

BFFRPD (Cont. from 14)

when choosing training partners and if line staff also deploy to gain experience.

Piepenburg said the district does not pay too much attention to terrain, but more so structural and EMS training with regional partners. The district usually selects one large wildland training event in the

spring with CSFD and MFD. The wildland techs hired to fill the deployment roster are the first to deploy with a Type 3 engine, but the line staff that want to deploy to gain experience take a Type 6 brush truck, he said.

The meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Meetings are usually held on the third Wednesday of the month at Station 1, 11445 Teachout Road, Colora-

do Springs. Meetings are open to the public in person or via Zoom. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 21 at 7 p.m. For joining instructions, updates, agendas, minutes, and reports, visit www.bffire.org or contact Director of Public Relations Brooke Reid at admin@bffire.org or call 719-495-4300.

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Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, May 24

Gleneagle annexation timeline unknown; merger process continues

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) meeting on May 24, the board discussed the timeline for the annexation of Gleneagle, received an update on the dissolution of the sub-district, held an election to determine board director positions, heard about the potential for revenue loss, and received updates on station remodels and new apparatus. The meeting was preceded by the volunteer firefighter pension fund board of trustees meeting.

Directors Charles Fleece and Treasurer Duane Garrett attended via Zoom.

Election of officers

District Attorney Emily Powell of Ireland Stapleton Pryor Pascoe PC law firm requested the board decide the officer positions. After a short discussion, the directors unanimously elected to retain the same positions.

Annexation update

DWFPD Volunteer Pension Board Trustee Dennis Feltz (attending remotely) asked for clarification on the comments made by Monument Fire District (MFD) board Vice President Roger Lance. See www.ocn.me/v23n5.htm#mfd.

President Mark Gunderman said there is no current negotiation regarding any annexation, but the City of Colorado Springs may be interested in annexing Gleneagle in one to 10 years. An annexation would impact all the work the combined districts have undertaken. Fire Chief Andy Kovacs and Gunderman had a discussion over coffee with Town of Monument Manager Mike Foreman, but there is no interest in annexation. The board represents the community for fire service, and Gunderman said he would like to see the merger between Wescott and Monument Fire District progress, to best serve the residents. Town Hall meetings will be held to inform the public of the options, and discuss what the future may look like, he said.

Kovacs said the concern regarding annexation arose from an article and a map that was published in December 2021 by The Gazette.

Note: The map showing potential annexation areas can be found on page 50 of Your El Paso Master Plan at <https://planningdevelopment.elpasoco.com>.

Sub-district dissolution process update

Powell said the petition for dissolution was submitted to the court, and the hearing is set for June 23. Her associate attorney Dino Ross will represent the district via Zoom. The court hearing notice will be published in a newspaper, in Colorado Springs and Monument, before the hearing. See www.ocn.me/v23n5.htm#dwfpd.

Gunderman asked about engaging a public relations firm to help inform the public after the hearing.

Powell said that after the court approval grants the petition, the court orders the election, and then the board and district cannot engage in one-on-one campaigning. A Resolution of Advocacy with campaign-style language can be disseminated, but not by the district. Any interested party or member of the press can request a copy of the Resolution of Advocacy through the Colorado Open Records Act, but any campaign must be away from the district and the

board. A factual summary can be disseminated by the district. Beyond that, information must be away from the board and delivered by groups such as the Local 4319, homeowners associations, and other interested parties, she said.

Gunderman said he would discuss getting the message out to the residents with Kovacs after the meeting.

Potential for revenue loss

Kovacs said there is a potential for revenue loss for fire districts in 2024 with Senate Bill 303 and Proposition HH. The bill is a 10-year reduction in property taxes, and some districts could receive back-fill from the state, the stipulation being no more than a 20% increase in assessed property values, but locally values have risen beyond that. The implications are unknown, and every district is scrambling to decipher the complicated language, he said.

Powell said that SB 303 is a massive piece of tax legislation that passed in both the House and Senate and was signed by Gov. Jared Polis on May 2. The bill refers to the voters in November with Proposition HH, with these questions:

- Shall property taxes be reduced by reducing assessment rates?
- Shall we de-Bruce the state by 1% and generate about \$167 million in revenue?
- Shall we use that \$167 million to back-fill certain local governments that might lose out due to property tax reductions?
- Other parts are also included in the referendum. Taking this to the voters in November creates problems for the 2024 budget process, because the district will not know how much revenue will be generated by property tax assessments in time for preliminary budgeting. If the referendum passes, every assessor in the state will be scrambling to re-assess properties. SB 303 may not make the November ballot due to 12 challenges from statewide counties claiming the bill violates the single subject law; it contains at least three, possibly five subjects. Proposition 103 maybe even more damaging, creating a hard 3% cap in revenue increases for local government, she said.

Powell said her law practice is preparing a practical guide to SB 303 to give clients a brief synopsis, such as:

- How do I budget for the year?
- What are the deadlines for certifying mill levies?
- Will the de-Gallagher measure allow the raising of mill levies, or has the new legislation undone previous voter approval?
- The legislation may also prevent districts raising revenue beyond inflation.

About 20 clients are participating in a cost share for the guide that will be available in a month.

Gunderman said it would be beneficial to have the guide.

Powell said the combined district could share the information and only pay for one cost share.

Chief's report

Kovacs presented the board with the April Chief's report, and said:

- Multiple station projects are in the planning process, with plans to remodel Station 2, 4 (Gleneagle Drive) and "Shamrock" Station 5 on Highway 83.
- The district will probably build a new Station 3 in 2023 if the district can secure the land. The new station will incorporate the district administrative offices to accommodate the combined district staff with the consolidation, and additional staff will be needed.
- The combined district ambulances typically last about five years, and the district will receive one ambulance at the end of the year and another is budgeted for 2024.
- The new Type 1 Pierce Engine 514 was placed into service at Station 4 on April 29, with a community "push-in" ceremony. Squad car 575 was also pushed into service during the ceremony and has been placed at Station 5.

- The district is expecting a Type 3 wildland engine this year after a delay of two years.
- The tower ladder truck pre-construction meeting will take place in October and construction is expected to take about six months. The existing ladder truck at Station 1 will be placed in reserve, and the 75-foot ladder truck that DWFPD owned will be sold.
- The community chipping program has begun and will continue most weekends, except for holidays, through October. The chipper will be staffed by two firefighters, and on some occasions two chippers will be in operation.

For more information, see the MFD article on page 17. The full report can be viewed at www.monumentfire.org.

Volunteer pension board of trustees meeting

At the bi-annual DWFPD volunteer pension board of trustees meeting, the board heard about the passing of a former volunteer firefighter, discussed the status and funding of the Firefighters and Police Pension Association (FPPA) volunteer pension fund, received a trustee resignation, and approved a new trustee.

Former volunteer firefighter passes away
The board passed on their condolences to the family of former volunteer firefighter Larry Coburn. Coburn was also a retired law safety officer and is survived by his wife.

Pension fund status

Trustee Mike Badger said the FPPA had been requesting the board add funds to the FPPA volunteer pension fund since 2015, but none has been added. The fund has no further liability after the volunteer firefighter hiring program was closed. The 2023 budget did not include funding for the FPPA fund, and additional funding should be discussed during the 2024 budget process, he said. See www.ocn.me/v22n12.htm#dwfpd.

Powell said she takes no position on whether the board should pay into the FPPA fund now or not, there is no obligation, but the board has a fiduciary responsibility to keep the pension fully funded. However, on completion of the merger MFD will manage the FPPA fund. If at that time the FPPA fund is underfunded, the board would need to ensure it is fully funded before the merger is complete, she said.

Badger thanked Powell for the explanation and said that any decisions regarding changes to the 2022 Allocation Report could not be made until after the actuarial study had been received. The next actuarial study is expected in September or October.

Kovacs confirmed that no harm would come to the volunteer pension fund and the commitment from MFD will exist in perpetuity, he said.

Note: At the end of the regular meeting, Powell corrected her previous comment made during the volunteer pension board meeting and said that the pre-inclusion agreement stipulating MFD manage the pension fund cannot be drafted until after the November ballot, and only if the dissolution of the northern sub-district passes.

The board received the resignation of trustee Bill Lowes, and unanimously approved the appointment of Dennis Feltz to the vacant trustee position.

The next pension meeting is scheduled for Oct. 25 at 4 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Meetings are usually held every other month on the fourth Wednesday at Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. The next regular board meeting is scheduled for July 26 at 4:30 p.m. Meeting attendance is open to the public in person or via Zoom. For joining instruction, agendas, minutes, and updates, visit www.monumentfire.org or contact Director of Administration Jennifer Martin at 719-484-9011.

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