

the fourth Wednesday at Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. The next regular meeting will be held on Wednes-

day, Jan. 24 at 4:30 p.m. For Zoom meeting instructions, agendas, minutes, and updates, visit www.monumentfire.org or contact Director of Administration Jennifer Martin at 719-484-9011.

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Monument Fire District, Dec. 6

Concern over mill levy reduction request; property inclusion petitions accepted

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Monument Fire District (MFD) meeting on Dec. 6, the board heard about a mill levy reduction request, accepted five petitions for property inclusion with approved publication and the setting of a public hearing for the petitions. The board also received updates on the merger process, the new career fire academy, and a few recently filled staff positions.

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs attended via Zoom.

Property tax concerns

Vice President John Hildebrandt said that at the Nov.15 meeting he mentioned how the MFD directors are good stewards of the district revenue, spending appropriately, and the floating mill levy that was implemented for 2023 was voter approved. Last year, the district set the mill levy at 18.83 mills and this year the district was planning to go back to 18.4 mills and still might, he said. See www.ocn.me/v23n12.htm#mfd. The district did not know the outcome of the "special" state Legislature session at the Nov. 15 board meeting when the board certified the mill levy for 2024.

Hildebrandt made the following personal comments:

- The citizens defeated Proposition HH by 18% in a 40/60 vote, after being assaulted with political ads, stating how a reduction in taxes would be good, and the TABOR funds be used in part to backfill revenue to special districts.
- After the "special session" Gov. Jared Polis held in late November to discuss property tax relief, a bill with insufficient relief for property owners was passed in SB 23B001.
- Polis then sent a letter to the special districts requesting districts reduce mill levies, but Proposition HH was insufficient before it failed, and now it is upon special districts to reduce mill levies.
- The cost of apparatus over the years has increased from \$680,000 to \$850,000 to \$1 million, and after 2027 new requirements will tack on another \$100,000. See www.ocn.me/v23n10.htm#mfd.
- The district continues to grow, and with growth comes the responsibility to serve more residents, and the need to purchase more equipment that is subject to inflation.
- The district pays good wages to retain high-caliber staff and cannot "willy nilly" reduce property taxes so homeowners pay less, but he understands that no one wants to pay more taxes, including himself.
- The residents saw right through proposition HH, but I do not like being thrown under the bus by Polis, and the whole thing just peeves me off.

President Mike Smaldino said he had "duly noted" the personal comments made by Hildebrandt.

Director Roger Lance said he echoed the comments made by Hildebrandt.

Note: Before the meeting, Hildebrandt presented this reporter and each board director with a copy of The Colorado Springs Gazette article: "Polis asks to reduce property tax levy," dated Dec. 1, 2023 by Marianne Goodland. See DWFPD article on page 9.

Financial report

Smaldino said the November financial report was not available for the board to review due to the board meeting being earlier than usual.

Kovacs said the November and

December financial reports would be reviewed in January.

Combined district merger update

President Mark Gunderman of the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) Board of Directors thanked the district and the board for their patience during the merger of the two districts. He said that now that the completion of the merger is near after the passing of the ballot measure to dissolve the DWFPD subdistrict, the district will have one mill levy. He thanked Kovacs and his "phenomenal" leadership and the entire executive staff for combining the district staff and building a culture—and that is what makes it stick along with the leadership, the timing, and the right people involved, he said. The DWFPD board expects to have the merger wrapped up by mid-summer, he said.

Hildebrandt said he appreciated the DWFPD board for the tremendous level of trust it placed on the district and the board to combine the districts.

Gunderman said for the most part the process was painless, with just a few obstacles to overcome, and it goes to show that it was time to merge the districts.

Smaldino thanked Gunderman and the Wescott board and said the right pieces and players created a seamless transition up to and including the election. The MFD board will not forget that DWFPD existed, and this board is proud to serve the combined district, he said.

Wescott resident Gary Nelson congratulated both boards and the district staff, and said although the merger appeared seamless, he knows there were a lot of feet paddling under the water, but it appeared as smooth as ducks gliding across the surface. The level of service, quality, and care has increased in DWFPD, and he appreciates the dedication to complete the merger that has been 20 years in the making, he said.

Petitions for property inclusion
Bradley said the district received a list of properties from the El Paso County Sheriff's Office (EPCSO) that were within the greater district boundaries, but not officially within the district. Letters were sent to property owners and the following five properties were the first to petition for inclusion:

- 774 Forest View Way - Baker Property
- 3954 Roberts Ridge Place - Meisinger Property
- 4330 Green Mountain Drive - Parr Property
- 4075 Deer Valley Court - Sperando Property
- 4320 Green Mountain Drive - Swenson Property

Bradley requested the board make a motion to accept the five petitions for inclusion as presented, set a public hearing on Jan. 24, 2024 at the regularly scheduled board meeting, and ordered the fire chief or his delegee to publish a notice of the hearing as required by state law.

The board unanimously approved the motion.

Kovacs said the district had received a few more petitions for inclusion of property into the district in addition to the five proposed. He expects several more will petition for inclusion over the next couple of months.

Director Tom Tharnish, Monument Public Works Department, asked if the new water tank in Forest View Acres was included in the list since it is right in the middle of some of the properties.

Kovacs said the address was included in the audit provided by EPCSO and not currently included in the district.

Tharnish said he would discuss a petition for inclusion with Town Manager Mike Foreman.

Note: The properties listed were built at various times from 1982 to 2017 and are located in Wildland Urban Interface areas within unincorporated El Paso County. See www.ocn.me/v23n12.htm#mfd. The district is unable to collect impact fees for properties built in unincorporated areas.

Career Fire Academy update

Bradley said the following:

- The development of a com-

binated Career Fire Academy began in September between himself, Kovacs, and Fire Chief PJ Langmaid and Deputy Chief of Operations Chris Piepenburg of Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District (BFFRPD).

- The district realized there would be no access to the Colorado Springs Fire Department (CSFD) for outside agencies in early 2024.
- The CSFD Fire Academy leadership did not want to exclude outside agencies in early 2024, but the district could not forgo training new firefighters until the second half of 2024.
- The districts are partnering



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