

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, Jan. 20

Wildfire risk; exclusion/inclusion policy; COVID-19 protocols

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board meeting held at the Station 1 community room on Jan. 20, the board heard updates on wildfire risk and their regional training center, and approved a new policy related to dual taxation parcels. They discussed COVID-19 protocols and the district's limited funds for the first quarter of 2021.

Director Jim Abendschan was excused.

OCN used a recording of the meeting to write this article.

Wildland fire concerns

Chief PJ Langmaid said that 2021 poses the greatest risk

of wildland fires with the continued drought conditions, and it will take the entire community throughout the year to ensure the district does not have another devastating fire. See www.bffire.org/ready-set-go-for-wildfire-action-planning-suggestions.

On Jan. 17, a grass fire in Black Forest ended up in the trees and 5,000 gallons of water were used to ensure the fire was fully extinguished.

An access issue exists at Milam/Old Ranch/Union that has been referred to the City Fire Marshal for resolution. Should a fire occur in that area, BFFRPD has no acceptable access, and the developer is being advised to provide access, said Langmaid.

Exclusion/inclusion policy

Chairman Rick Nearhoof requested the board consider adopting Resolution 2021-02—a resolution adopting fees and setting policy and procedures for inclusions and exclusions of property. Note: The board held a public work session via Zoom on Jan. 8 to discuss the policy and procedures before consulting with district counsel.

After a long discussion, the board adopted the resolution 4-0.

Colorado Springs resident Joel Helzer, who lives in the dual-taxation area at the south end of BFFRPD, asked the board what the dollar amount would be for the petition of exclusion of property. See www.ocn.me/v20n12.htm#bffire and www.ocn.me/v21n1.htm#bffire.

Vice Chairman Nate Dowden said the fee would be \$2,000 per property with a \$750 fee due at the time of application. Helzer said the fees are an onerous amount for each parcel but would be reasonable for a petition with 22 parcels. He asked the board to consider an adjusted fee, but Treasurer Jack Hinton said, "There is a lot to consider," and enumerated multiple issues.

Hinton said, "In reality, the board came up with 10 items that factor into the fee and each homeowner has the right to wait for the city of Colorado Springs to complete the exclusion process and it will not cost a dime." **Note:** In the interim, residents in the dual-taxation area would continue to pay property taxes to both Colorado Springs and BFFRPD.

Nearhoof then addressed Helzer regarding the deficiencies in the petition for the 22 properties Helzer submitted for exclusion from BFFRPD on Nov. 22 and said the district is not denying the petition but does require corrections, which he described.

Helzer said that asking the homeowners for \$16,500

to re-submit the petition would be difficult.

Colorado Springs resident Colleen Murphy said the following:

- The 392 parcels that were being excluded at the end of 2020 would have cost \$784,000 at \$2,000 per parcel under this policy.
- The homeowners have been waiting seven years, paying double taxes, and it is disheartening to see both BFFRPD and Colorado Springs firefighters respond to every single call in the neighborhood, and it has to stop.
- What more can the residents do to move the process forward, since the process has not been working between Colorado Springs and BFFRPD.

Langmaid said, "After three years, it is very clear that the district and the residents want the exclusion process to occur."

"I recommend that the board stay on the timetable for the exclusion process, with the planned exclusion of 733 parcels per year," said Langmaid. See www.bffire.org.

Helzer said he appreciated the board's efforts, and BFFRPD has done all it could.

The inclusion/exclusion policy with accompanying instructions is available at www.bffire.org.

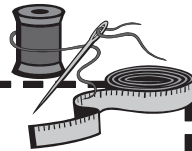
Langmaid also said the following:

- The city needs to resolve the issues they have created by continuing to annex unincorporated parcels throughout the county and then failing to exclude the parcels because they cannot meet the standards of coverage for fire protection services. See www.ocn.me/v16n12.htm#dwfpd1115.
- Right up until a couple of hours before the arrival of Colorado Springs City Council member Andres Pico at the July 15 board meeting, the city had planned to charge BFFRPD all of the fees relating to the pending exclusion of the 2,200 properties.
- The city changed course shortly before the meeting commenced and decided to cover the cost of the exclusion process. See www.ocn.me/v20n8.htm#bffire.

COVID-19

Langmaid responded to Black Forest resident Linda Smith's questions:

- The district has transported dozens of suspected COVID-19 patients in the Black Forest community with a significant increase over the past few months.
- After each suspected COVID-19 patient is transported, apparatus is decontaminated using a fogger with vegetable-based disinfectant at the station.
- EMS staff remove their personal protective equipment and dispose of it at the scene in a trash bag,

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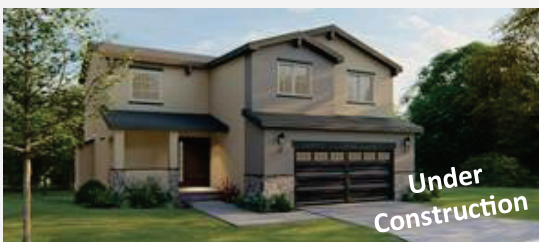
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