

The process involves several steps, including engaging the board with basic questions, asking the community for its opinions, gathering information about desired qualities and qualifications in a superintendent, creating a flier to publicize the search, and screening applicants.

CASB handles the Human Resources work and collects applications. The board decides how many applicants it wishes to interview and will have a community interview team.

The cost of the search will be \$12,000 plus expenses.

Upchurch commented that District 20 is also seeking a superintendent, so the sooner District 38 begins, the better.

Black recommended that the board answer the basic questions before its January meeting so that the call could go out nationwide, and hopefully interviews could be conducted in March. Black said that if the selection doesn't work out, CASB will do another for free.

The board approved the contract with CASB.

Audit approved

The board approved the re-

sults of the annual audit. Recognitions

The board recognized the Palmer Ridge High School football team for its second consecutive 3A State Football Championship and the Lewis-Palmer High School Girls Volleyball team for its fifth 4A State Championship in six years.

The board also recognized David Prejean of Farmers Insurance for his contributions to the district through participation in the Business Advisory Council and donations to cover "wish list" items for three schools each month.



Above: David Prejean of Farmers Insurance was recognized for his contributions. Photo by Harriet Halbig.

The Lewis-Palmer D-38 Board of Education usually meets on the third Monday of the month at its Learning Center, 146 Jefferson St., Monument. Due to

a conflict with Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the board will meet on Monday, Jan. 14 at 6 p.m.

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Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Dec. 4

2019 budget changed then approved, including some raises

By Allison Robenstein

At its regular meeting on Dec. 4, the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) board discussed the 2019 budget for over two hours. Before finally approving an amended budget, arguments erupted between the board, the administration, and residents. Topics such as monthly financials and run reports, which the board normally discusses, were postponed until January.

Director William "Bo" McAllister was excused, so Secretary Mark Gunderman ran the meeting. One highlight to the meeting was when Mary Gunderman, chairwoman of Gleneagle Women's Club, thanked the staff for helping with their annual craft fair.

2019 budget changed then approved

As the budget discussion opened, Chief Vinny Burns updated the board with the new property tax numbers that had come in since the November meeting, modifying the revenues identified in the paper budget received by the public. Director Gary Rusnak asked Burns to explain the updated version of the budget to the board, since neither it nor the public had copies of it.

Rusnak also asked staff to clarify whether the incoming revenues were gross or net of the treasurer's fees required to be paid from property tax income. This has been a continuing point of contention among Rusnak, Assistant Chief Scott Ridings and Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich. Popovich and Ridings say the assessor's checks are net after the fees have been removed. However, Rusnak said, "The revenue is gross of the fees, I confirmed this with the assessors." He also expressed frustration that he was not privy to the associated assessor paperwork, saying, "I am a new board member and I am entitled to see that information." Ridings insisted that he was sharing all relevant information with Rusnak.

The differentiation in salary increases between administrative staff and firefighters took up the lion's share of the budget discussion. In October, Burns and Ridings initially asked for Wescott salaries to increase significantly across all ranks to match the base salaries of Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District's in case of a merger. At that time, Ridings said all employee po-

sitions would see an increase, with basic entry-level firefighters seeing the most change with a 52 percent increase in salary. See www.ocn.me/v18n11.htm#dwfpd.

However, at the November meeting, Burns and Ridings scaled down salary requests, saying the administrative assistant would receive a \$9,000 raise, exempt employee (firefighters) salaries will increase 21 percent, and non-exempt employee (supervisors) salary totals will increase 11 percent in 2019. See www.ocn.me/v18n12.htm#dwfpd.

And in a partial turnaround, on Dec. 4, the budget reflected a \$50,500 line item increase in the exempt employee (chiefs) item. Note: The chiefs salary line item has not increased since 2016. Comparably, Simpson calculated the non-exempt employees (firefighters) were receiving only a 2.2 percent raise for 2019, and he suggested these increases should be equitable across the board for administration and firefighters. After Simpson reminded the chiefs, "leaders eat last," Rusnak said, "I'm uncomfortable with the salary increases that are here right now," making clear he would

prefer to go with a straight salary increase across the board.

Burns expressed his disappointment that the board was bringing up salary increase concerns now, saying without the increases the chiefs built into the budget the board is taking away his ability to operate. Ridings said they created a 10 percent salary increase and built promotional opportunities into the non-exempt line item for those firefighters who had been "asked for years to perform in positions probably above where they were at."

Director Larry Schwarz agreed with Simpson and Rusnak, saying he didn't support a large pay increase for the chiefs and was in favor of helping the firefighters get a fair amount of pay.

Rusnak, Gunderman and Schwarz all agreed the entire compensation package, including health insurance, salary and pension payments, should be considered and continued to push for more equitable increases for all employees.

Capt. Sean Pearson asked why Wescott firefighters couldn't be paid comparable salaries to those of TLMFPD or of Colorado Springs, saying,

"We are still grossly underpaid" and asking, "Is my job any different from theirs?"

Schwarz clarified the revenue source for Wescott is being "whittled down" as the district shrinks and the alarm load drops, saying in order for their salaries to increase, "The department needs to find ways to grow." He said, "Unless we annex or merge, this would always be a stepping stone fire department." Rusnak said Wescott should only do what it could afford to with salaries and not to try to keep up with neighboring departments.

The board suggested all employees should receive a 10 percent raise, so they decreased the total of the three salary line items—administrative assistant and exempt and non-exempt employees—by \$61,000 to be put into reserves until final 2018 figures are known. Burns said this doesn't take into account the promotions they wanted to give to firefighters, but Rusnak said the board doesn't control line items and the chiefs could redistribute the remaining increases anyway they see fit. Attorney Matt Court confirmed the chiefs have discretion over the money to move it in any way they like. Treasurer Joyce Hartung said it was not fair to cut firefighter salaries.

Note: The final 2019 budget shows the non-exempt line item representing firefighters' salary was decreased by \$60,000, and \$1,000 was removed from the administrative assistant line item. The chiefs retained their total increase in the exempt employee line item. The money removed by the board was put into the committed funds as promotions. To see the 2019 budget, see http://wescott-fire.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019_budget.pdf.

The board agreed not to decrease the pension or death and disability line items, which typically follow as a percentage of salary. Simpson suggested there were budget line items that could be reduced to augment the district's reserves. He noted some insurance-related items, such as dental and health benefits that are provided by external

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