

FPD offered a contract to take over Wescott's services. See <https://www.ocn.me/v19n3.htm#dwfpd>.

Of the four approaches to unification that Powell discussed the main obstacles will be Wescott's dual mill levies for the district and sub-district of 7 and 21, respectively. There was no discussion about Wescott's volunteers.

Powell said the "Authority" option simply layers a third government on top of the existing two districts, because each district and subdistrict would keep the mill levies the same. This would be the easiest of the four options to complete for Wescott.

The second option, a "Merger-by-Inclusion," would allow TLMFPD to encompass all the Wescott district and subdistrict. Wescott customers would vote to take on the 18.4-mill levy that TLMFPD customers currently pay.

Wescott employees would receive a lateral transfer in order to retain their original hiring date. This is important to the Fire and Police Pension Association in the event they need to file future disability claims. Wescott property owners could petition for exclusion. Wescott Chairman Mark Gunderman said those in the "southern enclave" who pay only 7 mills currently would switch to 18.4 mills overnight if this were approved.

The third option posed by Powell, a "District-to-District Transfer," would be a complicated process for Wescott. Voters in the southern district would vote to increase their mill levy from 7.0 to 21.90 mills, which is currently paid by those living in the northern sub-district. If this is approved, then the lower of the two district's mill levies would be agreed upon, which is 18.4 mills.

Wescott property owners may petition for exclusion by Wescott. Wescott Secretary Larry Schwarz said the Colorado Springs Fire Department probably wouldn't cover this area because it doesn't represent enough revenue. Wescott Interim Fire Chief Warren Jones noted if the enclave were to contract with Colorado Springs, they would need an entity with which to contract, rather than each homeowner signing a contract separately.



Above: On May 2, the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District honored former board Chairman William "Bo" McAllister by dedicating the newest water tender to him. McAllister served as a volunteer EMT and then led the Board of Directors until his passing in January 2020. Photo courtesy of Donald Wescott Fire Protection District.

Powell called the last of the choices the "Bake a cake" option. Neither mill levy survives, so voters would be asked to approve a new mill levy while also voting on the consolidation approval itself. The majority in each district would have to approve the mill level and the consolidation.

Both boards directed their respective chiefs to contact ESCI, a strategic analytics firm from Wilsonville, Ore., to begin a feasibility study.

For the TLMFPD board's perspective on unification, see article on page 21.

Interim chief's report

Jones presented a short-term action plan to the board, noting there is "excellent organizational coordination" between Wescott, TLMFPD, and Black Forest. He said a long-term plan can be developed but would be dependent upon the board's decision to pursue unification

with TLMFPD. The plan, which goes from mid-May to mid-July, includes:

- Promoting someone to the vacant lieutenant position. Testing will occur the week of June 14.
- Realigning shift personnel to meet response needs.
- Aligning vacation practices with the Employee Handbook and Standard Operating Procedures.
- Reducing wildland deployments for the season as compared to last year.
- Improving Station 3 to eliminate the "significant safety hazards."
- Reviewing the 2021 budget and requesting the necessary amendments. Jones said some of the district's apparatus, although in good working order, are older, have high mileage and are close to the end of their useful lives.

Battalion Chief Scott Ridings said the district saw a 36% increase in call volume for April 2021 as compared to the same time last year. He said all employees have completed their annual physicals.

Public comments

Resident Steve Simpson said he is glad the district is exploring unification with TLMFPD. He sees the chance for improved emergency services. He also suggested a merger would provide financial stability and more career opportunities for Wescott employees.

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 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 7:00 p.m. The next Donald Wescott fire district meeting is scheduled for June 15 at 4 p.m. For information, call Executive Administrator Stacey Popovich at 719-488-8680 or see www.wescottfire.org.

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Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, May 19

Staffing turbulence; county commissioner visit; first annual awards

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) board meeting on May 19, the board was updated on the ongoing staff retention issues and the discussion points raised during a recent meeting with a county commissioner, and heard about the recognition awarded at the first annual awards banquet.

Chairman Richard Nearhoof and Director James Abendschan were excused.

The meeting began at 7:08 p.m. when Treasurer Jack Hinton arrived and a quorum was reached.

Staffing turbulence

Fire Chief PJ Langmaid said the following:

- Six full-time staff were hired on April 26.
- Even though the district has hired six, in May the department lost another staff member who had been testing for nine years with the Colorado Springs Fire Department, and we are really happy for him.
- Another staff member is currently testing for employment with a fire department in Texas to be close to family.
- The previously hired administrator who was due to start in June had a tremendous resume, but he has been poached by another company that offered a higher salary.
- Many staff members are now commuting from the Denver suburbs due to the lack of affordable accommodations in El Paso County.
- Retention will remain a constant focus because the cost of living has increased.
- Studies show that the pandemic has caused some people to re-evaluate their lives, and that is creating a finicky, unstable workforce nationwide.

Langmaid also said a constant shift in workforce and workplace silos are causing major disruption when people leave, forcing the staff to adapt as leaders and managers. The district is working on the next phase of hiring, but as an extreme priority the district will now engage a certified public accountant to ensure the continuity of financial operations.

County commissioner visits district May 17

El Paso County Commissioner Holly Williams requested a meeting with Hinton and Langmaid to discuss the potential needs of BFFRPD, and Hinton said the following:

- The county will be receiving \$140 million in federal aid.
- Williams also met with other fire departments within County District 1 to determine their needs.
- The northern end of the district was the major focus during the visit due to the lack of available fire-fighting water.
- Williams was amazed that there was no water at

Flying Horse North (FHN) to fight fires and saw multiple new properties requiring wildland mitigation in the far north of the district.

- Although FHN is a dual service area and receives fire services from Donald Wescott Fire Protection District and BFFRPD, 750 gallons of water is the maximum that any one apparatus can provide at any time to fight a fire, and refilling BFFRPD apparatus takes place at Station 1.
- Among the various topics discussed was the possibility of additional water tanks for the district, and Williams mentioned that a water authority board to control fire-fighting water may be necessary.
- Williams said during the visit that the City of Colorado Springs' only intent is to annex a possible future hotel in FHN.
- Williams also mentioned the Northern Delivery System, an underground water delivery system that will travel along Highway 83 and provide return flows from Colorado Springs Utilities to northern El Paso County residents. See Triview article on page 18 and FLMD article on page 20.

Note: FHN has a small retention pond on its golf course, and a fire hydrant was recently installed at Allen Ranch Road. See www.ocn.me/v21n5.htm#bffrpd.

Hinton said regarding annexation, the Master Plan stated all of FHN and a portion of the southern areas could be annexed into the city, and he informed Williams during the meeting that BFFRPD anticipates a 25% loss of revenue per year should the city go through with the annexations. The district would not be able to maintain the required level-of-service with such a loss, he said. See www.ocn.me/v21n4.htm#bocc and <https://elpaso.hlplanning.com/pages/draft-plan-outreach>.

The El Paso County Planning Commission adopted the Master Plan on May 26. See the Planning Commission Special Meeting article on page 1.

Langmaid said it is clear the county has some energy, and it could help the economy by installing water tanks in strategic locations throughout the district. That would help developers meet code requirements and allow business to expand in the district. Also, investing revenue into the county Sheriff's Office dispatch service would increase the communications level and help all fire districts.

Langmaid also said that Cherokee Metropolitan District (CMD) has installed fire hydrants 30-40 feet from the road on Swan and Volmer Roads, but BFFRPD trucks cannot reach some of those hydrants. "We can absolutely use them in an emergency, but right now many are without water flow, and some locations are not safe fill areas" and the district needs to discuss future water use with CMD, said Langmaid.

Hinton said that although he was shocked Williams telephoned his home on a Saturday evening to request that he also attend her meeting with Langmaid, he was so glad she did. The three-hour meeting touring the district and visiting both stations was an enlightening learning experience for Williams.

Before the meeting, Williams stated that she would not discuss impacts fees, only the dual taxation areas and the district needs, said Hinton.

First annual awards/recognition

Langmaid said BFFRPD held its first annual recognition banquet on April 28. The following awards and recognitions were presented during the event:

- Firefighter of the year 2019 - Firefighter Cody Poole.
- Firefighter of the year 2020 - Lt. Benjamin Rackl.
- EMS provider of the year 2020 - Fire Medic Brandon Jones.
- Capt. Christopher Piepenburg for achieving the designation of Chief Training Officer from the Center of Public Safety Excellence.
- Donna Arkowski was awarded the title "Honorary Fire Chief" for 45 years of service to the district as a firefighter and secretary to the board.
- Shield 616 was presented with the Community Service Recognition Award for working to secure ballistic vests and helmets for the BFFRPD staff.
- Munson Excavating also received the Community Service Recognition Award for its continued support to BFFRPD during emergency operations.

Vice Chair Nate Dowden said the department received a note from Black Forest by Wedgewood Weddings, thanking the department for choosing them as the venue for the BFFRPD's first annual recognition banquet on April 28.

Financial update

Hinton reviewed the month's financial statements, which he had received from Langmaid the day before the meeting. OCN continues to request copies of the month's financials. After the meeting, and upon OCN's request, a year-to-date profit and loss sheet, a balance sheet, and the budget vs. actuals year-to-date were obtained.

The board accepted the financial report as presented, 3-0.

Chief's report

Langmaid said Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) and Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) had a significant structure fire, and BFFRPD provided mutual aid on April 27. He said:

- The consistent standardized training and operational efforts of the three departments crews and