

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, March 18

# For now, merger talks on hold

By Nancy Wilkins

At the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors meeting March 18, Director “Bo” McAllister gave the oath of office to Harland Baker, Greg Gent, and John Fredell. Fredell is serving his first term as director, while Baker and Gent returned to the board. The board voted unanimously to appoint Gent chairman, Joyce Hartung treasurer, and Baker secretary.

Wescott district resident Susan Hindman questioned the board about the possibility of a merger, asking, “Who will be fire chief if Wescott and Black Forest merge?”

“I think the gun has been jumped,” said Chief Vinny Burns, referring to merger talks between Wescott and the Black Forest district, adding, “We are eight months to a

year out, at the earliest, even that is pushing it.” McAllister, a member of the merger committee, added, “Black Forest has been busy with their own issues, so the talks have not stopped but have been put on hold.”

Despite the merger talks being on hold, Burns said he expects cooperation between the firefighters to continue. The two districts are working much closer and the firefighters are standardizing training and response teams, streamlining both organizations.

### Fire authority different from merger

A new fire authority forms before a merger, explained Burns, and requires no mill levy increase or election. A merger requires an election. Districts can back out of a fire authority. A fire authority allows both districts to retain their own board of directors and maintain separate financial processes. Members of both boards would become members of a third board of directors for the fire authority, created to handle firefighting operations.

“The new fire authority board would decide who is fire chief,” Burns said.

### Chief’s report

The Insurance Services Office (ISO) plans to evaluate the district in April to give Wescott a new fire protection rating. Insurance companies may use this rating to evaluate homeowners’ insurance. Burns said the water delivery system plays a big part in the rating. The ISO looks at water districts, pump tests, firefighter training records, equipment, and personnel.

Assistant Fire Chief Scott Ridings said he hopes for a lower rating, which may reduce homeowner insurance rates. It has been 10 years since ISO evaluated Wescott.

Burns reported that a door collapsed from a basement fire in a new home. “We had to get out of there. It was a very dangerous fire,” said Burns. There were 196 calls this February, up from 168 in 2013, a 17 percent increase.

### Financial report

Administrative Assistant Cheryl Marshall said the bank balances as of Feb. 29 were Peoples National Bank, \$ 51,000; PNP-Colorado Peak Fund, \$179,000; Colorado Trust, \$439,000; and Wells Fargo Public Trust, \$363,000, for a total of \$1 million.

Other financial items included:



**Above:** Three directors took the oath of office March 18 at the Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors meeting. From left are Secretary Harland Baker, Director John Fredell, and Chairman Greg Gent. Director Bo McAllister, far right, gave the oath of office. Photo by Nancy Wilkins.

- Wescott received \$615,000 as the first 2014 installments from the El Paso County’s treasurer’s office, collected from general property taxes.
- “We are under [budget] and on track” said Marshall. Monthly expenses to date amounted to 10.7 percent of the amount budgeted for the year. They are normally around 17 percent at the end of February.
- The pension board will meet at 6:30 p.m. April 21.
- Fredell asked about the cost of overtime expenses, and Marshall explained new policies in 2014 should help keep overtime lower. Burns said overtime expenses change with demand and expects the state to reimburse those expenses.

The board went into executive session for “determining positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations, developing strategy for negotiation, and instructing negotiations.” The board did not expect to make any public announcements after the executive session.

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The next meeting is scheduled for April 21, 7 p.m. at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive. Meetings are normally held the third Tuesdays of the month. The pension board will meet at 6:30 p.m. that day. Call 488-8680 for more information.

Nancy Wilkins can be reached at nancywilkins@ocn.me.

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Northern El Paso County Coalition of Community Organizations, March 8

# Homeowners have outlet for HOA complaints

By Bernard L. Minetti

At the March 8 meeting of the Northern El Paso County Coalition of Community Organizations (NEPCO), Colorado Homeowners Association Information and Resource Officer Gary Kujawski described the process for making complaints against homeowners associations (HOAs). He stated that his office is a part of the Department of Real Estate under the Department of Regulatory Agencies.

Kujawski said he provides homeowners a process to follow so that problems between HOAs and homeowners may be resolved properly and correctly.

The Colorado Legislature, as a result of consumer concerns regarding HOAs, created his office in 2010. Kujawski also collects data regarding complaints against HOA boards and provides this information to legislators to provide a basis for future legislation. Besides assistance to homeowners, this office provides assistance to boards, declarants, and other interested parties concerning their rights and responsibilities pursuant to the Colorado Common Interest Ownership Act.

Kujawski said some of the complaints he receives pertain to:

- HOA managers/management companies
- Board member responsibilities
- Governing documents
- Meetings and elections
- Community maintenance
- Dues, fees, fines, and rule enforcement
- Declarant issues
- Disclosure and production of records

Kujawski disclosed that one of the goals of the HOA Information and Resource Center is to inform homeowners.



**Left:** HOA Information Officer Gary Kujawski spoke about how to make complaints against HOAs. He described procedures and non-investigative assistance that his office provides. Photo by Bernard L. Minetti.

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