Umatilla Rural Fire Protection District

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November 2026

CHIEF'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Reporting Period: October 2026 **Date Presented:** Nov 4th, 2026 **Prepared by:** Chief Baker

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Administration and Operations

A significant amount of my time went into rebuilding our website. We are updating the operations, apparatus, recruitment, training, prevention, and public information pages. It has been a much bigger project than expected, but it is overdue and will give the public a better way to learn about the District. I have also been working with the City on the administrative transition plan and identifying where their assistance can help us with financial and Board-related processes. Due to training of a new employee and scheduled conferences we expect to be transitioning some admin services to the city in November.

Board Chairman Sipe and I toured the Sabey Data center in Quincy, Washington. It was a useful opportunity to see a data center firsthand and learn more about the facility and its operations. I also toured McNary Dam and Locks regarding a construction project expected to begin in the coming months. After reviewing the location with Benton County Fire District 6, we determined the project falls within their jurisdiction on the Washington side. The visit was still worthwhile because I now have contacts with project managers at the dam for future coordination.

We participated in the Halloween event on Main Street. It went very well, with strong staffing and volunteers helping represent the District. We also handled a number of significant calls during October, including a natural gas leak requiring evacuations and several other fire, medical, and traffic incidents.

Staffing

We continue to use a staffing plan that aims to have two engines available each day and a duty officer. The overlapping calls this month showed why that coverage matters. Our career staff, resident interns, and volunteers all play a part in making it work. We are still watching overtime closely, especially after the demands of summer, employee leave, and deployments. We need to maintain coverage without losing sight of what it costs.

Training and Safety

I attended Struggle Well training in Hood River, which focused on stress, resilience, and the challenges of working in public safety. It was time well spent and reinforced the importance of taking care of our people.

The Oregon Trail Fire Association has been conducting a fire academy for our resident interns and volunteers, with training taking place most weekends over the last several months. This has been a significant time commitment for Battalion Chief Harris, along with several of our career firefighters who have volunteered their time to help instruct. This is an intensive academy, with graduation scheduled for early December.

Our career firefighters also continue daily training, including getting familiar with apparatus that is new to our crews. Everything from hose deployment to ladder placement is different, and it takes repetition to become proficient. When we are operating at night, in bad weather, or during a chaotic emergency, these skills need to be second nature.

My hat is off to Chief Harris for continuing to push our training program and to all our firefighters for making it a priority. The difference in our crews compared to when I started a year and a half ago is very noticeable. Their confidence, teamwork, and ability to operate together continue to improve, and it shows on the emergency scenes we respond to. This is exactly why we place such a high priority on training.

Fleet and Equipment

Our 2009 Seagrave Structure Engine is now back in service after the work completed by UCFD-1. Having it available again is a big help. Engine 12 is still going through the insurance process following damage from the pallet fire, and Brush 11 remains out of service while we work to secure the needed repairs. Our 2001 HME remains in service and has been well received by the crews.

Pump testing is scheduled for November 7 with Boardman Fire and Rescue for four units, including the OSFM water tender. The October 23 testing date was canceled because of weather. We are also preparing for annual maintenance and will handle basic work in-house where practical to save money. Station 12's painting is complete, with most of the funding coming from the City's Downtown Revitalization Grant. We have also applied for City funding to repaint Station 11.

Planning and Finance

I had several meetings with our CPA to work through financial planning, budget updates, and the supplemental budget. We are doing a much better job tracking and reviewing our finances, but there are still old problems to sort out. The recent SAIF audit is one example of an issue that will

take time and money to correct. We are also working through the budget implications of our FEMA SAFER award and continuing discussions about long-term revenue, including a possible operating levy and the impacts of urban renewal and property tax abatements.

I have been talking with the City about the District-owned vacant lot next to Station 12 and what it would take to develop it. Because it is zoned residential, we would need to pursue a variance. I also wrote to the owner of the adjoining property to ask whether they might consider selling. Our current lot is not large enough for a meaningful station expansion, so I am starting those conversations now rather than waiting until we have an immediate need.

Closing

October was a reminder of how much work goes into keeping a small fire district operating. I am pleased that we were able to handle three calls at once, and I appreciate the employees and volunteers who made that possible. At the same time, the administrative workload and the issues we are still uncovering require a great deal of attention. We cannot fix everything overnight. My focus is to deal with the problems in front of us, make sound decisions, and leave this District in a better position for the people who serve here and the community that depends on us.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Baker
Fire Chief