RUSK COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES DISTRICT NO. 1
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING

Monday, August 31, 2026 | 5:30 p.m. | 1515 Whippoorwill Avenue, Henderson, Texas

Presiding	James “Jiffy” Dukes, Assistant Treasurer
Board Members Present at Call to Order	James “Jiffy” Dukes; Gloria Dooley, Secretary/Treasurer; Wayne Griffith, Vice President; Curt Collins, Commissioner
Board Member Arriving Later	David Burks, President, joined the meeting at approximately 6:20 p.m.
Quorum	Present
Others Present	Michael Searcy and New Salem, Eastside, Carlisle, Mt. Enterprise, Rusk Co. Rescue department representatives

1. Call Meeting to Order and Establish Quorum. Assistant Treasurer James “Jiffy” Dukes called the Special Meeting to order at approximately 5:39 p.m. in the absence of President David Burks. Commissioners Dukes, Gloria Dooley, Wayne Griffith, and Curt Collins were present, constituting a quorum. President Burks joined the meeting later at approximately 6:20 p.m.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance. Michael Searcy delivered the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Public Comments/Announcements. The presiding officer opened the floor for public comment. No public comments were offered.

4. Preliminary Employee Benefits Package

Secretary/Treasurer Gloria Dooley presented research concerning benefits for future District employees. The discussion was preliminary and was intended to establish enough direction to support recruitment and hiring of the District’s first employee while leaving detailed non-exempt firefighter benefits for later development.

Retirement

The Texas County & District Retirement System (TCDRS) was identified as an available retirement option. The District may enroll employees as they are hired, but participation would be mandatory for all eligible employees once the District participates. The minimum employee contribution discussed was 4 percent, with the District required to contribute at least the corresponding required employer amount.

Medical, Dental, Vision and Life Insurance

The Board discussed the difficulty of obtaining traditional group health coverage with only one initial employee. The Texas Association of Counties pool generally does not underwrite groups of this size. Other possibilities under review included Texas Health Benefits, participation through Rusk County if permitted, private-market group or individual products, and other small-employer options. Sidecar Health was discussed as an alternative model, but they require a minimum of 50 employees. No health-insurance vendor was selected at this meeting.

Vacation

The Board discussed a graduated vacation schedule and reached general consensus to begin conservatively. The preliminary structure discussed was up to three weeks of vacation, with the exact accrual schedule to be incorporated into the personnel policy. Up to 40 hours of unused vacation could be carried into the following year, subject to the policy, and earned unused vacation would be paid out at separation as required by the adopted policy and applicable law.

Sick Leave and Personal Leave

The Board discussed differences between exempt and non-exempt employees. The Board favored providing sick leave to both exempt and non-exempt employees, with documentation from a licensed medical provider required for absences extending beyond two consecutive workdays. Personal leave was viewed primarily as a non-exempt employee benefit. A preliminary concept of five personal days per year, with no more than five unused days carried into the next year, was discussed. The Board deferred final non-exempt leave rules until closer to hiring hourly firefighter personnel.

Exempt Employee Work Expectations

The first several District employees are expected to be exempt/salaried management employees. The Board discussed the expectation that exempt staff work the hours necessary to perform the job, with a general ceiling of approximately 50 hours in a normal workweek unless operational needs require otherwise. Short appointments or brief absences would ordinarily be handled through management flexibility, with the expectation that work obligations are met.

Expense Reimbursement

The Board supported reimbursement of legitimate District-related travel, mileage, training, and similar expenses for both exempt and non-exempt employees when the expenditure is approved in advance by the Board, except where emergency circumstances require expedited authorization. In an emergency situation, the employee would have to contact at least 2 Board Members and receive approval.

Personnel Handbook

The Board recognized that a comprehensive personnel handbook will be required as staffing grows. Future policy development will address exempt and non-exempt classifications, work schedules, overtime, leave, disciplinary procedures, drug policy, benefits, and other employment requirements.

Executive Director/District Administrator Recruitment Process

Ms. Dooley reported that four applications had been received for the executive-level District position as of the application deadline. The Board discussed whether to extend recruitment but agreed to evaluate the existing applicants first. Comprehensive background investigations were to include criminal-history research, motor-vehicle records, prior-employer contacts, references, and other reasonable verification. Preliminary interviews would then be conducted before the full Board interviews candidates in executive session at a later properly posted meeting.

Motion: Gloria Dooley moved to authorize James “Jiffy” Dukes to conduct background investigations and motor-vehicle-record checks on the four current applicants, with authority to incur the reasonable costs necessary to obtain complete background information, and to authorize David Burks and Gloria Dooley to conduct preliminary interviews. Second: Curt Collins. Vote: Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

5. Quick Response Station Property and Facility Research

The Board discussed authorizing research into land acquisition and development costs for the proposed Quick Response Station (QRS) program. The purpose is to establish strategically located District-owned stations that supplement, rather than replace, existing volunteer departments.

Proposed Geographic Priorities

- First priority: the south end of the county near U.S. 259 and FM 1798, serving the Laneville, Mount Enterprise and Eastside areas and other nearby gaps in weekday daytime coverage.
- Second priority: the western/southwestern area near the Highway 79/State Highway 42 corridor and the T-Post/Price area, providing coverage toward Carlisle, New Salem, Reklaw and western Laneville.
- Third priority: the northern/central area near FM 850 and FM 2012, providing improved access toward New London, Overton, western Crims Chapel and the Kilgore side of the District.
- Fourth priority: the eastern portion of the District, generally in the FM 43/FM 1716/SH 1251 area, with final placement to account for Tatum, Church Hill and the boundary with Gregg County ESD No. 1.

Site Selection Criteria

The Board preferred small parcels, generally approximately two to three acres, on or very near major highways or farm-to-market roads. Accessibility for apparatus was considered more important than locating directly at an intersection. Sites should provide enough room for drive-through apparatus movement and future expansion. The Board discussed purchasing suitable land in advance when a favorable opportunity arises, even if construction will occur later, because land costs are unlikely to decrease.

U.S. 259 / FM 1798 Site

The Board specifically discussed the approximately 23-acre tract near U.S. 259 and FM 1798. Rather than acquiring the entire tract if unnecessary, the District would explore whether the owner would sell or donate a smaller portion suitable for the first QRS.

Motion: James “Jiffy” Dukes moved to authorize Gloria Dooley to contact a realtor and/or landowner concerning acquisition of property near U.S. 259 and FM 1798 for the first Quick Response Station, including negotiation for a smaller portion of the tract, and further moved that all Board members be authorized to research and inquire about potential property for any future QRS location. Second: Curt Collins. Vote: Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

6. Capital Project Timeline Goals

The Board discussed preliminary timelines for employees, Quick Response Stations, QRS equipment, and communications. These dates were intended as strategic planning targets rather than binding completion dates.

Staffing

The Board discussed a five-year staffing horizon extending generally through 2031. The immediate priority is hiring the first executive/administrative employee, followed by additional management and operational personnel as the QRS program develops.

Quick Response Stations

Commissioner Dukes stated a preferred goal of completing all four QRS locations within approximately three years, recognizing that the schedule is aggressive and will depend on land acquisition, design, financing, staffing, and construction. The first station would be the south-end location, followed by the western, northern/central, and eastern locations based on operational demand.

QRS Apparatus

The initial concept is to place an engine and brush truck at each QRS. Because tenders are already distributed throughout the county, a dedicated tender would not be required at each QRS initially. As the apparatus fleet rotates, serviceable older engines and brush trucks may be reassigned to QRS use while newer apparatus are placed with frontline volunteer departments. Future QRS facilities may eventually house pumper-tenders or additional apparatus as needs grow.

QRS Facility Design

The Board favored retaining an architect/engineer for the first QRS and then reusing a standardized design for subsequent locations. The preferred concept is to separate apparatus housing from personnel quarters. The apparatus building could consist of two drive-through bays, each deep enough to stack two vehicles, designed so additional bays can be added later. Personnel quarters could be a separate modular, metal, or residential-style structure containing an office/work area, kitchen, bathrooms/showers, living area, and bedrooms that would support future 24-hour staffing. Separating the structures may reduce code complexity and preserve flexibility for future expansion.

Strategic Plan Timeline

The Board discussed the consultants’ 50-percent strategic-plan draft and the need to provide timely feedback so the next 75-percent draft can be completed. Commissioner Dukes noted that the draft was repetitive in places and should be simplified. Board members were asked to review the draft and provide comments.

Communications

The Board discussed a future proposal to replace District handheld radios with Motorola portable radios offering cellular and Wi-Fi capability. The preliminary cost discussed was approximately $1.447 million before negotiated reductions. Motorola had already offered pricing concessions, and the expenditure was contemplated in the 2027 budget. Only handheld radios were under consideration at this stage; mobile-radio replacement was considered too costly. The District expects to recover a significant portion of the cost by selling existing Kenwood radios, after lawful declaration as surplus, to other public-safety agencies or departments interested in purchasing them. The radio proposal was scheduled for a future meeting.

Mobile Command Unit Repairs/Connectivity

The Board also discussed the District-owned mobile command unit, which experienced air-conditioning and internet/connectivity failures during a recent large grass fire. The original rooftop air-conditioning unit dates to the vehicle’s original build and requires replacement. A replacement 18,000-BTU unit, distribution components, labor and transaction charges were estimated at approximately $2,380.99. Rusk County Rescue had already purchased Starlink equipment, mounting

hardware, cables and a router to restore internet service, while continuing to assume the recurring Starlink subscription cost. Because the unit serves countywide incidents and public-safety events, the Board agreed the District should reimburse those capital expenses and fund the A/C replacement.

Motion: James "Jiffy" Dukes moved to reimburse Rusk County Rescue for the Starlink/router/mounting-related equipment discussed and to approve replacement of the mobile command unit air-conditioning system at the quoted cost. Second: Wayne Griffith. Vote: Motion carried unanimously by voice vote.

Strategic Plan President's Letter

The strategic-plan draft calls for an introductory letter from the Board President to the community and firefighters. Commissioner Dukes agreed to assist President Burks in preparing the letter for submission to the consultant.

7. Adjournment. There being no further posted business, Curt Collins moved to adjourn. Wayne Griffith seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously by voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

_____ _____

Gloria Dooley, Secretary/Treasurer
Date: _____

David Burks, President
Approved: _____