director Easton, and unanimously passed.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:47 p.m.



\_\_\_\_\_  
President van Duinwyk



\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary Lee