



Civil Grand Jury 2025-2026

Mosquito Fire Protection District Serving The Community



Case # 26-04

June 10, 2026

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Summary

This report addresses two areas of concern regarding governance and finance in the Mosquito Fire Protection District (MFPD or District).

The MFPD Board of Directors (Board) currently operates with limited effectiveness. Meetings are hindered by inadequate preparation, incomplete information sharing, and inconsistent practices. As a result, key responsibilities, such as monitoring monthly expenditure and service performance, do not receive sufficient attention, reflecting gaps in leadership and oversight. Meetings are often prolonged and contentious, leading to frustration among both directors and members of the public. This lack of productivity is further compounded by insufficient formal training for newly appointed directors.

Finally, the organization faces a looming financial crisis, yet no formal plan is in place to address it.

Background

The Mosquito Fire Protection District, comprising the communities of Mosquito and Swansboro in El Dorado County, is in a beautiful and somewhat secluded region of the Sierra Nevada foothills. It is bordered on the east and south by the Federal Bureau of Land Management. The northern boundary is adjacent to the El Dorado National Forest. The southern boundary tracks the South Fork of the American River. The population is about 1800, which makes it the second smallest fire district in the county. By population comparison, it is less than 4% of the size of the county's largest fire district, El Dorado Hills Fire Department.

These communities place great value in their fire department station. This goes beyond the fire and medical services that are provided. The station serves as a community center where people meet at numerous events. These include



fundraising breakfasts and dinners, as well as other family social gatherings.

It is well known that MFPD is fiscally constrained which may impact future operations. The community has generously responded to this reality by developing many organizations that are dedicated to help. There is an MFPD Support Group composed of volunteers that work under the direction of the Fire Chief. They do tasks that do not require the extensive training needed by the professional firefighters. There are three other non-profit organizations that support or raise money for MFPD. Recently, one organization donated \$40,000 for replacement of the station's roof.

There is concern that a station closure could result in adverse consequences, including diminished responsiveness and reduced levels of public safety service delivery, as well as the erosion of a highly valued cornerstone of community life: its distinct identity, culture, and tradition of civic involvement.

Methodology

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with:

- Complainants
- Current MFPD Board Members
- Former MFPD Board Members

El Dorado County:

- Board of Supervisors District Representative (BOS)
- Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)
- Auditor-Controller

El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)

- Executive Officer

Documents Reviewed

MFPD Policies and Procedures

MFPD Board Agendas and Minutes (when available)

El Dorado Regional Fire Authority (EDRFA)

1. Commissioned evaluation of MFPD, December 2024
2. Agenda and Minutes from 5/16/2024 - 1/16/2025 (Final)

Local Area Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)

1. Municipal Service Review Vol II 4/27/22
2. El Dorado County Fire Protection Districts Targeted Municipal Review and Sphere of Influence Update: DRAFT for public review September 2025
3. Agenda of January 28, 2026

Annual Audit Reports, Robert W. Johnson, an Accounting Corporation – years 2020-25

Board of Supervisors; Region 4 representative's printed material:

Supervisor's Meeting Notes from LAFCo & MFPD meetings: 10/29/25, and 1/8/26
Rural Communities Study – completed by University of California Santa Barbara,
October 2025

El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury Reports and Responses:

2015-2016 Mosquito Fire Protection District Dysfunction (Case 15-01)
2019-2020 West Slope Fire Protection Update (Case 19-06)

California Intergovernmental Risk Authority, Brown Act Training Curriculum April 2025

California Ralph M. Brown Act

California Special Districts Association

Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) Grant: Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) (Grant # EMW-2022-FF-0241)

Discussion

Governance

The Grand Jury investigation focused on the Board's performance as it addresses its responsibilities during the preceding 18 months. This review focuses on the Board's governance involving productivity, compliance with policies and statutory requirements, transparency, and the conduct of meetings. Attention was given to the role of the Board President as the officer who presides over the Board's meetings.

Monitoring Operations Spending

An important responsibility of the Board is to craft an annual budget and provide oversight which should include a monthly spending plan. At MFPD, a monthly spending plan has not been created. Without that plan, the Board is limited in its ability to identify trends, variances, or emerging fiscal concerns in a timely manner. Without utilizing comprehensive budgeting tools, the Board does not effectively perform their role of monitoring monthly fiscal performance of district operations.



In 2023, MFPD started a four-year FEMA Grant (Grant) that allocated \$50,000 per year for “Stipend for Duty Shifts.” Spending in early years has nearly depleted the total amount. This leaves little or no funding for the final year (2027).

The Board is responsible for overseeing MFPD’s fiscal spending. The Fire Chief manages Operations and has an obligation to report to the Board. Operations include managing District staff, overseeing daily activities, and delivering fire protection and emergency response services to the community.

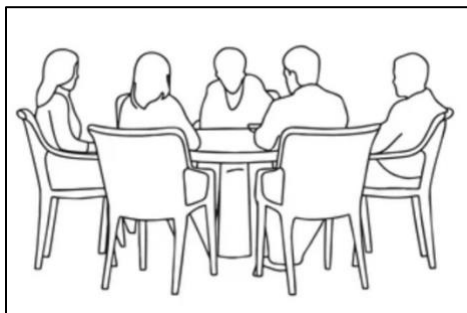
The Board failed to fully carry out its responsibility to oversee Mosquito Fire Protection District spending on Operations. At a Board meeting, Directors asked the Fire Chief about specific expenditures. The Fire Chief blatantly refused to provide any information. He informed the Directors that detailed spending information was outside the Board’s area of responsibility. Although the statement by the Fire Chief was false, the Board did not challenge this position or require greater financial transparency, effectively accepting limited fiscal oversight.

Until recently, MFPD had a Finance Committee, comprised of 2 Board members, 3 community members with fiscal familiarity, and the Fire Chief. They would meet monthly to review current spending status, evaluate grant status and reimbursement timelines,

examine MFPD expenditures occurring that month, and obtain updates from staff regarding projected operational costs that might affect the budget (unexpected vehicle costs, staffing realignment, etc.). The Finance Committee lead (Board Member) would provide a report to the entire Board. It would include action items for future meeting agendas. This provided the Board with valuable insight into operations spending and its immediate needs. As a result, the Board could take informed fiscal actions.

In October 2025, the Board dissolved the Finance Committee. No action was taken to replace this function. At present, fiscal monitoring remains the responsibility of one Board member who has stated that he has had no fiscal training. He seldom provides any details of operational spending to the Board.

Unproductive Board Meetings



Witnesses reported that unproductive meetings have led to visible frustration among Board members that contributed to the resignation of three directors in 2025. It has also diminished respect from both operational staff and members of the community.

Effective meetings depend on all directors having ample time to study the agendas and Board Member meeting packages before each regular Board meeting. Board Member meeting packages contain detailed information that accompany agenda items. Grand Jury witnesses stated there are regular breakdowns in providing complete information in advance to the Board and to the public.

The MFPD Policy Manual states submissions for agendas must be in the Board clerk's hands "at least 7 days before the regularly scheduled meeting." The Brown Act requires the agenda to be posted at least 72 hours prior to the regular monthly Board meeting. Directors receive the agenda at the same time it is posted. The Policy Manual does not state similar time requirements for the Board Members Package.

The agenda packet materials are often provided to the Board Clerk for distribution in a sporadic manner right up to meeting time. Sometimes materials are handed out to

directors at the Board Meeting. The Agendas and Board Member Packages have errors and are inconsistent and confusing. The agenda lacks organization and connection to the accompanying Board Member Package.

Directors spend a large amount of time early in the meetings sorting things out, often in an argumentative manner. Directors are given little or no time to consider each issue before the meeting. Meetings are routinely extended beyond the expected time. As a result, 16 special meetings occurred in 2025. This is a clear sign that the meetings are inefficient.

Another barrier to Board productivity is poor meeting management. The Board President does not consistently employ effective meeting practices necessary to maintain focus, manage discussion, and guide productive deliberations. As a result, discussions frequently stray from the matter at hand. Directors often raise concerns or grievances and engage in lengthy exchanges with fellow Board members; however, after significant meeting time is consumed, no corrective motion, formal direction, or actionable resolution is brought forward. This pattern results in inefficient use of meeting time and limits the Board's ability to effectively conduct business.

Meeting Decorum

Maintaining decorum during meetings is a core responsibility of the presiding officer. There have been occurrences of personal verbal attacks against committee participants, Board members, and citizens attending meetings. There have also been rude and angry outbursts by Operations command staff directed at individual directors. This conduct is allowed to proceed unchecked, reflecting a failure of meeting control.

Improper Board Leadership Involvement in Operations

The MFPD Policy Manual establishes that the Board President is the primary channel for communication between the Board and the Fire Chief. That role is to be a two-way conduit for communication between the Board and Operations. It is not to be a source of the President's independent authority over Operations. The current relationship of the President with Operations has gone far beyond the above principles of communications governance.

Through interviews, the Grand Jury learned of a pattern of informal interaction between the Board President and command staff occurring outside established Board communication channels and without regular reporting to the full Board.

Multiple witnesses described the President's frequent presence at the station and in the Fire Chief's office. Complicating this relationship, the current Board President also serves in an operational support capacity as an Emergency Medical Responder under the command structure of the Fire Chief in support of the incident response team.

Directors raised two principal governance concerns. First, Directors expressed concern that the President receives operational information and knowledge that is not regularly shared with the rest of the Board, resulting in unequal access to information necessary for informed decision making. Operations include managing District staff, overseeing daily activities, and delivering fire protection and emergency response services to the community. This created a perception of an informal line of influence between the Board President and Operations.

As a result, Directors felt excluded from critical communication channels between Board leadership and Operations. This lack of shared information leaves the Board without a common factual foundation when deliberating District matters. Consequently, Board meetings become reactive, argumentative, and inefficient, as Directors are often required to debate operational and policy issues without equal access to relevant information. Such conditions diminish effective governance, hinder productive decision making, and weaken transparency within the District's leadership structure.

Violation of Legal Counsel Communications Policy

Mosquito Fire Protection District policy states that when legal counsel is to be consulted on District matters, Board approval must first be obtained by majority vote. The policy further provides that if such consultation occurs in person, both the Board President and a second Director must be present. However, during Board meetings, the President stated that on several occasions she communicated with legal counsel without prior Board approval and without another Director present, raising concerns about compliance with established

Board policy and governance procedures. The Board took no disciplinary action related to this violation.

Brown Act Violations

There have been multiple reports related to Brown Act violations. There was an admission by the Board President in a public meeting, that she “probably violated the Brown Act” in connection with the hiring decision of a new Fire Chief as confirmed by multiple witnesses. The event involved one-on-one communications between the Board President and other individual directors.

The Grand Jury also learned that the Fire Chief Hiring Committee was abruptly dissolved prior to completion of its work, after which the new Fire Chief was selected through a process that raised concerns regarding transparency, adherence to established governance procedures, and compliance with open meeting requirements. These circumstances created a perception that a significant Board action may have occurred outside the public process.

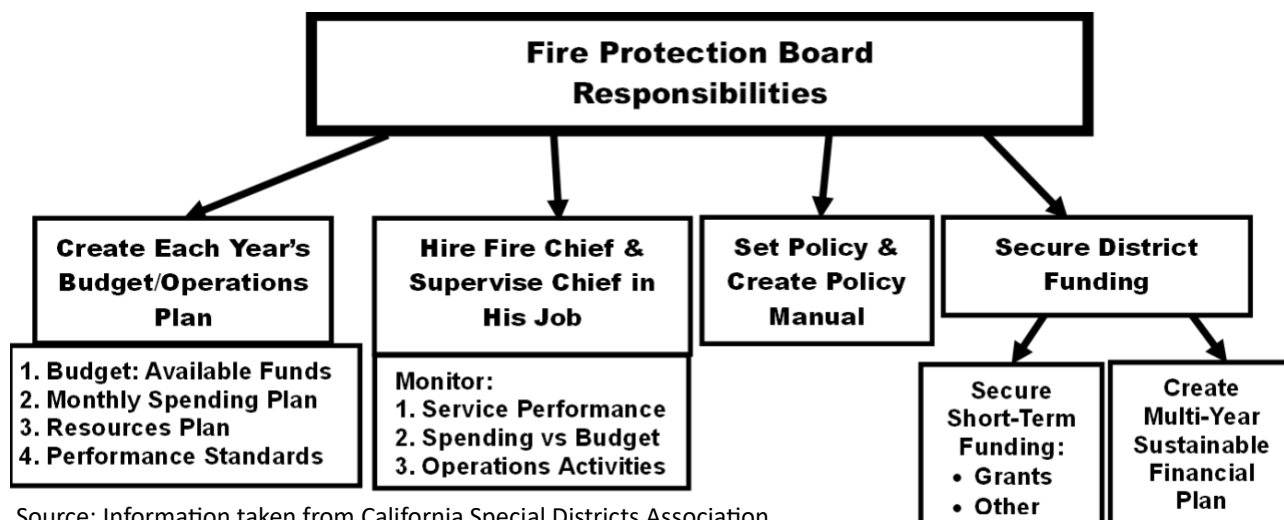
Under the Brown Act, publication of meeting minutes is not required. However, posting minutes in a timely fashion is recognized as best practice for fire districts and other local agencies. An eighteen-month review of meeting records available on the MFPD website revealed inconsistent and, in some instances, delayed publication of meeting minutes, limiting timely public access to Board actions and deliberations.

Lack of Preparation for New Board Members

Like most fire districts, MFPD has a group of Directors who are responsible for governing a complex system. They are unpaid community volunteers; residents who care deeply about public safety and are willing to dedicate significant time and effort to serve their neighbors. Their intentions are sincere, and their commitment is substantial. Most Directors soon find that the role they assume is far more complicated than they expected.



New Directors enter their job armed with little more than good intentions. They are immediately faced with the major responsibilities of the job, as shown in the diagram below based on the California Special Districts Association.



Source: Information taken from California Special Districts Association

Narrative Description of Chart Above

Fire Protection Boards perform four primary functions: planning, leadership oversight, policy development, and financial management.

The Board first establishes the annual budget and operations plan. This includes identifying available funds, establishing a monthly spending plan, allocating resources, and defining performance standards.

The Board hires and supervises the Fire Chief. Oversight responsibilities include monitoring service performance, ensuring expenditures align with the budget, and reviewing operational activities.

In addition, the Board is responsible for establishing policy and maintaining a policy manual to guide governance and operations.

Finally, the Board ensures financial stability by securing short-term funding, such as grants and other sources, and by developing a long-term, multi-year sustainable financial plan.

Fire Protection Board responsibilities must be managed across two distinct types of emergency response: medical and fire. On average, 80 percent of calls are medical in nature, while about 20 percent involve fires. This requires fire protection districts to maintain both medical response capability and traditional firefighting operations. Each function requires different training, certifications, equipment, and staffing to provide these services.

These operational demands are made more difficult by limited financial resources. The MFPD, like many other fire protection districts, operates with severely constrained revenue. This limits staffing, wages, benefits, equipment purchases, and long-term planning. Equipment is often older and may require repair. Compensation and benefits are modest compared to neighboring fire protection districts, making employee retention difficult. Turnover of leadership and staff is common. This adds instability to an already challenging management environment.

Directors must quickly embrace the day-to-day work of the Board. This includes:

- Defining clear boundaries between the Board and Operations
- Establishing core committees, such as a finance committee
- Assisting in the preparation of effective meetings, including agendas and meeting materials
- Contributing to smooth and efficient Board meetings in order to make sound decisions
- Maintaining respectful communication with other board members
- Identifying Board officer roles such as President, Vice President, and Secretary

Despite this, new Directors receive little to no formal preparation for their role. This lack of preparation creates immediate challenges. Board members must learn while performing their duties under public scrutiny. All deliberations take place in open meetings, where community members observe discussions and disagreements. For individuals unfamiliar with public governance, open meeting laws can make communication difficult and decision-making slower.

Differences in personality, communication style, and management experience among board members can further complicate communication. The unfortunate result is that a group of well-intentioned, hardworking community volunteers, people who stepped forward to help their neighbors, can find themselves presiding over a system that struggles to function effectively.

A consequence of such dysfunction is a decline in public confidence, especially when disagreements occur during open meetings. Board members themselves have become discouraged by the stress and criticism. Some may resign, creating vacancies that are difficult to fill, as other residents may be reluctant to serve in a role perceived as difficult or argumentative.

Impending Financial Crisis

Created in 1973 as a community collective of volunteers, Mosquito Volunteer Fire Department operated successfully as a volunteer fire department. In 1978, voters approved the formation of Mosquito Fire Protection District (MFPD), joining El Dorado County Special Districts and became eligible for funding. The percentage of property taxes that MFPD received supported their volunteer model. Proposition 13 and AB-8 MFPD froze that contribution at a lower percentage leading to a constrained funding situation.

In the last decade, this low-cost volunteer model has collapsed. The primary causal event occurred in 2019 when California required volunteer firefighters to have Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) certification and wildland fire training. While these standards improved safety and professionalism, they also sharply reduced the number of residents able to participate as firefighter volunteers. For MFPD, volunteer firefighter participation has steadily declined. MFPD is now forced to rely on paid or stipend professional firefighting personnel to maintain emergency response. This is a much higher cost model. MFPD's property-based tax revenue is inadequate to fund this model.

Financial Summary Table: Reserves, Expenditures, Revenue by Source, Total Revenue, and Net Income/(Deficit) — Years 2020–2025 (all amounts in dollars)

Description	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Reserves, (End of Year)	\$377,371	\$550,118	\$502,210	\$439,892	\$475,654	\$377,231
Total Expenditures	\$533,498	\$1,333,220	\$835,618	\$935,986	\$735,646	\$748,801
Revenue						
Taxes	\$345,020	\$351,952	\$359,915	\$374,158	\$367,027	\$381,247

Financial Summary Table: Reserves, Expenditures, Revenue by Source, Total Revenue, and Net Income/(Deficit) — Years 2020–2025 (all amounts in dollars)

Description	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Development Fees	\$8,250	\$10,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Interest	\$6,461	\$1,832	\$1,672	\$6,492	\$12,087	\$10,011
Grant	\$80,880	\$78,162	\$196,963	\$383,576	\$332,891	\$103,034
Other	\$8,278	\$101,356	\$52,638	\$5,467	\$32,410	\$29,341
Strike Team	\$79,156	\$967,312	\$276,524	\$81,930	\$46,994	\$120,245
Total Revenue	\$528,995	\$1,510,965	\$887,712	\$851,678	\$791,403	\$643,878
Net Income/(Deficit)	(\$4,503)	\$177,745	(\$47,906)	(\$62,318)	\$55,753	(\$98,423)

Source: MFPD's Independent Auditor's Reports

In the past two years, property tax revenue supported less than half of the expenditures. The balance came primarily from grants and Strike Team revenue. Both sources are highly unreliable. The current FEMA Grant will expire in December 2027.

Despite this impending financial crisis, there is limited evidence of focus on MFPD's long-term financial sustainability. This issue is notable in that prior external reviews have identified serious financial sustainability issues for MFPD. Two examples are a Grand Jury Report, 2019-2020, and findings from the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) Municipal Services Review (MSR) dated 4-27-2022.

Findings

Finding 1. The Mosquito Fire Protection District Board does not have a monthly spending plan.

Finding 2. The Mosquito Fire Protection District Board has improperly relinquished its governance responsibility regarding district spending.

Finding 3. Mosquito Fire Protection District Board Agendas and Board Member Packages have errors, are late, and are often incomplete.

Finding 4. Mosquito Fire Protection District Board meetings suffer from a lack of meeting control and discipline.

Finding 5. The Mosquito Fire Protection District Board President's interactions with the Fire Chief go beyond the principles expressed in the Mosquito Fire Protection District Policy Manual.

Finding 6. The Mosquito Fire Protection District Board President violates District Policy by talking with legal counsel without Board approval and without another Director present.

Finding 7. The effectiveness of the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board is impeded by actions that likely constitute violations of the Brown Act.

Finding 8. Mosquito Fire Protection District Board members lack knowledge in the governance and operations of a Fire Protection District.

Finding 9. Due to the end of the FEMA grant and decline in other funding sources the Mosquito Fire Protection District is very likely to experience a large reduction in funding leading to a financial crisis.

Recommendations

R1a. The Grand Jury recommends that Mosquito Fire Protection District Board of Directors require the Fire Chief to prepare a monthly spending plan for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to support regular fiscal monitoring and improved budget oversight by September 2026.

R1b. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board of Directors require the Fire Chief to prepare a monthly spending plan as a standard component of the District's annual budget process.

R2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board follow its own Policy of overseeing the District's fiscal well-being with a monthly review of actual spending compared to its monthly spending plan starting September 2026.

R3. The Grand Jury recommends that **all** materials for the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board Member Package for each scheduled meeting be submitted to the Board Clerk at least 7 days before the regularly scheduled meeting to match the policy timeframe for agenda submission beginning with the September 2026 meeting.

R4. The Grand Jury recommends that at the beginning of each calendar year the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board select a Board President by reaffirming the sitting Board President or electing a new one beginning January 2027.

R5. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board and Fire Chief develop by January 2027 a communication plan that defines communication procedures to ensure all Directors are kept informed of all communications between the Board President and the Fire Chief.

R6. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District Board revise District Policy to specify the consequences against any Director who violates District Policy such as unauthorized contact with legal counsel, by September 2026.

R7. The Grand Jury recommends that all Mosquito Fire Protection District Directors adhere to the requirements of the Brown Act immediately.

R8. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District work with the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and Local Agency Formation Commission to provide the means for practical, focused, hands-on business and governance training for every new Fire Protection District Director starting in January 2027.

R9. The Grand Jury recommends that the Mosquito Fire Protection District address the financial crisis with the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors with a funding plan in place by July 2027 prior to the expiration of the FEMA grant in December 2027.

Required Responses

A Civil Grand Jury report details a single investigation. Each report lists FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS. The organization responsible is notified and is required to respond to the report.

The California Penal Code § 933(c) specifies response times.

- **PUBLIC AGENCIES.** The governing body of any public agency (also referring to a department) must respond within 90 days from the release of the report to the public.
- **ELECTIVE OFFICERS OR AGENCY HEADS.** All elected officers or heads of agencies/departments are required to respond within 60 days of the release of the report to the public.

**The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code § 933 and § 933.05:
From the following government bodies:**

- Mosquito Fire Protection District Board
All Findings and Recommendations 1-9

Invited Responses

Responses are invited from the following within 90 days:

- El Dorado County Board of Supervisors
Findings 8 and 9 and Recommendations 8 and 9
- El Dorado Local Agency Formation Commission
Finding 8 and Recommendation 8

Failure To Respond

Failure to respond, as required to a Jury report, violates California Penal Code Section 933.05 and is subject to further action that may include additional investigation on the subject matter of the report by the Jury.

For more information refer to How to Respond to an El Dorado County Grand Jury Report available on the El Dorado County Grand Jury webpage.

<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/files/assets/county/v/2/documents/public-safety-amp-justice/grand-jury/how-to-respond.pdf>

Disclaimer

This report reflects the independent, evidence-based analysis of the 2025–2026 El Dorado County Civil Grand Jury. Findings and recommendations are offered solely in the public interest to promote efficient, equitable, and transparent county government.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.