

main the same at ISO 4 or improve to ISO 3. Kovacs said he would integrate full-time staff into the district, although their role might change. Kovacs, noting that he got his start as a volunteer firefighter and managed a 200-member volunteer program, envisioned using the volunteers as a wildland fire mitigation crew and providing certifications and credit should they apply to work in the district.

Kovacs encouraged attendees to review TLMFPD's website, including their strategic plan, DWFPD merger feasibility study, and annual report. He urged residents to contact him at akovacs@tlmfire.org or 719-484-0911 for additional information.

See the TLMFPD website at <http://tlmfire.org>, view a video of the meeting, and download the presentation at <https://bit.ly/pl-tlmfpd-workshop>. For information about the Palmer Lake Fire Department, see <https://www.townofpalmerlake.com/fire>.

Board explores adult use cannabis revenue

Following its regular meeting on June 23, the board held a workshop to delve into the financial impact that sales of adult use cannabis in Palmer Lake could have on the town's dire financial situation, should those sales be allowed.

Mayor Bill Bass began the workshop by saying the purpose was not to debate cannabis use, which is legal in Colorado.

He pointed out that tax revenue generated by sales of adult use cannabis would be "other people's money that we have been leaving on the table." Bass said the town would have to use more than one of the three financial strategies the board had identified. The goal is to make Palmer Lake economically viable and put it on a path to prosperity, he said, adding that the town is at a tipping point between thriving or deteriorating. "When we ran, we had no idea of the financial condition of the town. The first budget was a real surprise. Quite frankly, you were told wrong; the town does not have plenty of money," Bass said.

Bass then reviewed two other financial strategies: a mill levy increase and consolidation of the Palmer Lake Fire Department with the TLMFPD. A mill levy increase of less than 35 mills would not bring the town to operating standards, might require another mill levy increase in two to four years and would place the financial burden on residents. The proposed fire district merger would remove a critical service from the town and would increase the mills residents pay for fire prevention from 10 to 18.4 mills, Bass said.

He contrasted adult use cannabis sales with the two previous strategies, pointing out that the cannabis option removes the financial burden from residents and the town can regulate issues like security, odor, and traffic. Cannabis

sales in Colorado were over \$2 billion last year and generated \$423 million in taxes at the state level. Focusing on possible revenue in Palmer Lake, Bass estimated that first year gross sales could be \$15 million and could generate \$1.5 million in tax revenue for the town. Additional measures such as a small mill levy increase might be needed in addition to cannabis sales, Bass said.

Bass calculated that it would take a 35 mill increase to generate just over \$1.5 million, the amount expected to be generated by the first year of adult cannabis sales. Bass argued that choosing the right financial strategy could be the difference between thriving or going into receivership and becoming part of Monument. "This board is not pro tax increase; we're not pro cannabis. We are pro Palmer Lake," Bass said.

Following Bass' comments, the audience of about 50 had a chance to ask questions and make comments.

Attendees raised the issue of whether the board could approve sales on its own without putting the issue before the voters, which Bass said was possible. Rich Kuehster, who served on the Palmer Lake Board of Trustees when the current ordinances regulating cannabis were passed, pointed out that a mill levy increase on the ballot, if passed, would take a year and a half to yield revenue to the town. He encouraged the board to approve the sale of cannabis with a vote of its own

rather than putting the issue on the ballot in November. Throughout the workshop, several other residents asked the board to take their own vote on the issue to generate revenue as quickly as possible.

Resident Onan Floyd pointed out that there were no sales of adult cannabis between Denver and Manitou Springs, and cannabis businesses in Palmer Lake would have a base of about 25,000 people. He thought the board's estimate of first-year sales and tax revenue were accurate.

Resident Jim Parko said he and his wife are in the cannabis business in Pueblo. Based on his experience, he thought the board's estimates were accurate. He pointed out Colorado Springs would soon be voting on adult sales, and this would limit media coverage for Palmer Lake's decision. Even if Colorado Springs approves adult use cannabis, Douglas County will not, so Palmer Lake will still benefit from its proximity to a prohibition area. He urged the board to act quickly.

Resident Ed Kenny opposed raising the town's mill levy and argued legal sales were safer than street sales.

Resident George Sweet said he worked at a cannabis store in Manitou Springs and thought the board's estimates were in line with the sales at that business. He said he believed cannabis sales drew customers from all walks of life.

Resident Linda Elliot raised concerns about traffic, increases in crime, and break-ins. Trustee Karen Stuth responded that the town could address those issues if they occurred.

Resident Cindy Hanson said she had lived in the town since the mid-1970s, and cannabis had been used in the town all that time.

Resident John Russell, who served on the Board of Trustees previously, said the estimates of revenue were too high. He felt revenue would drop off quickly.

Resident Sharon Black asked about impact on home values. Stuth said there were studies showing home values increased in neighborhoods with adult use sales and added that if the town went into receivership, home values would plummet.

The workshop ended with Trustee Darin Dawson emphasizing that additional tax revenue equivalent to a 35-mill increase must be found to keep the town moving forward. It is up to the community to decide, he said.

Workshops are scheduled on an as-needed basis. See the town's website at www.townofpalmerlake.com to confirm times, dates and locations of board meetings and workshops. Meetings are typically held on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. Information: 719-481-2953.

James Howald can be reached at jameshowald@ocn.me.

Jackie Burhans can be reached at jackieburhans@ocn.me.



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