

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, Nov. 20

# County ignoring its own rules, chief warns

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board meeting on Nov. 20, the board heard about the lack of water cisterns and fire hydrants in Flying Horse North and how the El Paso Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) asked the chief to “re-review” his position during the planning phase of the golf maintenance facility which is currently under construction.

## Flying Horse North and county decision-making

The board reacted with dismay and disbelief when Interim Fire Chief PJ Langmaid’s comments included:

- The BOCC chose not to enforce their own code of firefighting water supply requirements for new developments during the approval phase of Flying Horse North. I asked them to install a fire pump in the reservoir, but the BOCC can overrule the fire chief.
- Several large commercial

buildings and 258 homes have no plans to include fire hydrants or water cisterns for structural firefighting in Flying Horse North.

- A proposed 30,000 square-foot clubhouse would be above height restrictions and has no planned inclusion for the fire protection systems required for buildings with large capacity occupation.
- BFFRPD is not equipped to serve large commercial buildings like that.
- At some point during the last year, BFFRPD stopped receiving email notifications regarding all pending new developments, possibly due to a change in our own email system.

Langmaid explained that the county planners (or El Paso County Development Services) decided that cisterns were not necessary since they were not used during the Black Forest Fire. However, the main

use of cisterns is to provide water to fight a single structure fire, not a wildland fire conflagration and cisterns were used during the second day of the Black Forest Fire at High Forest Ranch, a development north of Flying Horse North.

Langmaid continued that during each phase of Flying Horse North, Classic Homes, Inc., will be required to revisit the water supply issue with BFFRPD as part of the county review process, so the district will be more proactive then.

“Classic Homes have now quickly agreed to install a fire pump for the Golf House building and plans for a 200-room hotel are on hold at this time. This is going to turn into a big deal, folks,” he said.

Langmaid said they are going to be forced to assume a more active role in planning and development of the district, to review residential, commercial, and fire water supply. The county doesn’t have a fire marshal and depends on the Pikes Peak Regional Building Inspectors. A BFFRPD Fire Marshal position will need to be created, he said. The district will be updating the rules on its website for developers who want to build within the BFFRPD boundaries. *For background, see [www.ocn.me/v19n11.htm#bffire](http://www.ocn.me/v19n11.htm#bffire).*

## Amendment to the 2019 budget

Treasurer Jack Hinton requested the board approve the proposed amendment to the 2019 budget. He made particular note of the additional funding needed to allow the district to fix the exhaust vent system and pay for two new ambulance chassis in the latter half of the fiscal year. The board had approved these expenditures in 2019 realizing money would need to come from district reserves.

The board approved 5-0

an increase of capital expenditure from \$308,000 to \$563,100 for the 2019 budget.

## Public hearing on the proposed 2020 budget

BFFRPD operates on a zero-based budget, meaning 100% of tax revenue received has been allocated and is used for the operation of the district. The budget also allows for emergency funds, TABOR monies and a balance at the end of the year to pay for wages and benefits through the first quarter, which is when the district receives the first payment of property tax revenue. Payment of the balance for two new ambulances in 2020 is also included in the proposed budget.

Langmaid said he is working on creating a strategic plan through 2025 so the district can be more proactive.

The budget is scheduled for approval at the Dec. 11, board meeting.

## Online banking approved

Hinton requested the board approve Resolution 2019-03 to grant authority for the chief and the finance director to access the district’s bank accounts for the purpose of making deposits and transferring funds between the district’s accounts as necessary to complete tasks assigned to the finance director by the chief. The board voted 5-0 to adopt the resolution.

## Check signing emergency fund

Hinton proposed a resolution that all board members could access district bank accounts during an emergency, as directed by the board. After a discussion, Hinton agreed to present at the December meeting a corrected resolution that would state more clearly how a board member could only access accounts during an emergency.

## Public comment

Black Forest resident, Linda Smith asked the board: How can BFFRPD spend more than they have? Hinton responded with the following:

- The district holds reserves and the budget is strictly the amount of taxes received from property taxes which are based on the mill levy.
- The property tax assessment is usually accurate, give or take \$1,000.
- The new mill levy of 14.5 mills will be partially implemented in 2020 at 12.5528 mills.
- The amount of \$550,000 was approved for the mill levy increase in 2020 for the budget in conjunction with the assessed property taxes.

## Operational report

Langmaid said the following:

- A total of 107 responses were made in October, which is a significant increase in calls for service. It was expected with the population density increasing and we expect the calls to keep growing. Year-to-date calls have surpassed 1,040.
- American Medical Response (AMR) has requested meetings with BFFRPD and our neighboring partner agencies to build improved mutual aid agreements.
- Thanks to the board decision to hire extra EMS staff, Firefighter/Paramedics Brandon Johns and Amanda Earle have become the latest full-time staff members on November 10.
- Firefighter/Paramedic Daniel Grodman has resigned.
- Two Assistance to Life Service (ALS) ambulances are now in service in the district and the aim is to continue that model even though a Firefighter/Paramedic is leaving.
- An apparatus and equipment committee is being formed to identify needs in both areas for 2021 and 2022.
- Captain Chris Piepenburg has been working diligently with local and state partners regarding a more robust wildland program.
- BFFRPD is still looking at wildland fire deployments in 2020 and it will require some sacrifice and generate overtime.
- Training continues with Fire Officer and Firefighter Hazmat Technician courses.

## Paramedic student contract

Langmaid requested the board approve the newly-drafted paramedic student contract requiring a three-year commitment from trainees since the district is paying for their

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