

Black Forest Fire/Rescue Protection District, April 19

Board approves wage compensation schedule; wildland technicians hired

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD) meeting on April 19, the board held an executive session to discuss a wage compensation schedule and heard about the recently hired five seasonal wildland technicians and the ongoing preparations to combat wildland fires.

Executive session

The board moved into an executive session at 7:50 p.m., pursuant to Colorado Revised Statute 24-6-402 (3.a.V.), to discuss compensation matters that may be subject to negotiations with employees or employee organizations.

When the board returned to the regular meeting at 8:21 p.m., board Chairman Nate Dowden said a revised 2023 wage schedule had been proposed and presented to the board implementing some modifications for certain positions. He made a motion to adopt the wage increase proposal effective April 17, to align with the next pay period.

The board unanimously approved the new schedule.

Note: After the meeting, Fire Chief PJ Langmaid confirmed the wage increases were primarily to adjust the compensation for the paramedics and the public relations director. Salary increases were also applied to the following positions: fire chief, deputy chief operations, administrative officer, and Firefighter/EMT Class 3 and 4 positions.

Resident Linda Smith asked if the deputy chief of logistics position would be filled.

Langmaid said the position would not be filled. The executive team will fulfill the role and provide additional opportunities for personnel development internally.

Wildland fire preparedness

Deputy Chief of Operations Chris Piepenburg said the district hired five new wildland technicians about a month ago. The wildland technicians are covering three shifts and work 24 hours on, with three days off, but all the new hire technicians were off shift for the mutual aid calls the district had recently received. The technicians will perform the risk assessments and mitigation efforts, change the fire danger signs, and operate the tenders for the district, he said.

Langmaid said the wildland technicians are working a 42-hour week and are paid with wildland deployment revenue.

Note: Rapid Wildfire Risk assessments continue on each property to help assess the wildfire hazard and mitigation needs within the district. Each property owner will be provided with a score card. To request a more detailed Firewise property assessment with helpful suggestions on how to make your property defensible and survivable, contact 719-495-4300 or email admin@bffire.org with your address and contact information. Additional details can be found at bffire.org.

Wildland fuel testing

Piepenburg said the district received a laboratory oven and supplies to conduct wildland fuels testing. The oven tests vegetation samples for moisture from three locations around the district every two weeks, but recent precipitation had prevented testing. The oven provides a moisture percentage to accurately predict the combustibility of fuels within the district, he said.

Langmaid said only two entities were testing for fuel

safety within the county, and the district is happy to be the third entity testing.

Black Forest Fire lessons learned

Smith asked if any of the current staff had served the department during the 2013 Black Forest Fire, and if the fire could have been averted had the district had the current department.

Langmaid said he was unsure, but he and board members lost property and maybe one or two returning firefighters were around during the fire. Hypotheticals are always a challenge for firefighters, but based on lessons learned, under similar circumstances, the decentralized command model the district has in place will allow the shift commanders to make aggressive decisions without compromising safety, he said.

Piepenburg said that every staff member is well versed about the Black Forest Fire, and they know the story very well. It is the role of each staff member to do their very best to ensure it does not happen again. The district also maintains a nationwide wildland fire deployment program to allow staff to gain first-hand experience in operating under austere conditions, he said.

Smith said she feels more protected and safer with the new organization, the additional staffing, and all the training that takes place.

Dowden said hopefully any organization learns from the past, and thankfully the department has changed and improved after such a major impetus. Kudos to the team for moving the district forward, he said.

Community club requests assistance

Three members of the Black Forest Community Club 10th Anniversary of the Black Forest Fire Remembrance Committee requested department assistance in the form of a lad-

der truck to raise a flag, a Firewise booth to help educate the community, and participation in the form of a speech during the event on June 10.

Langmaid said that all decisions should be made by the committee, but the district staff were happy to help wherever possible. District Public Information Director Brooke Reid would assist with making connections. Langmaid suggested the committee contact the El Paso County Sheriff's Office for traffic control, and he would ask retired Deputy Chief James Rebitski if he could give a speech during the event, but the 2023 budget did not include any funding for the event, he said.

Facilities update

Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn said the district is still waiting for an inspection before the gas meter can be installed in the barn.

Dowden asked why the inspection had been lagging for so long.

Dunn said the 20-year-old building plans had to be tracked down before an inspection could take place, but the vendor now has the plans. See www.ocn.me/v23n2.htm#bffrpd.

Piepenburg said the following:

- The district staff are "crushing it" and had performed about 1,718 training hours in March.
- Live Fire Training was taking place throughout the week with Monument Fire District scheduled to join in at the end of the week.
- Staff continue to work on state certifications.
- All staff completed a Wildland Refresher course and a Pack Test.
- The recently hired staff completed a week of Wildland Training and Sawyer training.
- The district assisted Falcon Fire Protection District with a structure fire

and helped during the 125 Fire near Simla, in Elbert County, on March 30. Langmaid said the following:

- The remodel of the Station 1 community room has been paused to allow the community to use the room.
- The 2005 Pierce mid-mount aerial ladder truck is close to being transported and delivered, but nothing had been confirmed.

Note: The district received the apparatus on April 26. See www.ocn.me/v22n12.htm#bffrpd.

Extreme ownership

Director Chad Behnken thanked Langmaid for the invitation to attend the Echelon Muster Extreme Ownership Conference in Orlando, Fla., with Langmaid and three of the district lieutenants. Behnken said speakers at the two-day leadership conference presented the lessons they learned during wartime deployments and how those same lessons can apply to everyday situations. The conference teaches extreme ownership of tasks within organizations without looking to the top leadership to blame for missions that fail, how to empower staff, and to prioritize and create a strong organization, said Behnken.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday of the month at Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colorado Springs. Meetings are open to the public in person or via Zoom. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 17 at 7 p.m. For joining instructions, updates, agendas, minutes, and reports, visit www.bffire.org or contact Administrative Officer Rachel Dunn at admin@bffire.org or call 719-495-4300.

Natalie Barszcz can be reached at nataliebarszcz@ocn.me.

Lewis-Palmer D38 Parent and Community Advisory Committee, April 11

Bear Creek Elementary, Portrait of a Graduate and Educator, wellness policy discussed

By Harriet Halbig

The Lewis-Palmer D38 Parent and Community Advisory Committee (formerly District Accountability Advisory Committee) discussed a number of subjects at its final meeting of the school year on April 11.

Bear Creek Elementary presentation

Bear Creek Elementary (BCES) Principal Peggy Parsley, who will retire at the end of the school year, offered a presentation about her school

with the aid of several staff members.

The population of Bear Creek is 875 students, one of the largest elementary schools in the state. The school was opened in 2001 as Creekside Middle School and later became Bear Creek when the student population of Grace Best Elementary was transferred to the site. Seventh- and eighth-graders were then transferred to Lewis-Palmer Middle School.

The school serves grades K through 6 and is a Title 1 school along with Palmer Lake Elementary. This reflects the number of students who are eligible for free/reduced lunches or are otherwise considered at risk.

The vision for BCES includes building character, educating students, and a dedication to shared leadership, Parsley said. Students and staff

D38 (Cont. on 16)

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