

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Nov. 17

2021 budget disagreements may see a loss of a chief position

By Allison Robenstein

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District held a regular meeting on Nov. 17 during which the board reviewed the draft budget and got updates on current projects. A special meeting was held Nov. 12 for an executive session. No decisions were made during or after that meeting.

Director Joyce Hartung was excused.

Nov. 3 election results:

Ballot Issue 6B (allow Donald Wescott Fire Protection District to increase or decrease mill levies):

Yes/For 3,663 (62.36%)

No/Against 2,211 (37.64%)

Ballot Issue 6C (allow Donald Wescott Fire Protection Northern Subdistrict to increase or decrease mill levies):

Yes/For 3,568 (62.7%)

No/Against 2,123 (37.30%)

Budget 2021

Chief Vinny Burns reviewed the draft 2021 budget with the board in preparation for its Dec. 1 public hearing. Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich said the budget is prepared using the 7.15% residential property tax rate.

One point of contention surrounded part-time salaries, a new accounting category in next year's budget. Specifically, board Chairman Mark Gunderman was concerned about Assistant Chief Jim McBride's ongoing work with the district in creating an education program. "I'm questioning if a district our size needs a fourth person with a chief rank after we just approved a new organizational structure," Gunderman said. He said he would rather see the money go into additional overtime budget because of uncertainties. "If 2020 has taught us nothing it's that we don't know what to expect."

This year, the district restructured the ranks, creating three battalion chief positions in addition to Burns' rank.

Originally, the position was exempt, but Burns said McBride will work hourly now.

Director Duane Garrett said the district has had this discussion in the past. Because we have battalion chiefs who are handling training, this position is unnecessary, he said.

Burns said many of the programs used today have been due to McBride's work. "He has a high level of fire service knowledge and has been priceless as a tutor and mentor." Garrett asked for specific measurements upon which Burns could prove his case, saying they are using multiple educational platforms whereas before they had none.

Gunderman said, "I have a hard time looking at my neighbors paying for [a] chief who is 2,000 miles away." McBride lives on the East Coast. There was no conclusion, but the topic will be on the table during the public hearing on Dec. 1.

Burns said due to the pandemic many classes and workshops have been cancelled or have moved to virtual, so the training budget was decreased.

Burns said he would like to concentrate on smaller projects to be paid for through the reserve funds including new radios, more gear for firefighters, and some facility repairs. No new apparatus is being budgeted. He also warned the board it should begin saving for Station 1, which will need a remodel soon, and Station 3, built in 1981, which should be torn down and rebuilt.

Gunderman said the bottom line is that the reserves need to remain between \$900,000 and \$1.2 million as they had all agreed.

Chief's report

- Firefighter George Laugesen is one of four paramedic students. He has met all the necessary requirements and will be promoted to paramedic this year.
- There were 78 calls for service with zero fire loss in October. This is an 11% increase over October 2019 calls. Secretary Larry Schwarz asked about the 15 calls that showed units were returned to

quarters before arrival on scene. Burns said these calls were automatic aid. Because the home department got to the call first, and determined no other companies were required, these units turned around. Schwarz, who has been a proponent of more staff per rig, asked how manpower is tracked per truck. Lt. Jason Chavez said data is only tracked in the narrative of the report and would not be easily queried. For example, if a paramedic gives a patient medication, they typically leave their rig to ride in the ambulance with the patient to the hospital.

- The November chief's report will include fire loss. "There were back-to-back significant calls," along Highway 83 that included a fire from a multiple vehicle crash and a fatality. Burns said the team handling these calls was, "extremely professional" noting it was one of the more horrific scenes the firefighters have encountered. "Words can't describe the damage to some of those vehicles," he said.
- Chief Shannon Balvanz confirmed the Federal Emergency Management Agency grant request has been officially approved. This money will pay for a vehicle exhaust removal system in all three stations. The state will pay \$124,857, and Wescott's out-of-pocket expense will be \$6,000. The project is expected to begin in December. Schwarz suggested the stations should be decontaminated before the work starts, but this wasn't in the 2020 budget. Burns said he will try to prepare costs and pull the money from reserves.

Chavez said a new life pack, which was also paid for using grant funding, has been in service for two weeks. The state is reimbursing the district for the unit, and Chavez expects the money in the next few weeks.

- Santa on Patrol will happen on Dec. 12, weather permitting. The backup date will be Saturday, Dec. 19.
- Burns thanked a resident who kindly brought meals for all three shifts. He said the Greek and Mediterranean influenced cooking was much appreciated and delicious. A previous Antelope Trails student made the district a poster thanking them for their service. Burns said due to the pandemic, her tour was postponed.
- Regarding COVID-19, Burns said it is "spreading like crazy around the community and we are doing everything we can to keep it out of the station." Anyone coming on duty must first answer a questionnaire using an app on their phones.

The meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m.

The next Donald Wescott fire district meeting is scheduled for Jan. 19 at 4 p.m. If the meeting is held in person, it will be at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Dr. For a virtual meeting, the phone number is 669-900-9128, and the meeting code is 980 378 2073. Meetings are usually on the third Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. For information, call Executive Administrator Stacey Popovich at 719-488-8680 or see www.wescottfire.org.

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Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Nov. 18

Fire chief final candidates announced; COVID-19 report

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) board meeting held via Zoom on Nov. 18, the board heard the final candidate selection for fire chief, heard a COVID-19 update, and presented the proposed draft 2021 budget to the public.

Vice President Roger Lance, Secretary Mike Smaldino, and Director Tom Tharnish were excused.

Fire chief job description

Fire Chief Chris Truty said that eight changes were made to the fire chief job description that were initially motivated by the chief profiles provided by Prothman consultant Mark Risen. See www.ocn.me/v20n10.htm#tlmfpd. The board moved to approve the changes to the fire chief job description as presented, 4-0.

Fire chief candidates

Fire Chief Search Committee member/board President John Hildebrandt announced the final six candidates for the position of fire chief:

- Kristopher Blume of Tucson, AZ
- Jimmy Bumgarner Jr. of Monument, CO
- Mark Ellis of Wellington, FL
- Kenneth Harrison of Trabuco Canyon, CA
- Andy Kovacs of Loveland, CO
- Scott Robb of Oro Valley, AZ

Hildebrandt made a motion to declare the six finalists for the fire chief posi-

tion. The board unanimously approved the finalists, 4-0.

Hildebrandt said the final candidates will attend 30-minute in-person interviews at the Chamber of Commerce office at 166 Second St. with the full board and the Prothman representative on Dec. 5. The district will cover the travel expenses for each candidate.

The interviews are open to the public and due to COVID-19 will be available electronically either via live YouTube or Facebook stream. For joining instructions visit www.tlmfire.org.

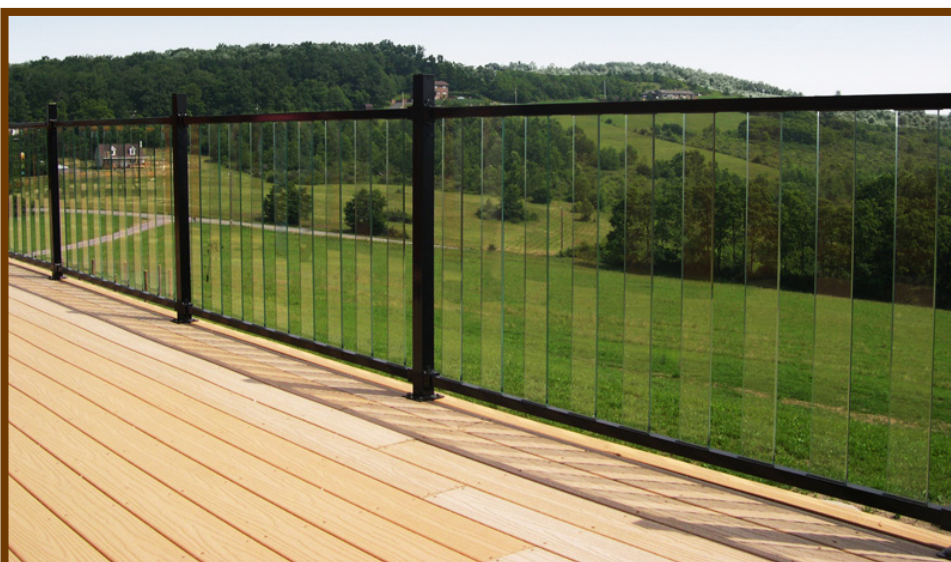
Before the interview process, the full board will receive summary reports from the six-member district staff panel (three representing the administration and three representing the union) from the interviews conducted online from Nov. 19-21 with each candidate. At the completion of all the interviews, the full board will decide whether to select a candidate, postpone a decision, or choose another option, said Hildebrandt.

COVID-19 update

Truty said that he listens to a weekly COVID-19 call with El Paso County public health officials and the Office of Emergency Management, and he gave the following update:

- Hospital staffing shortages are high within the state and although the mortality rate is decreasing

TLMFPD (Cont. on 16)



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