

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Aug. 18

De-Gallagherization initiative moves forward

By Allison Robenstein

During the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) meeting on Aug. 18, the board continued to move forward with a ballot question to de-Gallagherize revenue. The chiefs provided updates on ongoing and completed projects, including a \$124,000 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant award for the stations.

Secretary Larry Schwarz and Director Joyce Hartung were excused.

De-Gallagherization ballot question on November ballot

A question will be on the November ballot for both the district and sub-district, asking voters to approve de-Gallagherization of the district's revenues. District counsel Michelle Ferguson said the board had until Aug. 25 to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with El Paso County. During the July meeting, the board agreed to begin the process for a ballot question by sending a letter of intent to the county. See <https://ocn.me/v20n8.htm#dwfpd>.

Background: The Gallagher amendment is a voter-approved measure requiring a maximum of 45 percent of the state's total property tax burden to be paid by residences in order to relieve the increases in residential property taxes. The other 55 percent is paid by nonresidential (commercial) property. Because of TABOR, the tax rate can never increase without voter approval. Fluctuations in the residential tax directly affect the district's budget.

All Coloradans will be asked to remove the automatic ratio between commercial and residential percentages, putting it in the hands of the Legislature. Ferguson said the district should also take this opportunity to stabilize revenues should the statewide question fail.

Ferguson created financial models to identify how much revenue the district would lose if the prop-

erty tax rates decreased. For example, if the current 7.15% was reduced to 5.88% as some have suggested, this would represent a loss of \$410,000 in revenue. Should the residential rate fall to 3%, Wescott will lose \$1.25 million in revenue.

Chairman Mark Gunderman said such changes to revenues have a "shocking impact on the operating budget to the district," noting a vote in favor of de-Gallagherization does not increase taxpayer expenses. Resident Steve Simpson expressed his desire for the district to find cost savings should the de-Gallagherization question fail in November.

Chiefs' report

Chief Vinny Burns and Battalion Chief Scott Ridings updated the board on the following:

- The district was approved for a FEMA grant totaling \$124,000 for a station exhaust system. Chief Shannon Balvanz wrote the grant. Currently, when the trucks run in the station, a fan draws some of the exhaust up and out, bringing in fresh air through the open bay doors. Nonetheless, soot has built up on bunker gear and the walls of the bay. The new system will be a hose structure that attaches to the apparatus exhaust pipe eliminating any exhaust in the bays. The hose disengages as the trucks drive away from the station. The grant requires a match of \$6,000 which was unanimously approved by the board.
- The LED project was approved March 31 to replace bay lighting at Station 1 and bay and living quarters lighting at Station 2. The project reduced electric costs and spares firefighter turnout gear, which is susceptible to ultraviolet lighting degradation. See <https://ocn.me/v20n5.htm#dwfpd>.
- Call volume for COVID-19 has been minimal.
- Several firefighters are deployed on wildland fires in Colorado.

- Call volume for June and July totaled 138 calls for service, including 75 EMS-related calls and 63 fire-related calls. There was no fire loss for the two months. Average call arrival time is six minutes and 35 seconds. Turnout time, from the time the call is aired from dispatch to leaving the station, averages 48 seconds.
- The district is pre-planning water supply locations in rural areas.
- All houses within the district have been triaged with traffic signal-like ratings—red, yellow, and green—in case of a wildland fire.
- Firefighters are talking with Gleneagle homeowners associations to educate them on becoming a firewise community.

Public comment

Paradise Village resident Mary Gunderman told the district what a great job they do for the community.

This reporter noted most of the district's regular board meetings have now gone virtual, but the Zoom phone number and access code for these meetings is not available to the public on their website.

The meeting adjourned at 5:13 pm.

The next Donald Wescott fire district meeting is scheduled for Sept. 15 at 4 p.m. If the meeting is held in person, it will be at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Dr. Should the meeting be held virtually, 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.

Allison Robenstein can be reached at allisonrobenstein@ocn.me.

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, August 19

Fleet replacement planning re-evaluated

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board meeting on Aug. 19, the board discussed a new fleet replacement plan, received a progress report on the dual taxation process, and approved financial policies.

Treasurer Jack Hinton was excused.

Fleet/apparatus replacement planning

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid asked the board to consider exploring the option of using four lease/purchase agreements to replace two engines and two tenders. He said the following should be taken into consideration:

- The current Apparatus Replacement Plan is unsustainable as it was written in 2017, and will take until 2029 to fully achieve, by which time the cost of apparatus replacement will be higher.
- Saving funds at \$225,000 per year for multiple years in the Capital Reserve Fund is unrealistic due to the current age of the existing fleet.
- In 2020, the allocated funds were used to purchase two new ambulances with the assistance of a Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant.
- The district does not have water infrastructure and the current apparatus has varying water pump capacities that do not all interlock with each other.
- Using a lease/purchase agreement over a 10-year period would allow the district to start taking delivery of new apparatus in 2021 or early 2022.

Langmaid said, "The district would have instantaneous upgrades and the intention is to dive deep and explore the technical side in depth and find the best lease/purchase agreement."

After a lengthy discussion, Vice Chairman Nate Dowden made the motion for Langmaid to further investigate the cost of new possible apparatus and to research details of a lease/purchase agreement using a Request for Proposal process; the outcome would be contingent on the board authorizing funds. The board agreed, 4-0.

Dual taxation update

Langmaid said Colorado Springs City Council mem-

ber Andres Pico had received the list of 2,000 homes that he requested on July 20. After receiving a map from the City Council and a second review by district counsel Linda Glesne of Collins, Cockrel and Cole Law Firm, Denver, the list showed that two large parcels in the district were not in the city of Colorado Springs and those parcels would remain within the BFFRPD.

The district has requested those properties be removed from the BFFRPD exclusion process, but the district has not heard back from the City Council. He encouraged residents to continue checking both BFFRPD and Colorado Springs City Council websites. Visit www.bffire.org and www.coloradosprings.gov. See www.ocn.me/n20v8.htm#bffrpd.

Communications and dispatch

Langmaid said the following:

- The Mobile Data Communication (MDC) platform has been installed and tested to ensure the Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) configuration worked properly.
- Before making the previously approved purchase of MDC units, the district met with South Metro's MetCom to determine if the MDCs were warranted should the district move dispatch services. The MDC purchase will now go ahead regardless of whether the district moves to a different service in the future.
- A service that offers satellite imagery to advise incident commanders of crucial information before arriving at an incident and a Computer Aided Dispatch interface for Station Alerting would be beneficial in helping shave minutes off dispatch to calls.
- A lack of budget resources in the El Paso County Sheriff's Office fire dispatch unit and other communications issues are one of BFFRPD's primary issues, and all options should be investigated. "Good communication is imperative to saving lives and the current communications system is lacking and raising blood pressure," said Langmaid.

Financial report

Langmaid read the financial report and clarified a concern raised by Hinton earlier in August regarding increased overtime. Langmaid said the following:

- The increase in overtime occurred due to CO-

VID-19, sick employees, training, and the district's three staff vacancies.

- Monies set aside in the budget for training should have been placed in the wages budget and it could be transferred, but district Finance Director Frances Esty said it is not necessary.
- The district is currently just under budget for the year.
- The district has been reimbursed \$19,000 for wages and other expenses related to COVID-19 by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance Grant Program.
- The hope is that the district will continue to recoup COVID-19-related expenses.

The board accepted the financial report as presented, 4-0.

New financial policies

Langmaid asked the board to approve four new financial policies that Hinton had presented to the board in January, since copies of previous financial policies could not be found in 2019:

- 401—General Budget, new.
- 402—Revenue, new.
- 403—Capital Improvement, new.
- 404—Financial Reserves, revised since September 2019.

The board approved the four financial policies, 4-0.

Chief's report

Langmaid gave the following update:

- Three full-time staff members resigned; two due to family school scheduling concerns related to the pandemic.
- BFFRPD interviewed 13 candidates in an oral hiring board with the assistance of two chiefs




 ELIZABETH BRYSON
INSURANCE
 GROUP
 ELIZABETH BRYSON
 325 2nd St. Ste. M Monument, CO 80132
 Office: (719) 418-9350
elizabeth@ebinsurancegroup.com
ebinsurancegroup.com