Fern Bluff MUD
Meeting Minutes for April 2026

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting of the Fern Bluff Municipal Utility District Board of Directors was called to order at 6:10 p.m. The meeting was confirmed to be live. A roll call of directors was taken.

- All directors were present except Director Jessica Stempco.
- Director Barnes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Landscape and Parks Maintenance Report

Brian Schmidt, the District landscaper, presented the landscape and parks maintenance report. He reported that recent rain prevented mowing during the prior week because the equipment is heavy and can damage wet turf. Instead, crews focused on debris removal, tree limbs, leaves, weed eating, edging, and general cleanup.

Mr. Schmidt reported that irrigation zone 16 at the community center area had not been operating for approximately two weeks. The likely cause was lightning damage to a controller module and the zone valve. The repair was completed the day of the meeting. He noted that recent rain and Bermuda turf conditions prevented visible turf damage, but the repair was necessary to keep the system in proper working order.

The second round of turf fertilization was completed before the rain. The next planned turf fertilization and fall pre-emergent application is scheduled for September. The second round of aeration was completed at the ball fields at Olson and the soccer field at Fern Bluff Park after the rain, taking advantage of softened soil conditions.

Mr. Schmidt stated that, before the next meeting, he planned to complete a second round of fertilization for the gardens, including the butterfly garden, the parks, and the community center. He also reported that midyear mulching would begin at the end of May and continue into June. With the exception of the repaired controller issue, he reported that the landscaping systems were in working order and looking good.

The Board discussed the beginning of mosquito season following the combination of rain and warmer weather. Mr. Schmidt also reported that crews continue mowing greenbelts where wildflowers are not present. For homeowners backing up to greenbelts, crews are mowing two passes along back fences and two passes along walkways, while avoiding areas where wildflowers are growing.

3. Landscape Proposals and Parks Improvements

Mr. Schmidt presented a set of bundled proposals for parks and landscape improvements. The proposals were summarized together with backup information for Board review.

3.1 Butterfly Garden Improvements

The butterfly garden proposal included 140 one-gallon pollinator plants for $3,500. In response to questions about plant types, Mr. Schmidt stated that the specific plant mix depends on nursery availability, but the intent is to use mostly native plants and plants already shown to live and grow successfully in District gardens. He noted that dog urine has been damaging some planting areas and discussed the challenge of discouraging dogs from urinating on garden plants.

3.2 Parks and Playscape Mulch

Mr. Schmidt discussed proposed work at multiple parks, including the smaller and larger Cheatham parks, Friendly Oaks, Fern Bluff Park, and Veterans Park. He explained that after recent playcape renovations and additions of artificial turf, the District should need significantly less playcape mulch than in prior years. In some locations, the approach would be to fluff existing playcape mulch and add a lighter top layer instead of replacing five inches across all areas.

Mr. Schmidt stated that Veterans Park needed mulch the most. The Veterans Park proposal had not been included in the packet due to an apparent omission, but he estimated the cost based on 20 cubic yards of material and agreed to send the proposal to the General Manager. Friendly Oaks was discussed as a more labor-intensive location because of the distance and terrain around the play area.

The proposals also included planting 10 plants at the front garden of the smaller Cheatham park where bare spots exist, seeding bare areas with Bermuda at the larger Cheatham park on Brightwater, and maintenance work intended to protect the District's recent parks investments.

3.3 Turf Compaction and Unauthorized Motorized Use

The Board and Mr. Schmidt discussed turf compaction and damage at Fern Bluff Park, including evidence of scooter or motorized tire tracks on turf areas. Mr. Schmid reported that Fern Bluff Park has heavy after-school use and compaction from children and scooters. He had already aerated the irrigated areas at Fern Bluff Park following the rain because conditions were ideal. The discussion included concern about electric motorcycles, scooters, and other motorized vehicles being used in parks where they should not be allowed.

Motion	Approve the landscape improvement proposals, including the six proposals presented and Veterans Park, for an amount not to exceed $22,500.
Moved by	Director Horton
Seconded by	Director Barnes
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0. Director Stemco was not present.

4. Citizens Communications

The Board asked whether any citizens were present to communicate with the Board. No citizens communications were presented.

5. Consent Agenda

The Board considered the consent agenda. No items were removed from the consent agenda.

Motion	Approve the consent agenda as presented.
Moved by	Director Smith
Seconded by	Director Barnes
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0. Director Stemco was not present.

6. General Manager and Administrative Report

The General Manager presented several administrative items, including policy documentation, agreements, a proposed employee carport, billing vendor issues, and resident communications.

6.1 Employee Compensation and Payroll Policy

The General Manager presented a compensation and payroll policy for Board approval. He explained that the District did not previously have a formal written pay policy and that the policy is also needed for reimbursement purposes if he is deployed through the Public Works Response Team during a state emergency. He stated that, over the coming year, he expects to bring additional written policies to the Board, including policies related to community center rentals, parks, and administration, in order to formalize practices that have historically been handled by custom or practice.

The Board discussed exempt and non-exempt employee status. The General Manager stated that, at present, the expectation is that only the General Manager would be exempt, although the Operations Manager could potentially become exempt in the future. The Board discussed whether future versions of the policy should address conversion of employees from non-exempt to exempt status, including responsibility for the process and treatment of accrued compensatory time. The Board also discussed whether job descriptions should be attached to or associated with the policy. The General Manager stated that job descriptions had been prepared in prior years and could be referenced.

The Board also discussed where policies should be maintained for employee access. The General Manager indicated that a central SharePoint location was likely, with printed copies or email distribution also possible as the policy library develops.

Motion	Approve the compensation and payroll policy as presented.
Moved by	Director Sabatino
Seconded by	Director Horton
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0.

6.2 Household Hazardous Waste Agreement

The General Manager reported that the City of Round Rock sought to renew the household hazardous waste agreement. The renewal was described as a five-year renewal with no change in pricing. The Board discussed continuing to communicate availability of household hazardous waste certificates through the newsletter and bill messages.

Motion	Approve continuation of the household hazardous waste program.
Moved by	Director Horton
Seconded by	Director Smith
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0.

6.3 Employee Carport

The General Manager reported that the adopted budget included funding for a carport and that the District obtained a proposal from a trusted vendor that had previously performed varied work for the District. The project had been budgeted at $50,000, while the proposal received was approximately $10,000 and change. The carport concept was modeled after the structure at Park Valley and Wyoming Springs, and the proposed canopy would provide approximately 60 feet of coverage for up to six vehicles depending on parking configuration. The Board discussed the benefit to employees and protection from heat and hail damage.

Motion	Approve the employee carport proposal.
Moved by	Director Smith
Seconded by	Director Horton
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0.

6.4 Billing Vendor Issues

The General Manager reported ongoing issues with the District’s billing vendor, I3 Verticals/AVR. The March electronic bills were not available through the online portal as expected, and the issue had persisted for approximately a month. The same issue occurred again during the current billing cycle. Customers clicking to view the bill PDF were unable to access the document. The General Manager reported escalating the issue through progressively more assertive communications, including to the vice-president level, and stated that the vendor was attempting to revert to an older bill-print format that had previously worked.

The Board discussed whether the District should consider alternative vendors. The General Manager stated that he had been shopping options and had one viable alternative under consideration, but emphasized that a billing transition would be complex and burdensome on staff and customers. He stated that changing billing vendors would not be undertaken lightly because billing and collections are essential operations. Staff has been printing bill files when needed so that individual bills can be provided to customers who call, but this is taxing on staff and should not be necessary.

6.5 Spring Cleanup

The General Manager reminded viewers and residents that the spring cleanup is scheduled for May 9. This reminder was also being included in communications until the event date.

7. Operator / Operations Report

The operations report addressed the electronic meter project, the water loss audit, and park fountain repairs.

7.1 Electronic Meter System / AMI Portal

Staff reported that AVR, Diehl, and I3 Verticals continue working together on the utility portal needed to install, track, and manage the District's electronic meter system. The portal was not yet ready. Staff stated that another water system is successfully using Diehl meters with the relevant exports, so the vendor team is working to identify why the District's setup is not functioning as expected. The expectation was that the next Board meeting may include more concrete progress toward meter installation.

7.2 Texas Water Development Board Water Loss Audit

Staff reported that the District completed and submitted the five-year water loss audit to the Texas Water Development Board. The numbers were reported to look good. Staff noted that the District completes this larger audit every five years because it does not have loans with the Texas Water Development Board; otherwise, the District typically completes an annual water survey.

7.3 Parks Fountain Repairs

Staff reported that several drinking fountains had experienced problems following winter freezing conditions. The problems involved internal valves and parts rather than broken PVC pipe. New complete kits were ordered and installed, and all fountains were reported to be up and running. Staff recommended discarding old non-working kits rather than retaining questionable parts.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Roads Committee

The Roads Committee had no new items to report. The previously discussed project remained on track for late May completion.

8.2 Budget Committee

Director Barnes presented a budget update based on a profit-and-loss summary provided by the General Manager. March revenue was reported at approximately $236,700 actual compared with a $210,000 budget, resulting in a favorable variance of approximately $26,000. Operating expenses were reported at approximately $261,700 actual compared with a $412,900 budget, resulting in a favorable variance of approximately $151,200.

The largest favorable variances were reported in capital outlay improvements, maintenance, employee benefits, district employment, and legal fees. The District was reported to be in a positive year-to-date position of approximately $1.5 million, which is approximately $727,000 ahead of budget. The Committee stated that the District is sitting in a strong budget position.

8.3 District Community Center Committee

The District Community Center Committee had no formal report, but the General Manager discussed a possible future budget amendment involving funds currently allocated for community center improvements and roof replacement. He reported having an intriguing conversation with the AMI vendor regarding favorable pricing on equipment and stated that, if the AMI pilot progresses successfully, he may bring a budget amendment to the Board to move some funds toward electronic meters and radios. This could allow the District to accelerate the AMI system, reduce meter-reading contract costs, and improve water loss data.

The Board discussed the community center roof and whether replacement is necessary at this time. The General Manager stated that a maintenance approach, such as cleaning and treatment, may buy additional years on the roof and that the roof appears solid. The Board also discussed prior front-area leaks and confirmed those had been addressed. Door replacement was also briefly discussed; the General Manager stated that the doors remain functional and that individual glass repairs may be preferable to a full replacement at this time.

8.4 Deed Restriction Committee

The Deed Restriction Committee had nothing to report.

8.5 Security Committee

Director Barnes reported that the Williamson County Sheriff's Office report showed activity around the neighborhood, with a few calls inside the neighborhood primarily involving personal safety matters within individual homes. No broader neighborhood concern was identified.

8.6 Communications Committee

Director Smith discussed a planned newsletter for the following week. Proposed newsletter items included camp advertisements, parks reminders, preventing dogs from damaging plantings, prohibitions on scooters, motorcycles, e-bikes, and other motorized vehicles in parks, spring cleanup information, and household hazardous waste reminders. The Board also discussed ongoing issues with fishing in District ponds and the potential future use of cameras or signage to deter violations.

9. Ongoing Litigation / Legal Items

The Board noted that the District attorney was not present. The Board discussed that Governor Abbott had appointed Judge Sarah Moore to the new 512th District Court in Williamson County, where the District's lawsuit had been moved. The Board noted that the appointment may allow movement in the case, though no specific action was reported.

10. Next Meeting Date and Future Agenda Items

The next meeting was confirmed for May 26. The Board discussed that May 26 is the day after Memorial Day, but packet preparation occurs the prior week and the date appeared workable.

Potential future agenda items include additional written policies and a possible budget amendment related to AMI equipment purchases if pricing and pilot progress support bringing the item forward. The General Manager stated he would coordinate with the Budget Committee before bringing a budget amendment to the Board.

11. Adjournment

Motion	Adjourn the meeting.
Moved by	Director Barnes
Seconded by	Director Horton
Outcome	Motion carried 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

12. Key Decisions and Takeaways

1. The Board approved the consent agenda by a 4-0 vote.
2. The Board approved landscape improvement proposals, including Veterans Park, for an amount not to exceed $22,500.
3. The Board approved continuation of the household hazardous waste program.
4. The Board approved the compensation and payroll policy, while noting possible future refinements related to employee classification changes, compensatory time, job descriptions, and policy access.
5. The Board approved the employee carport proposal at a cost materially below the amount budgeted.
6. Staff reported ongoing billing vendor issues with customer access to electronic bill PDFs and continued due diligence on alternative billing vendors.
7. Staff reported continued work on the AMI utility portal and electronic meter system, with possible future budget action if favorable equipment pricing and pilot readiness align.
8. Staff reported completion and submission of the five-year Texas Water Development Board water loss audit.
9. The next meeting was confirmed for May 26.