

**FINAL COPY**  
**Torrance County Board of Commissioners**  
**Regular Commission Meeting**  
**March 11, 2026 9:00 AM**

Commissioners Present:

**RYAN SCHWEBACH – COUNTY CHAIRMAN**  
**KEVIN MCCALL- COUNTY VICE-CHAIR**  
**LINDA JARAMILLO – COUNTY COMMISSIONER**

Others Present:

**JORDAN BARELA-COUNTY MANAGER**  
**MICHELE JONES-DEPUTY COUNTY MANAGER**  
**MICHAEL GARCIA- COUNTY ATTORNEY**  
**SYLVIA CHAVEZ-COUNTY CLERK**  
**SENAIDA ANAYA- CHIEF DEPUTY CLERK**  
**DON GOEN – PLANNING & ZONING DIRECTOR**

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1. **Call to Order:** Chairman Schwebach called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM

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2. **Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation:** Pledge led by Chairman Schwebach, Commissioner Jaramillo said Invocation.

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3. **Changes to the Agenda:** NO CHANGES

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4. **Public Comment:**

**None In Person**

**None by Zoom**

**5. Approval of Minutes:**

- a. Commission: Request approval of February 25, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes of the Board of County Commissioners.**

**Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commission McCall seconded.

- Roll Call Vote:
    - Schwebach – Abstain
    - McCall – Yes
    - Jaramillo – Yes
    - **Motion Carried**
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**6. Consent Agenda**

- a. Finance: Request Approval of Payables with the date range of February 19, 2026 through March 4, 2026.**

**Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commission McCall seconded.

- Roll Call Vote:
    - Schwebach – Yes
    - McCall – Yes
    - Jaramillo – Yes
    - **Motion Carried**
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**Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commission McCall seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

## **7. Adoption of Resolution:**

**a. Manager: Request Approval of Resolution No. 2026-09. A Resolution Authorizing Project SAP 25-J2477-GF and The Assignment of Authorized Officers and Agents.**

### **Manager Barela**

- Purpose of the Resolution
  - The resolution is primarily procedural/administrative.
  - It ensures compliance with requirements from the New Mexico Economic Development Department (NMED) regarding a previously approved grant.
- Background of the Grant
  - At a prior Commission meeting, the Commission approved a grant agreement for \$250,000.
  - The funding will support planning, design, and construction of water storage systems at the McIntosh Fire Station in Torrance County.
  - The grant funding and agreement have already been accepted.
- Additional Requirement from NMED
  - NMED requires a formal resolution from the County.
  - The resolution must designate specific County officials as “authorized officials.”
- Role of Authorized Officials
  - These officials will be empowered to:
    - Execute the grant agreement
    - Handle funding obligations
    - Sign financial and legal documentation
    - Manage paperwork related to the project implementation

**Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commission McCall seconded.

- Roll Call Vote:
  - McCall – Yes
  - Schwebach – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**

- b. **ROADS:** Request Approval of Resolution No. 2026-10, A Resolution Adopting the Annual Certified Maintained Road Mileage for 2026.

**Leonard Lujan – Road Department**

- Addressed the County Commission and County Manager regarding a routine annual submission to the state.
- Explained that the item is procedural and done each year.
- The department is preparing paperwork to send to the state, and it requires Commission signatures before submission.
- Noted that:
  - The process is the same as in previous years.
  - One element has not yet been added - the maintenance “instances” or related details are still being finalized.
  - Once that portion is determined, future submissions may change slightly.

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Discussion: Road Maintenance Responsibility Issue

- Leonard Lujan reported no update or movement regarding the acceptance or denial of who will maintain roads easements.
- He described the situation as “radio silence” from the relevant parties.

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Response from County Administration

**County Manager**

- Addressed Mr. Chair and Commissioners regarding the same issue.
- Reported discussions that occurred through New Mexico Counties.
  - The organization is planning a stakeholder meeting.
  - The meeting will include multiple counties across New Mexico.
  - The goal is to discuss how the easement maintenance issue is affecting counties statewide.
  - Preliminary conversations have already taken place, but:
    - No official meeting invitation has been sent yet.

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**Commissioner Comments:**

**Commissioner Jaramillo**

- Shared a recent field visit with Road Department Superintendent Leonard Lujan.
- The visit took place earlier in the week (Monday) and included touring multiple roads within the district.
- Purpose of the visit:
  - To review roads selected for maintenance and funding requests.
- Observations and comments:

- Learned how road maintenance decisions are made.
- Gained insight into the challenges of maintaining a large number of county roads.
- Expressed appreciation for the work and efforts of the Road Department.

**Motion:** Commissioner McCall motions to approve. Chairman Schwebach seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

## **8. APPROVALS/ACTION ITEM**

**a. CLERK:** Request Approval to Transition Precincts 11 and 12 to All-Mail Voting.

**Sylvia Chavez – Torrance County Clerk**

- Presented a proposal to the County Commission to convert the Encino and Duran precincts to all-mail ballot precincts.
- Explained that the issue has been discussed previously with the Commission and is being brought forward due to operational and staffing challenges.

Reasons for the Proposal

- Shortage of Precinct Workers
  - Workers are becoming harder to find, especially in rural communities.
  - Many existing workers are aging and reluctant to work 12-hour election days.
  - In Encino, it is increasingly difficult to find at least three workers required for Election Day.
  - One reliable worker often runs for local office, making them ineligible to serve as a precinct worker.
- Travel and Logistics Challenges
  - Workers traveling from other areas would need to leave home around 5:00 AM or earlier to arrive by 6:00 AM setup time.
  - Standby workers often decline assignments in Encino or Duran because of travel time and distance.
- Declining Participation of Existing Workers

- Longtime workers in Duran have indicated they no longer want to serve as precinct workers.
  - Election Controversy Impact
    - Commissioner Jaramillo noted that since around 2016, controversy around elections discouraged some workers from participating, leading to a steady decline in available staff.
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#### Voter and Cost Data Presented

- Precinct 11 (Duran):
    - 105 registered voters
  - Precinct 12 (Encino):
    - 95 registered voters
  - Typical turnout:
    - Approximately 45 voters in many elections.
    - In some local elections, as few as 10 voters participated.
  - Cost Comparison
    - Traditional polling location operations cost close to \$11,000 for Election Day.
    - Converting to all-mail precincts would save approximately \$13,700.
    - Per-vote cost comparison:
      - \$71 per vote with traditional polling locations.
      - \$2.50 per vote with all-mail ballots.
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#### Voter Access and Outreach Plan

Clerk Chavez emphasized that the Clerk's Office will conduct outreach to ensure voters remain informed and able to participate:

- Provide community education about the mail ballot process.
- Attend village meetings in Encino to explain the changes.
- Verify correct mailing addresses for voters.

- Offer satellite office support for voter registration updates.
  - Consider sending staff, voting technicians, or precinct workers to communities to help collect ballots if needed.
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#### Current Mail Election Experience

- The county is currently conducting an all-mail election for the Estancia Municipal School District.
- Ballots mailed: ~2,700
- Ballots returned due to bad addresses: 359
- Another election in the Corona area:
  - 68 ballots mailed
  - 5 returned for incorrect addresses

Clerk Chavez noted this is a learning curve and reinforced the need for address verification outreach.

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#### Voting Options Under an All-Mail Precinct

- Voters would automatically receive a ballot by mail.
  - If a voter wants to vote in person:
    - They can complete an affidavit of non-receipt if they did not receive their ballot.
    - They may then vote at a convenience center polling location.
  - Data shows many voters in Encino and Duran already use early voting or absentee ballots, indicating familiarity with the process.
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#### Legal Authority and Approval Process

- Clerk Chavez confirmed the change follows New Mexico state statute.
- However, the change must be approved by the County Commission because it affects their constituents in Torrance County.
- She brought the proposal to the Commission before final steps with the Secretary of State's Office to gauge support.

## Commission Discussion

- Commissioners acknowledged financial savings and operational efficiency.
- Commissioners also noted that many voters in those precincts already use mail voting, suggesting the transition may be manageable.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

### Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

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- b. **MANAGER:** Request Approval to Submit Congressionally Directed Spending Letters of Interest to U.S. Senator, Martin Heinrich’s Office, for the Emergency Operations Center Project to be Located at 2807 U.S. Hwy 66, Moriarty, NM 87035.

### **Manager Barela – County Manager**

Addressed the County Commission regarding a request to submit a project for federal Congressionally Directed Spending.

#### Explanation of Congressionally Directed Spending

- Also known as Community Project Funding on the House side.
  - Federal representatives receive allocated funds in the federal appropriations (omnibus) bill to support projects in their districts.
  - Local governments, including counties, may submit letters of interest and project proposals to their federal representatives for consideration.
- Federal Representatives Contacted
- Discussions were held with:
    - \*\*Martin Heinrich – U.S. Senator for New Mexico
    - Melanie Stansbury – U.S. Representative
  - Both offices indicated interest in funding projects within Torrance County this year.

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### Proposed Project

#### Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Project

- Planned at the “Red Building” in Moriarty.
- The EOC project was previously identified as one of the Commission’s top four capital projects submitted to the state legislature.

### Project Development Status

- Currently in the programming phase with Studio Southwest Architects.
- The firm is finalizing programming details and a cost estimate.
- Programming is expected to be completed within approximately 30 days.

### Facility Concept

- Interior build-out of the existing building.
  - Proposed functions include:
    - Emergency Management offices
    - Sheriff's Office vehicle processing area
    - Public safety training room
    - Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operations room
  - Potential additional features could include:
    - Security upgrades
    - Lighting and parking improvements
    - Storage areas or mezzanine space.
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### Funding Request Details

- Typical federal project funding target: ~\$1 million.
- Federal representatives often select 15–20 projects statewide each year.
- **Manager Barela** explained that:
  - A \$1 million award could fund full design and approximately 75% of construction.
  - Final project scope could be adjusted to match available funding.

### Timeline for Federal Funding

**Manager Barela** outlined the federal process:

1. County submits Letter of Interest to federal representatives.
  2. Representatives shortlist projects they support.
  3. Projects move to the House or Senate Appropriations Committee.
  4. If approved, they are included in the federal appropriations/omnibus bill.
  5. Funding is then distributed through existing federal programs (e.g., HUD or other agencies).
- The process may take 12–18 months before funds become available.
  - Estimated timeline for this cycle: around October 2026, depending on federal budget negotiations.
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### Additional Submission

- Due to a deadline from Rep. Stansbury's office, the County submitted a preliminary letter of interest last Friday to avoid missing the opportunity.

- Submitting the same project to both the House and Senate increases the chances of funding and may allow combined funding (e.g., \$500k from each office).
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#### Commissioner Questions

- **Commissioner Jaramillo** asked about:
  - Total project cost
  - Whether \$1 million would fully fund the project
  - The status of the building and design plans
- **Manager Barela** clarified:
  - The building is an existing metal structure.
  - The project currently involves interior development rather than new construction.
  - The conceptual layout included in the meeting packet is not a final design.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

#### Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
  - McCall – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**
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- c. **JUVENILE JUSTICE:** Request Approval of a Budget Adjustment for the New Mexico Department of Children, Youth and Families Juvenile Justice Program to Decrease Funding for the Boys Council Program by \$16,600.00 and to Increase Funding for the Girls Circle Program by \$16,600.00

#### **Rebecca Armstrong – Coordinator, Justice Board**

Provided a presentation to the County Commission regarding a second Budget Adjustment Request (BAR) related to gender-specific programming within the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department Juvenile Justice Program.

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#### Background

- This request follows a previous BAR approved earlier by the Commission.
  - The earlier adjustment reallocated unused Restorative Justice funds to support gender-specific youth programming.
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#### Current Budget Adjustment Request

- Proposal to reallocate \$16,600 within existing program line items:
  - Decrease: Boys Council program funding by \$16,600

- Increase: Girls Circle program funding by \$16,600

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#### Reason for the Adjustment

Rebecca Armstrong explained the reallocation is needed due to program staffing and service capacity differences:

- The program currently has:
    - 1 Boys Council facilitator
    - 2 Girls Circle facilitators
  - After reviewing remaining sessions needed through the end of the fiscal year, the Girls Circle program requires additional funding to complete scheduled programming.
  - The Boys Council program has less capacity to use all originally allocated funds.
- Goal of the adjustment:
- Ensure all available funds are utilized before the fiscal year ends.
  - Prevent unspent funds from reverting back to the state.

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#### Program Structure and Participation

- The funding originally assumed a different number of contractors, requiring the current budget reconfiguration.
- Group ratios vary by program facilitator:
  - Boys Council group led by Robert Chavez has approximately 1 facilitator for 10 students.
  - Girls Circle groups often operate at 2 facilitators for about 10 students.
- These ratios remain within the program model guidelines, but additional facilitators allow for:
  - Better group management
  - More flexibility in programming delivery

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#### Facilitator Performance and Program Impact

- Rebecca Armstrong noted that Robert Chavez, the Boys Council facilitator:
  - Has performed exceptionally well.
  - Is comfortable working in school environments.
  - Has experience managing larger classroom groups of up to 25 students, making a 10-student group manageable.

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#### Future Program Goals

- The Justice Board hopes to expand program capacity next fiscal year.
- Ideal staffing goal:
  - 2 Boys Council facilitators
  - 2 Girls Circle facilitators

Benefits of expansion:

- Greater program stability
- Ability to maintain services if a contractor leaves mid-year
- Reduced impact from the lengthy RFP hiring process for contractors.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

**d. ROADS:** Request Approval to Submit a Letter of Interest to the New Mexico Department of Transportation to Participate in the FY2026/2027 Local Government Road Fund Project/School Bus Route Cooperative Program with

Recommendation to Chip Seal Approximately 2 Miles of Echo Ridge Road South of the Intersection of Heritage Lane.

School Bus Route Project – Echo Ridge Relift

Presentation

- **Leonard Lujan** explained that this is one of three annual projects the Road Department typically submits.
- The project involves a relift (road resurfacing) on Dead Ridge planned for the next fiscal year.
- The request is primarily administrative, requiring Commission approval so the application can be submitted before the state deadline.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner Jaramillo seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

- e. **ROADS:** Request Approval to Submit a Letter of Interest to the New Mexico Department of Transportation to Participate in the FY2026/2027 Local Government Road Fund Project/County Cooperative Program with Recommendation to: (1) Chip

**Speaker: Leonard Lujan**

Presented a letter of interest request to participate in the NMDOT Local Government Road Fund – County Cooperative Program.

Original Proposal

- Chip seal approximately 3 miles of Microwave Road (O-27) between:
  - U.S. Highway 60 and New Mexico State Road 55
- Chip seal approximately 3 miles of Spangler Road from:
  - Highway 55 to Langley Road

Correction Made During Discussion

- Lujan clarified that the first project should be gravel work rather than chip seal.

Corrected Project Scope

1. Gravel 2 miles of McIntosh Road between Highway 60 and Highway 55
2. Chip seal work on Spangler Road

- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner Jaramillo seconds.
- **The motion was amended:** to replace “chip seal” with “gravel” for the Microwave Road portion.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

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- f. **ROADS:** Request Approval to Submit a Letter of Interest to the New Mexico Department of Transportation to Participate in the FY2026/2027 Local Government Road Fund Project/County Aerial Project Cooperative Program with Recommendation to Chip Seal Approximately 1 Mile of Calle Del Sol.

**Leonard Lujan**

Presented another letter of interest submission for road improvements.

Proposed Project

- Chip seal approximately 1 mile of Calle Del Sol

- Located near New Mexico State Road 41.

#### Clarifications During Discussion

- Lujan confirmed the project is not part of the ongoing permit work and is a separate SP (state partnership) project.

#### Cost Estimate

- Estimated cost for 1 mile of chip seal:
  - Approximately \$83,618

#### Packet Error Noted

- Commissioners observed the packet incorrectly listed:
    - 21 miles instead of 1 mile
  - The error was acknowledged as a typographical mistake and corrected for the record.
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#### Additional Discussion

##### Commissioners discussed:

- Potential to extend the project by an additional half mile if funding becomes available.
- The difficulty of accurate cost projections due to fluctuating prices for:
  - Fuel
  - Asphalt
  - Construction materials
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

##### Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

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- g. **FIRE:** Request Approval of an Unauthorized Purchase in the Amount of \$384.95 to the Alabama Fire College for a Fire Investigator Training Course.

**Gary Smith - Torrance County Fire Chief**

- Reported an administrative oversight regarding a training course taken by an Assistant Fire Chief.
  - The Assistant Chief attended a fire inspection/investigation training course in Alabama while on approved leave.
  - The department intended to support this training as part of efforts to develop in-house fire inspection and investigation capabilities.
  - However, due to a process oversight, the department had not properly arranged payment beforehand.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
  - McCall – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**
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- h. **FIRE:** Request Approval to Re-Appropriate \$20,000 in County Infrastructure Funding Initially Allocated for Fire Training Equipment to Employee Training to Support the Ongoing Training Needs of Newly Hired Fire Personnel.

**Gary Smith - Torrance County Fire**

Presented a request to reallocate \$20,000 in county infrastructure funding originally budgeted for fire training equipment (training props).

Reason for Request

- The Fire Department recently hired three additional firefighters, increasing staff to 22 full-time personnel.
- The department needs funding to rapidly train new hires in required certifications, including:
  - EMT Basic
  - Firefighter I
  - Firefighter II
- Proposed Change
- Transfer \$20,000
  - From training equipment/props
  - To employee training costs

## Training Expenses Covered

Funds would support:

- Training course tuition
- Per diem
- Hotel accommodations
- Travel expenses during training programs.

Some training is currently planned in Socorro, where firefighters would attend classes.

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## **County Manager Clarification**

### **Manager Barela**

- Provided commissioners with a county infrastructure funding allocation summary by department.
  - Explained that:
    - The request is essentially a line-item transfer within the department's infrastructure allocation.
    - Commission approval is required because the funding is being redirected to a different project purpose.
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## Discussion: Firefighter Training Strategy

### External Training vs. In-House Academy

Chief Smith explained the department's current training approach:

#### Hybrid Training Model

- Combination of:
  - External academies
  - Internal day-to-day training exercises

#### Example External Training Program

- Potential use of training academy at Central New Mexico Community College (CNM).
- Program details:
  - 5-month academy
  - Cost approximately \$4,500 per firefighter
  - Includes:
    - Training equipment
    - SCBA gear
    - Structured curriculum

#### Advantages

- Lower cost than building a full internal academy.
  - Allows the county to avoid purchasing large amounts of training gear for recruits.
- 

## Long-Term Staffing and Training Vision

Chief Smith stated his goal is to eventually reach 30 full-time firefighters for the county.

Once staffing stabilizes:

- The department expects less frequent hiring cycles.
  - Firefighters could be sent to existing regional academies every few years rather than maintaining a full in-house academy.
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#### Role of the Training Chief

Commissioners asked about the duties of the department's training chief.

Chief Smith explained that Training Chief Fixler is responsible for:

- Developing the annual training plan
- Scheduling training through the department's Response Master training platform
- Coordinating training for:
  - Full-time firefighters
  - Volunteer firefighters
- Supporting district-level training sessions.

Baseline requirements:

- A firefighter typically must complete about 190 hours of training annually to maintain certifications.
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#### Volunteer Training Integration

- The department is working to better integrate volunteers into training programs.
- Because volunteers have full-time outside employment, training must often occur:
  - Evenings
  - Weekends

Training officers will travel between districts to support volunteer training nights.

- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
  - McCall – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**
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- i. **SHERIFF:** Request Approval to Re-Appropriate \$67,000 in County Infrastructure Funding Initially Allocated for a Parking Lot Project at the 7th Judicial District Court Building to Vehicles to Lease 3 New Responder Law Enforcement Units for the Torrance County Sheriff's Office.

## **Manager Barela and Reece Eckard – Sheriff Office Administration**

Provided background context before the item discussion.

### Context of the Request

- The Commission previously discussed the lack of budget authority for new Sheriff's Office vehicles this fiscal year.
- Commissioners requested staff to review the county budget to determine whether funding could be reallocated to address the need.
- Administration identified \$67,000 within the county infrastructure budget that had been originally allocated for a Sheriff's Office parking lot project.

### Reason for Reallocation

- Discussions with the Sheriff's Office indicated:
  - The parking lot project likely would not be completed this year.
  - Patrol vehicles were a much higher operational priority.

### Lease Proposal

- Administration worked with Enterprise Fleet Management to evaluate vehicle lease options.
- With the \$67,000 available, the county could lease up to three new responder vehicles this fiscal year.

### Lease Cost Structure

- The cost includes:
  - Vehicle lease payments
  - Upfitting costs (equipment installation for law enforcement use).
- Upfitting requires a 50% down payment, with the remaining cost incorporated into the lease.
- Staff provided the Commission with a cost breakdown showing:
  - Current fiscal year costs
  - Annual lease costs
  - Total cost over the four-year lease term
  - Cost comparisons for one, two, or three vehicles.

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### Sheriff's Office Operational Need

#### **Reece, Sheriff's Office Administration**

- Confirmed the department is currently short on patrol vehicles.
- The office has:
  - Approximately 25 total vehicles in the fleet.
  - 14 deputies plus command staff and investigators using vehicles.
- Several vehicles are currently out of service due to mechanical failure or accidents.

### Current Fleet Issues

- One vehicle recently required a new transmission.
- Another vehicle was lost in a pursuit-related crash.

- A patrol vehicle damaged in a deer collision has 130,000 miles but may still be repairable.
  - Patrol units typically accumulate about 3,000 miles per month.
- Immediate Need
- The department estimates five additional vehicles would ideally be needed, but leasing three units would provide critical relief.
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#### Insurance Claims Update

##### **Mellisa Johnson – Operations Manager**

Provided an update regarding insurance claims through New Mexico Counties insurance pool:

- A two-year-old claim for a totaled patrol vehicle has now been approved.
  - The county should receive approximately \$19,000 reimbursement soon.
  - Additional active claims include:
    - A rollover crash during a pursuit
    - A vehicle damaged after hitting a deer.
  - Once reimbursement is received, the funds will return to the Sheriff's Office budget through Commission approval.
- 

#### Commission Discussion

Commissioners discussed several considerations:

##### Lease vs. Purchase

- Concerns were raised about:
  - High mileage on patrol vehicles
  - Loss of equity when leasing rather than owning vehicles.
- Leasing would mean the county does not hold the vehicle title, but vehicles would be replaced regularly before excessive wear.

##### Budget Stability

Administration explained leasing could help stabilize fleet expenses:

- Purchasing vehicles outright often creates large spikes in capital expenditures.
- Leasing spreads the cost into consistent annual payments.
- Example scenario discussed:
  - Maintaining \$250,000 annually in vehicle lease funding rather than large irregular purchases.

##### Long-Term Fleet Strategy

- Commissioners discussed maintaining a mixed fleet strategy, potentially with:
    - 30–40% leased vehicles
    - The remainder county-owned vehicles.
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#### Vehicle Availability and Timeline

- Phil Long Ford of Denver is currently holding three vehicles for the county.
  - Estimated upfitting timeline:
    - 3–4 months, depending on equipment availability.
  - Officials noted that Enterprise may help expedite outfitting through vendor relationships.
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#### Commission Action

##### Motion:

Approve reallocation of \$67,000 in county infrastructure funding (originally allocated for a Sheriff's parking lot project) to lease three new law enforcement responder vehicles for the Torrance County Sheriff's Office.

- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner Jaramillo seconds.

##### Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
  - McCall – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**
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- j. MANAGER:** Request Approval of a Fiscal Agent Agreement Between Torrance County and EMWT to Administer \$600,000.00 in Funding Allocated to EMWT by the New Mexico Environment Department for Project SAP 24-I2477-GF.

#### Manager Barela

Presented a request for the County Commission to approve a Fiscal Agent Agreement (MOU) related to a state grant allocated to the Estancia Valley water system initiative.

##### Background of the Grant

- In 2024, Estancia Valley Water Transmission Association (EMWT) received \$600,000 from the Governor's Office through legislative appropriation.
- The funding is intended for planning, designing, constructing, or acquiring water systems in the Estancia Valley.

##### Issue Identified

- At the time of the appropriation, the state assumed Torrance County would act as the fiscal agent for the grant.
- However, the formal paperwork process was never completed, preventing access to the funds.

## Required Steps to Access the Funding

**Manager Barela** explained that the New Mexico Environment Department requires:

1. EMWT to execute the grant agreement.
  2. EMWT to pass a resolution designating the County as fiscal agent.
  3. Execution of a Fiscal Agent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County.
- EMWT has already approved these steps.
  - The only remaining action is County Commission approval and signature of the fiscal agent agreement.

## Funding Use

Once approved:

- The County can amend the FY26 budget to include the \$600,000 appropriation.
  - Expected uses include:
    - Acquisition of the Sunset Acres Water System
    - Funding a technical memorandum (tech memo) for the Melody Ranch water system.
  - The tech memo will be prepared by Bohannon Huston, with a proposal not to exceed \$25,000.
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## Questions and Discussion

### **Question – Commissioner Jaramillo**

- Asked whether the \$600,000 funding is still available with the state.

### **Response – Manager Barela**

- Confirmed the funding still exists in the state appropriation, but it cannot be accessed until the fiscal agent agreement is approved and the funds are budgeted.
- 

### **Question – Commissioner Jaramillo**

- Asked if a majority of the funding will be used for the Sunset Acres water system acquisition.

### **Response – Manager Barela**

- Confirmed a portion will go toward Sunset Acres, while another portion will support the Melody Ranch technical memo.
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**Concern – Commissioner Jaramillo**

- Expressed concern that water infrastructure planning has focused mostly on the northern part of the county.
- Raised the issue that the southern district has not been fully involved in planning discussions.
- Referenced long-standing discussions about a pipeline connecting Willard to Moriarty to distribute water throughout the county.

**Question – Commissioner Jaramillo**

- Asked whether some of the \$600,000 could be used to support water rights acquisition in the southern district to advance the long-term pipeline concept.
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Response – Commission Discussion

**Commissioner Schwebach noted that:**

- The original strategy focused on connecting to existing water systems first because it was more economical.
  - The pipeline concept remains a long-term goal, but funding has historically been difficult to secure.
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**Amy May - Representative, EMWT**

Responded to Commissioner Hernia's concerns.

Key Points

- Confirmed the board has discussed acquiring water rights in the Willard area.
  - After the Sunset Acres acquisition is reimbursed, some of the remaining funds may be used to pursue water rights purchases in the southern district.
  - The topic will be discussed at the next EMWT meeting scheduled in two weeks.
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**Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked when EMWT expects to be capable of acting as its own fiscal agent rather than relying on the county.
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**Response – Manager Barela**

- Explained EMWT is still developing organizational capacity.
  - The organization is building operational and financial strength by acquiring water systems and assets.
  - Larger projects often require a fiscal agent because funding agencies are cautious about granting large sums to newer organizations.
  - Example given:
    - EMWT recently received \$4 million for the Melody Ranch project, and the state still prefers a fiscal agent to oversee the funding.
- 

**Response – Amy May**

- Estimated EMWT could potentially operate independently within 3–5 years.
  - Noted organizational challenges including:
    - Limited staff
    - Difficulty achieving quorum at board meetings
    - Need for stronger board participation.
- 

**Follow-Up – Commissioner McCall**

- Encouraged EMWT to accelerate the timeline to 2–3 years for becoming financially and administratively independent.
- 

**Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked whether serving as fiscal agent would create a burden for the County.
- 

**Response – Manager Barela**

- Said the administrative burden depends on the scope of the project.

- In this case:
    - The funds are likely to cover a single closing payment and one technical memo, so the administrative burden will be minimal.
- 

#### **Additional Clarification – Manager Barela**

- Under the Joint Powers Agreement for EMWT, the fiscal agent must be one of the member governments:
  - Estancia
  - Willard
  - Moriarty
  - Torrance County
- Currently, Torrance County is the only member entity capable of serving as fiscal agent under state financial requirements.
- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to approve. Commissioner McCall seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
  - McCall – Yes
  - Jaramillo – Yes
  - **Motion Carried**
- 

## **9. TORRANCE COUNTY BOARD OF FINANCE**

### **a. TREASURER:**

#### **Kathryn Hernandez - County Treasurer**

Provided a status update on the operations of the Torrance County Treasurer's Office.

Financial Operations

- Reported that the Treasurer’s Office is fully up to date on all bank reconciliations.
- Staff are monitoring and reconciling accounts daily to maintain accuracy and timely reporting.

#### Account Access Issue (Follow-up from Previous Meeting)

- The office discovered an outdated access connection to the New Mexico State Treasurer's Office tied to a previous treasurer's account.
  - The account had remained open but was not actively used, occasionally showing small balances (around \$1).
  - **Treasurer Hernandez stated that:**
    - Staff members Carol and Helen now have proper access.
    - The old account will be closed to prevent further confusion.
- 

#### Questions and Discussion

##### **Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked whether the Treasurer's Office had resolved previous reconciliation issues involving unusual balances (approximately \$14,000) associated with the county's financial system.

##### **Response – Treasurer Hernandez**

- Confirmed the issue was largely corrected.
- Explained the discrepancies stemmed from the Tyler Technologies ERP system used for county financial management.
- Remaining issue:
  - About \$3,000 still occasionally appears off during distributions.
  - Tyler support is actively working to correct the backend system problem.
- Noted the issue traces back to payments dating to around 2020.

##### Follow-up – Commissioner McCall

- Confirmed the office is aware of and actively monitoring the issue.
- 

#### Mobile Home Tax Enforcement Update

##### **Treasurer Hernandez**

Provided an update on mobile home tax collection efforts.

##### Staff Activity

- Miles (Treasurer’s Office staff) has been actively identifying delinquent mobile home accounts.

February Collections

- Enforcement efforts resulted in \$24,202 collected.

March Collections (to date)

- As of the day before the meeting:
    - \$10,560 collected.
- 

**Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked whether the mobile home tax enforcement effort is a new initiative.

**Response – Treasurer Hernandez**

- Confirmed the program began approximately one year ago.
  - The county also conducts mobile home tax auctions, with 40 mobile homes currently scheduled for auction in May.
- 

**Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked whether only the mobile home is auctioned, or if the land is included.

**Response – Treasurer Hernandez**

- Clarified that only the mobile home is auctioned, not the land.
  - The process follows state statutes governing mobile home tax sales.
- 

**Question – Commissioner McCall**

- Asked about requirements for removal or cleanup of the mobile home after purchase.

**Response – Treasurer Hernandez**

- The buyer assumes responsibility for removal or relocation of the mobile home.
- The Treasurer’s Office provides a full information packet to buyers outlining requirements.

**Additional Explanation**

- In cases where a bank holds a lien, the Treasurer’s Office contacts the lender.
  - Often, the bank will pay delinquent taxes before the auction to retain the asset.
  - Example:
    - During a previous auction two years earlier, a bank paid the outstanding back taxes before the sale.
- 

**b. FINANCE:** Finance Department Board of Finance Report

**Michele Jones – Deputy Manager/Finance**

Presented the FY 26 second quarter finance report and provided an update on ongoing financial operations.

Key Points – FY 26 Q2 Report

- Revenues: 51.8% of budgeted revenues collected by end of Q2 (December).
- Expenditures: 32.5% of budgeted expenditures used by Q2.
  - Indicates careful expenditure management and revenues on target.
- The report was submitted to and approved by DFA (Department of Finance and Administration).

Discussion & Clarifications

- Commissioner Questions:
  - On revenue vs. expenditure difference:
    - Explained that operational costs are carefully managed, and some planned projects or expenses did not occur yet, creating a buffer.
    - Historical trend: counties generally spend ~68–69% of budgeted revenues annually.
  - On lingering/unpaid expenditures:
    - Some expenses may be pending invoices or unexecuted projects; this is normal and part of ongoing budget management.
- **Deputy Manager Jones & County Manager Barela:**
  - Confirmed that expenditure under-budget is positive, providing flexibility for mid-year adjustments.
  - Emphasized that quarterly reports allow monitoring of cash flow and budget health.

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Additional Financial Updates

- Department-level budget tracking:
  - Jones noted department-to-budget percentage reports can be generated for more granular analysis.
- CoreCivic payments:

- Signed contract received; payments can now be processed, covering November through present.
- Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) revenue:
  - As of February, \$6.3 million collected, an 18% increase over the previous year.
  - Noted by commissioners that future revenues may decline due to regional economic changes (e.g., wind farm slowdowns affecting hotels and restaurants).
- ARPA funds and other special funds:
  - Some expenditures may exceed budgeted authority; these will be monitored throughout the year.
- FY 27 budget preparation:
  - Deputy Manager Jones noted FY 27 budget work is underway, slightly behind schedule due to onboarding but progressing.

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New Personnel Introduction

- Kurt Knight, CPA (Kurt Knight – KCK Advisory Company):
    - Introduced as financial consultant to assist with FY 27 budget, revenue forecasting, ARPA reporting, and Tyler system integration.
    - Commissioners encouraged to engage and ask questions as needed.
- 

## 10. DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION

### a. CLERK'S REPORT

#### **Clerk Sylvia Chavez gave an update on**

#### Candidate Filing – March 11

- Candidate Filing Day: Individuals filed for county positions:
  - Magistrate Judge: Bobby Garcia (R), Craig Davis (R)
  - County Commission District 1: Albert Chavez (D), Nathan Allen Schaefer (R)
  - County Commission District 2: William Pfeiffer (D), Thomas J. Holt (R), Leanne Tapia (R)
  - County Sheriff: Thomas D. Carter (R), David E. Frazee (R)
  - County Assessor: Hugh G. Jones (D), Crystal M. Garcia (R), Martin A. Lucero (R)
  - Probate: Nathan M. Dial (R), Melvin McNeil (R), Mary Ann Anaya-Hernandez (R), Tracey Master (R)
- Next Steps:

- Clerk Chavez will qualify candidates by end of week/early next week.
  - Qualification includes:
    - Verification of petition signatures
    - Confirmation of campaign finance filings via Secretary of State's CFIS system
  - Any missing documentation must be submitted by tomorrow
  - Candidate Write-In Day: Next Tuesday; same qualification process applies.
  - Clarification:
    - **Commissioner Schwebach asked:** "We have some check marks – does that mean they're qualified?"
    - **Clerk Chavez responded:** Internal tracking only, check marks do not indicate official qualification.
- 

#### School District Elections

- Estancia School District Special Bond Election:
  - Ballots mailed: 2,758
  - Ballots returned: 359
  - Undeliverable: 216
  - PSA: Voters must ensure up-to-date registration to receive ballots.
- Voter Registration Notes:
  - Many voters do not update addresses, leading to undeliverable ballots.
  - Motor Vehicle updates trigger automatic voter registration via AVR system, but voters must respond to confirmation letter.
  - Clerk emphasized importance of valid mailing address for future absentee ballots.
  - Commissioner comment: People often ignore these updates, causing issues with receiving ballots.
- Corona School District Election (March 24):
  - Registered voters: 68
  - Ballots returned: 5

- Undeliverable: 1
  - Clerk may need to call a special meeting to canvas before the first April meeting.
  - Proposed Canvas dates: March 30 – April 2, short 10–15 minute meeting anticipated.
  - Commissioner comment: Agreed that low voter awareness may cause ballots to be missed.
- 

#### Staff Recognition

- Genell Morris: Stepped up as primary customer service staff despite being short-staffed.
  - Chief Deputy Clerk Senaida Anaya preparing for upcoming election training.
  - **Commissioner Jaramillo comment:** Acknowledged staff efforts and the difficulty of managing absentee ballots with limited personnel.
- 

- **Commissioner Jaramillo:** Commented on voter awareness and mail delivery issues, emphasizing the need for PSAs and updated voter registrations.
  - Discussion: Confirmed March 30, 2026 at 9:00AM for Corona School District Canvas meeting; brief meeting anticipated.
- 

#### b. MANAGER'S REPORT

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#### c. COMMISSIONERS' REPORTS:

1) Commissioner McCall, District 1 - **None**

2) Commissioner Schwebach, District 2

Commissioner Schwebach

- **Commissioner Schwebach, District 2** introduced discussion regarding non-designated and unmaintained subdivision roads in the county.
- Noted that Morrow Hall had intended to attend but was unable; however, he provided written remarks to be read into the record.

- The issue has been an ongoing concern raised by residents for years.
- 

#### Remarks from Morrow Hall (Read into the Record)

Deputy Manager Jones Read: Remarks by Morrow Hall, read during meeting.

#### Historical Context

- Hall returned to Estancia in 1970 to work at the New Mexico Abstract Company, where he witnessed the rapid development of subdivisions in Torrance County.
- Early subdivisions in the 1950s–1960s included large grid developments such as Valley of the Estancia Ranchettes, often created without adequate infrastructure such as water or proper roads.
- In 1973, the state passed subdivision regulations, but loopholes allowed many subdivisions to be created without proper planning or infrastructure.

#### Past County Actions

- Historically, county commissions approved subdivision plats while disclaiming responsibility for maintaining roads.
- Hall stated that these decisions “kicked the can down the road”, leaving current commissioners with the problem.

#### Concerns Raised

- Residents in these subdivisions:
  - Have lived with substandard roads for decades.
  - Have lower property values due to poor road access.
  - Continue to pay property taxes without receiving road maintenance services.

#### Suggested Solutions

- Gradually add subdivision roads into the county system over time.
- Possibly designate roads as “county roads in training” to allow periodic maintenance such as grading until upgrades are possible.
- Focus on roads with higher population use first.

#### Acknowledgment

- Hall commended the County Road Department, noting:

- Newly paved roads such as Riley Road and Martinez Road.
  - The county's new road department facility, which he described positively.
- 

### **Commissioner Schwebach** – Discussion Initiation

- Noted the county faces a “catch-22” situation:
    - Some subdivisions did not want county roads originally due to concerns about through traffic.
    - Now many residents request county maintenance.
  - Suggested developing a mechanism or policy to address these roads moving forward.
- 

### Road Department Perspective

#### **Road Superintendent Leonard Lujan**

#### Current Road Priorities

- School bus routes are priority roads and must remain passable in all weather.
- Other county roads are considered secondary roads, though still maintained regularly.

#### Maintenance Requirements

- County policy requires at least one maintenance pass per year on designated county roads to meet maintenance obligations.

#### Subdivision Road Issue

- Many older subdivisions were approved decades ago when few residents lived there.
- Today these areas have more homes and increased traffic, but the roads were never officially accepted by the county.

#### Former “Green Road” Program

- Previously, residents could request limited maintenance (blading once per year) through an application process.
- When the county changed mapping systems, those “green roads” were removed, leaving only officially maintained county roads.

#### Proposed Idea

Lujan suggested creating a paid service option where:

- Residents on non-maintained roads could pay the county to blade roads periodically.
  - Work would likely occur during overtime hours (Fridays or Saturdays) so it does not impact regular county road maintenance.
  - Residents could split costs among property owners along a road.
- 

#### Legal Considerations

##### **County Manager Barela / Deputy Assessor Linda Gallegos**

- Preliminary discussions with legal counsel indicated that charging residents for a service may avoid anti-donation clause concerns, since the county would be providing a paid service rather than a free benefit.
  - Additional research is needed regarding:
    - Liability
    - Special assessment districts
    - Legal authority for alternative road maintenance programs.
- 

#### Commissioner Questions & Comments

##### **Commissioner Schwebach**

- Asked whether the commission should pursue developing a program for non-maintained roads.
  - Raised concerns about:
    - Liability if the county maintains roads below normal county standards.
    - Whether the county could subsidize road improvements or maintenance.
- 

#### Commissioner Discussion – Special Assessment Districts

Commissioners discussed the possibility of using special assessment districts, where:

- Residents benefiting from road improvements vote to tax themselves for the project.
- Funds are used for engineering, construction, and maintenance.
- County may front engineering costs, which are reimbursed if the project proceeds.

Concerns raised:

- Engineering costs can be expensive upfront.
  - Risk exists if the project does not move forward after engineering work.
- 

#### Commissioner Comments on Developer Responsibility

Commissioners noted:

- Modern subdivision policies now require developers to build roads to county specifications before the county accepts them.
- Historically, many subdivisions were approved without those requirements, creating today's challenges.

Example discussed:

- A subdivision where the developer built roads to county specifications and included a clause that once 90% of lots were sold, the county would assume maintenance.
- 

#### Commissioner Discussion – Property Taxes & Fairness

Commissioners noted:

- Residents in these subdivisions pay property taxes comparable to residents with maintained roads.
  - Some commissioners believe the county should provide some level of service in return.
- 

#### Commissioner Discussion – Possible Road Adoption

Discussion included the possibility that:

- The county could gradually adopt additional roads.
- As more roads are chip sealed or paved, the maintenance burden shifts and may allow blading resources to be reallocated.

**Road Superintendent Lujan noted:**

- Approximately 130 miles of roads have been chip sealed or paved, reducing the need for grading.

## Other Examples Shared

**Deputy Assessor Linda Gallegos** shared experience from another county:

- Residents formed a special district and agreed to pay approximately \$100,000 through property tax assessments.
  - In return, the county maintained the roads in the subdivision.
  - This arrangement has reportedly continued successfully for about 20 years.
- 

### **3) Commissioner Jaramillo, District 3**

**Commissioner Jaramillo** reported that she toured roads within her district with Road Superintendent Leonard Lujan.

- During the tour:
    - Leonard explained the responsibilities and operations of the road department.
    - They discussed advantages and disadvantages of the county adopting certain roads.
  - **Commissioner Jaramillo** stated the tour was very informative and helpful for understanding road maintenance and policy decisions.
- 

## 2. Meeting Regarding Torreon Fire Station

- On Monday at 1:00 PM, Commissioner Jaramillo met with:
  - Gary Smith
  - The local fire chief
  - Representatives from Torreon
- The meeting focused on getting the Torreon fire station operational.

### Potential Improvements to the Station

- Possible upgrades discussed:
  - Sleeping quarters
  - Sprinkler system
  - Minor facility upgrades

- Full kitchen
- Large gathering area

These features make the location suitable as a response hub for firefighters.

- The station already has:
    - Showers
    - Two bathrooms
- 

### 3. Proposal for a Wildland Fire Hub

- The Torreon station could serve as a central wildfire response hub.
  - It would support three nearby mountain communities, with Torreon located centrally between them.
  - The hub could improve response times and coordination during wildfires.
- 

### 4. Wildland Fire Program Development

Gary Bixler explained that the county is developing a wildland firefighting program.

Key elements include:

- Appointment of a Wildland Coordinator
  - Applying for grant funding to support the position
  - The role ideally requires full-time (40-hour/week) availability to coordinate with regional wildland programs.
- 

### 5. Resource Mobilization Plan (RMP)

- The county is working to participate in the state Resource Mobilization Plan (RMP).
- Benefits of the program:
  - Access to state wildfire response resources
  - Ability to recover costs after wildfire responses.

Recent Fire Example

- A recent wildfire (about 100 acres) occurred in the Chairman's district.
  - The response used a Unified Command structure involving:
    - County fire personnel
    - State Forestry
    - Director Kevin Pacheco
  - The county is currently working to recover response costs from that incident.
- 

#### 6. Seasonal Wildland Staffing Plan

- Initial staffing may rely on seasonal firefighters.
  - Seasonal hiring advantages:
    - Covers the 8–9 month fire season
    - Avoids long-term benefit costs
    - Allows the program to launch quickly.
- 

#### 7. Wildland Firefighter Qualification

- The department recently conducted a Pack Test, which includes:
    - A 3-mile hike
    - Carrying a 45-pound pack
  - 11 firefighters successfully passed, making them eligible for wildland deployment.
- 

#### 8. Willard Town Council Meeting

Later the same day, Linda Jaramillo attended a town council meeting in Willard.

##### Fire Department Activity

- A large equipment testing operation was taking place at the fire station.
- Fire hoses and equipment were being tested.
- Testing services were contracted out to a third-party provider.

##### Station Status

- The Willard Fire Station is operating well, but:
  - No firefighters are currently stationed there full-time.

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9. Key Regional Priority

**Commissioner Jaramillo emphasized** that the main goal for the mountain communities is:

- Training firefighters
- Improving coordination between the three mountain communities
- Strengthening wildfire preparedness, especially given the very dry conditions and high fire risk.

**11. Announcement of the next Board of County Commissioner’s Meeting:**

**March 25, 2026**

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**12. SIGNING OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS**

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**13. ADJOURNMENT**

- **Motion:** Chairman Schwebach motions to adjourn. Commissioner McCall seconds.

Roll Call Vote:

- Schwebach – Yes
- McCall – Yes
- Jaramillo – Yes
- **Motion Carried**

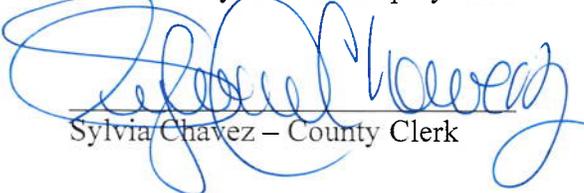
Meeting adjourned at 12:26 PM.

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Ryan Schwebach – Chairman

3/25/2026  
Date

  
Senaida Anaya – Chief Deputy Clerk

  
Sylvia Chavez – County Clerk

\*The video and audio of this meeting are available upon request.