

Monument Fire District, April 24

Station 3 land purchase approved; outgoing directors recognized



Above: From left, Local 4319 President/Engineer Christian Schmidt, Director Roger Lance, Fire Chief Andy Kovacs, and Lt. Roger Lance in the Station 1 training room during the Monument Fire District Board of Directors meeting on April 24. Schmidt recognized Lance for his service on the board from 2008-24. Lance was presented with a glass commemorative plaque, thanking him for his dedication and commitment to the fire district. Photo by Natalie Barszcz.



Above: From left, Local 4319 President/Engineer Christian Schmidt, Director Tom Tharnish and Fire Chief Andy Kovacs, in the Station 1 training room during the Monument Fire District board of directors meeting on April 24. Schmidt thanked Tharnish for serving nine years on the board of directors and presented him with a glass commemorative plaque recognizing his dedication and commitment to the fire district. Photo by Natalie Barszcz.

By Natalie Barszcz

At the Monument Fire District (MFD) meeting on April 24, the board approved a land purchase agreement for the rebuild of Station 3, recognized outgoing board Directors Roger Lance and Tom Tharnish; received an update on the merger process, received feedback from the Station 1 training center development town hall, and further discussed a land purchase for a future Station 6. The board also heard about a Senate Bill 194.

Vice President John Hildebrandt attended via Zoom.

Outgoing director recognition

Fire Chief Andy Kovacs said it was the end of an era as directors Lance and Tharnish end their tenure on the Board of Directors and allow Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) board Directors Mark Gunderman and Duanne Garrett to replace them as permanent MFD board members. He said he could not ask for a better Board of Directors, with hearts always in the right place always looking out for the line firefighters and finding better ways to serve the community. He thanked them for their contributions to the district, the firefighters, and the community over the years.

Local 4319 President/Engineer Christian Schmidt thanked both directors for their contributions and said he had personally enjoyed getting to know the directors over the past few years, the firefighters appreciate everything the board has achieved, and it has been a genuine privilege.

Lance said the firefighters are the customer next to the community, there is no other group more important than the firefighters. We have leadership, and a board, but the firefighters do the job, and he is proud to have served and knows he is leaving this department in a better place.

Tharnish said in the short nine years, the knowledge gained had been overwhelming at times but enlightening. He thanked the Local 4319 for its support, and he knows the district is in good hands, and a much better organization than when he joined the board, and he hopes that continues.

President Mike Smaldino thanked both directors for their contribution, leadership, and their perspectives and it has been a privilege to serve together.

Fire Station 3 land purchase agreement

John Sattler, vice president of NVS Program Management, representing the district and overseeing the Station 3 rebuild, said the process is non-traditional and it would have been preferable to build the station on a finished piece of ground, instead of a property that is undivided without any infrastructure, but there were no other properties to wait on. The purchase price is \$1.346 million for the 2-acre lot north of the YMCA for the rebuild of Station 3 with administration office space. The building will be 20,000 square feet and will meet the future district needs with room to grow, he said.

The board approved the Fire Station 3 land purchase agreement 6-1 in a roll call vote; Tharnish abstained.

Note: The district budgeted \$2.4 million to begin the project in 2024. See www.ocn.me/v24n4.htm#mfd.

Training Center development—town hall meeting

Kovacs said about 90% of the community residents attending the Station 1 proposed training center development town hall on April 18 were in support of the development. A couple of residents raised concerns about the development and the potential cost that has not yet been fully realized. The district will not be using any bonds or tax increases to develop the site, and that eased concerns. Some residents were also con-

cerned the district was duplicating efforts when other facilities exist in the county, but the training center will keep staff in district during training, and that will best serve the community, he said. See the Town Hall article on page 1.

Kelly said a few residents in attendance had the impression that the 2017 ballot measure increasing the mill levy would eventually reduce the levy if the district had enough funding. The common theme was why the district was proposing to spend about \$3 million on a training center. The answer is for the professional development of firefighters to give them what they need to perform the mission and save lives. The residents were asking for an adjustment to the mill levy at the meeting and were scrutinizing the district expenditures. The board needs to be very judicious with the taxpayers' dollars, and that is what the residents were asking for, said Kelly.

Lance said the board did reduce the mill levy for 2024, that was a board decision, but we could have maintained authorizing the matching mill levy but chose not to.

Hildebrandt said for future community meetings there needs to be rules on how the public can comment. One individual was not only texting incorrect information but also blurted out comments that interfered with the normal decorum of the meeting. He understands the concern about the district spending additional funds, but the board is being frugal, and the plans are for the future growth of the district. The idea of returning \$3 million in a mill levy decrease every time the district has additional funding would not be very prudent for the district's financial planning. Sometimes the district will be able to commit to a project, other times the district will need to wait until finances build up, said Hildebrandt.

Merger update

Kovacs said at the DWFPD board meeting that district counsel Emily Powell requested the MFD Board of Directors hold a special meeting on May 8. The short meeting is necessary to approve a resolution to transfer the remaining two properties belonging to directors Charles Fleece and Mike Forsythe and begin the process of dissolving DWFPD. on See DWFPD article on page 13.

Fire Station 6 land purchase

Kovacs said he received another offer from a property owner willing to sell an 8-acre parcel of land just north of the QuikTrip land, off Old Denver Road, with a creek running through it. The executive staff have walked the property that is just north of the QuikTrip 4-acre site. When QuikTrip approached the district through an intermediary as it was developing the property, the 4 acres were being used to stage materials and equipment. The district cannot definitively determine how the district would use all 4 acres, but with all the development in the district there will be few opportunities to purchase land. In five to 10 years from now, the district may need to add a sixth station and the land would be in the right area. The district has budgeted to purchase 2 acres in 2024 and Kovacs requested the board focus on purchasing 2 acres instead of 4. He said the district needs to live within its means, and he encouraged the directors to discuss the options.

The board discussed the options, which revealed varying opinions. Kelly and Secretary Jason Buckingham agreed the board should remain fiscally responsible and stick with the 2-acre requirement. Tharnish said the right to first refusal would not obligate the district to any financial commitment, even though the district does not have a plan for the additional 2 acres.

Estes concurred with Tharnish, to pursue all options, and said the QuikTrip location is an outstanding property.

Hildebrandt agreed with Estes and said the QuikTrip property would be preferable and has the best location. He also agreed with Kelly and said the district must be prudent with taxpayers'

dollars in light of the feedback from the Station 1 proposed training center town hall.

Smaldino agreed with Lance, favoring the entire 4-acre QuikTrip property. The district was lucky to purchase land and expand Station 1; the original site was large enough when it was originally built as a volunteer fire station. Station 2 has a leach field on donated property, and nobody knows what the future fire service needs will be. It is better value today to purchase 4 acres and do due diligence instead of purchasing land at a higher cost down the road, said Smaldino. See www.ocn.me/v24n4.htm#mfd.

The board requested Kovacs provide more information and comparison costs for both sites at the next regular board meeting.

Future funding sources

Kovacs said Senate Bill 194 was heard by a House committee on April 23 and received 10-1 bi-partisan support. SB 194 is nearing approval and will rewrite the language for Title 32, the legal governing state statute for special districts. The bill will allow fire districts to look at other sources of revenue, in the way over 20 other special districts are already permitted to do. The board could seek other sources of revenue after voter approval such as: the collection of impact fees in unincorporated areas of the district or imposing a sales tax on the residents. Proposed November ballot initiatives could compromise the district's largest single source of revenue (about

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