

to the town, especially when no transport actually occurs. Overhead maintenance, staffing costs, and calls not covered by insurance have so far been absorbed by TLMFPD's taxpayers, since Palmer Lake is not in the TLMFPD service area and Palmer Lake property owners do not pay taxes to TLMFPD. Palmer Lake could also contract with American Medical Response (AMR) for ambulance service, which would also require payments from the town.

2. Town of Palmer Lake revenue is declining due to lower property tax and sales tax revenue, while town costs for insurance are increasing. PLVFD shares the town's 1-cent sales tax with the Police Department.
3. The PLVFD building is 76 years old and needs extensive renovation to be safe for volunteers to use.

For this meeting, the committee had narrowed the options for the department to three:

Option 1 is to do nothing, but Kuehster and Mayor Nikki McDonald agreed this is not feasible, since there is no room in the budget to pay for ambulance service to Palmer Lake or make improvements to the PLVFD building, which Kuehster said "is in such bad shape." He added, "We can't keep citizens or volunteers safe with the amount of funding we have right now."

Option 2 is to keep the PLVFD operational and increase taxes on Palmer Lake property owners to pay an estimated \$300,000 in yearly operations costs plus either \$500,000 for renovating the current building or \$800,000 to build a new PLVFD equipment and volunteer building (both costs would be spread over 10 years). These options would cost about \$120 or \$144 per year per \$100,000 of assessed home value, about \$10 per month or \$12 per month respectively. This option could also include a way to pay TLMFPD (or AMR) for ambulance service.

Option 3 would involve including the Town of Palmer Lake into TLMFPD and increasing taxes paid by Palmer Lake property owners by the current TLMFPD mill levy of 11.5 mills, or \$92 per year per \$100,000 of assessed home value (about \$9 per month). If TLMFPD merged with Larkspur Fire Protection District, which is being discussed, the TLMFPD mill levy could go slightly higher than 11.5 mills to match the current Larkspur mill levy at the time of the merger. This higher mill levy would have to be listed in the Palmer Lake inclusion ballot question.

Service would be provided by TLMFPD Station 1 at 18650 Highway 105, which is adjacent to the southern boundary of Palmer Lake, which is 2.5 miles from downtown Palmer Lake, 3.5 miles from the Glen, and within the five-mile service requirement.

Also, since it would be more effective for TLMFPD to serve Palmer Lake from its Station 1, the only way the current PLVFD station would still be used is if Palmer Lake also pays to renovate it for its volunteers.

A straw poll of those in attendance midway through the meeting showed a 15-2 opinion for keeping the PLVFD and increasing taxes. No decision was made on whether the ballot question should ask property owners for the funds needed to renovate the existing fire station or the larger amount needed to build a new fire station. The consensus by the end of the meeting was to meet the July 25 deadline to notify the El Paso County clerk that Palmer Lake will have a ballot issue on the November ballot.

The committee must next recommend a specific ballot question that the Palmer Lake Town Council would submit to the county clerk and recorder by Sept. 25. If November ballot voters decide against keeping and funding PLVFD, then an April 2015 ballot could consider whether to include the town in TLMFPD. In the latter scenario, 20 percent of the Palmer Lake electorate would need to support a petition for in-

clusion for it to be qualified as a ballot question.

Some of the comments made in support of keeping PLVFD an independent entity were:

- Several people felt that non-PLVFD firefighters could not navigate the Glen or find specific homes there due to lack of signage and GPS coverage.
- PLVFD is the "heart of the town," providing such personal touches as the chili supper, pancake breakfast, and Palmer Lake Star maintenance. PLVFD "holds us together."
- TLMFPD would not pay for keeping the current PLVFD building in use and there would be "less of a presence" of the Fire Department in town without it.
- Insurance ratings might fall if there were not a fire station in town, but the actual new rating would not be assigned until after any changes are made.
- Vierling explained that PLVFD volunteers do documented certification and training every two to three years.
- Since there will be a tax increase either way, it would only cost \$14 more per \$100,000 per year to keep PLVFD than to go with TLMFPD.
- McDonald said, "If we go with TLMFPD, we don't maintain control over our whole department. For \$14 a year, do you want to sign away what we have right now that is good, who knows our town, that can mitigate? To maintain and control our own department."

Comments made in support of inclusion of PLVFD into TLMFPD included:

- TLMFPD could only continue to provide EMS service to Palmer Lake if it is reimbursed for

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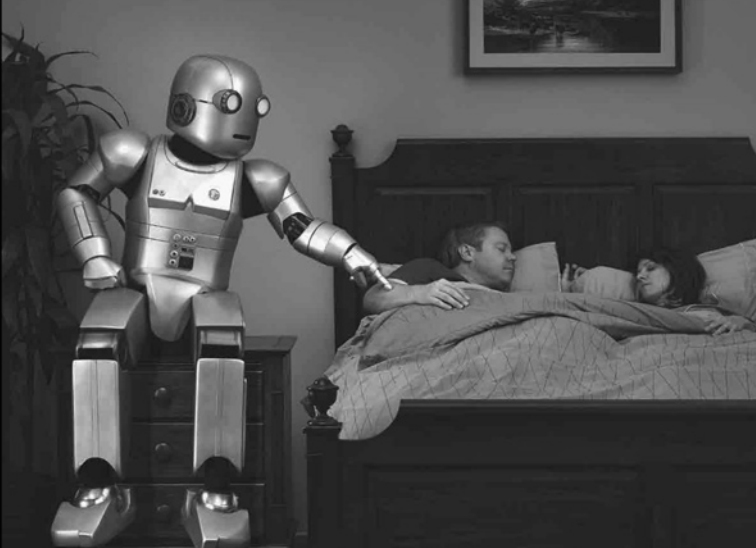
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