

Resident proposes lower mill levy increase

Resident Gary Rusnak challenged Pinnacle's proposed mill increase during public comments at the close of the meeting. Rusnak, claiming 30 years' financial management experi-

ence with government contracts, presented his independent financial analysis of DWFPD's fiscal situation. Rusnak stated that a 7-mill levy increase could support current services if the district was willing to implement cost-saving changes such as reducing staff from five firefighters per shift to four, combining the chief and assistant chief positions into one role, selling equipment, operating out of one station as opposed to two, merging with other districts, restructuring the district's loan, and delaying capital expenditures.

Rusnak reminded the board—and the chief and assistant chief as technical advisors to the board—that it has a fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers to approve operational budgets, negotiate partnerships and/or mergers, and establish mill levy tax rates. Rusnak continued with a summary of how much more a district resident could potentially pay in property taxes if the mill levy increased to 22 mills.

Rusnak concluded that "as an independent public person and the data that I was provided, that I was able to receive, was, I think with some sound management, financial management, I think the mill levy increase would need to be no more than 7 (mills) and could be even less."

Regular board business

The board unanimously approved the March meeting summary. Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich presented the bank balances and financials. Total cash in March amounted to \$1.421 million, up from \$782,296 in February.

Popovich noted that DWFPD's annual audit was conducted in March, and the audit report will be presented at the May board meeting. The Profit and Loss statement showed that the Legal Counsel line item is over budget by \$5,188.

Chief's and assistant chief's reports

Chief Burns disclosed the agreement with Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD), which is intended to remedy the disparity in automatic aid calls between the two districts. Essentially, DWFPD will respond only to calls coded as Echo or Delta, which involve cardiac arrest, respiratory arrest, or other life-threatening medical trauma in the southern Jackson Creek and adjoining areas of the districts' automatic aid territory. Burns stated that the plan is a reasonable solution and should eliminate unnecessary responses. Burns did not mention when the agreement starts, but a previous OCN article refers to an April 3 start date. See www.ocn.me/v17n4.htm#tlmfpd.

Burns reported that staff presented a 15-mill levy in-

crease with a 10-year financial plan at the final steering committee meeting held on March 15. Eighteen homeowners' associations (HOAs) fall within district boundaries and all 18 were invited to participate in the steering committee meetings. Thirteen HOAs were represented at the March meeting, at which an anonymous poll was taken. Burns said the vote favored the mill levy increase by a 2-to-1 ratio.

Burns discussed district goals based upon a recent SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Strengths included adequate fire equipment, a strong medical program (all are trained in Advanced Life Support and Basic Life Support), experienced and well-trained staff, and community involvement through smoke detector battery programs, public education in the schools, mitigation projects, and summer safety fairs.

Weaknesses identified by the analysis included personnel retention due to lack of advancement inherent to a small organization and lack of a community response team geared specifically to the elderly. Burns listed opportunities as maintaining current programs, preparing for a growing elderly population, sharing an engine or other fire safety responsibilities with the statewide organization, exploring mergers, consolidations, and authorities with other fire districts, and continuing deployments to wildland fires.

The two major threats Burns named were catastrophic fire, which is affected by the Wildland Urban Interface, and the severe loss of tax revenues. Goals included improving the district's ISO rating to positively influence homeowners' insurance premiums, pursuing several community certifications available to the district, and helping Gleneagle become a Firewise community. Burns added, however, that the primary goal is to become financially stable by 2019.

Burns turned his attention to a letter of appreciation received from Clark County, Kan. The letter thanked the DWFPD crew deployed to a wildland fire who encountered significant hazards and challenges. Burns also praised B Shift for its recent service to a woman in cardiac arrest. Both the hospital and the woman's husband credited B Shift for saving her life. As of April 9, the woman was expected to make a full recovery. Burns recognized Sean Leonhardt for his work with special needs kids at Manitou Springs High School. Burns also announced that El Paso County had lifted the stage 1 fire ban.

Note: The district has three full-time shifts (A/B/C) that serve 48 hours on duty then 96 hours off duty in a continuous rotation.

Assistant Chief Scott Ridings compared the 243 emergency calls in March 2016 to the 254 emergency calls in

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