

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Sept. 20, Sept. 27, and Oct. 18

By 2018, district to be cut in half; 2017 budget drafted

By Lisa Hatfield and Kate Pangelinan

The City of Colorado Springs annexed Flying Horse Ranch on Oct. 14, 2003 without opposition by Donald Wescott Fire Protection District's (DWFPD) and had also annexed the land making up the southern half of DWFPD's current property-tax-paying service area many years ago. Now the district is working on a new 2017 budget that looks ahead to drastically reduced tax revenue in 2018 and beyond as those properties are de-included from DWFPD in two phases over the next two years.

By November 2017, district property owners will likely be asked to vote on a mill levy ballot measure to determine what level of service will be offered to the northern remainder of the district in the long term. Note: The southern half will be served by the new Colorado Springs Fire Department Station 22 on Voyager Parkway.

Note: Colorado Springs has been annexing territory from DWFPD since before 2003. See www.ocn.me/v3n10.htm#dwfpd

First draft of 2017 budget

The Sept. 20 DWFPD Board of Directors meeting included a first glimpse of the 2017 budget. Chief Vinny Burns indicated that the district was endeavoring to save money compared to the budget for 2016, including notable projected cuts from the Total Firefighting Operations and Administration line items.

During public comments on Sept 20, a civilian asked about how the de-annexation negotiations between the fire district and the city's lawyers progressed, but Burns said there was nothing new to report. See www.ocn.me/v16n6.htm#dwfpd0517 and www.ocn.me/v16n7.htm#dwfpd-0621.

"Orderly exclusion" options discussed in executive session

On Sept. 20, the board went into executive session at 7:37 p.m. for "Determining positions relative to matters that may be subject to negotiations; developing strategy for negotiations; and instructing negotiations." It was related to current negotiations with Colorado Springs concerning the "orderly exclusion" of the southern half of Wescott's service area that lies within Colorado Springs.

The meeting came back into open session and adjourned around 11 p.m. Executive Administrator Stacey Popovich told OCN that no announcements were made after the executive session and that the board planned to schedule another executive session soon to finish the discussion.

Preparing to sign the IGA excluding property from district service area

On Sept. 27, the directors continued the executive session. When they returned to open session at about 7:15 p.m., they voted unanimously to approve Resolution 16-9, saying they would indeed sign the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with the City of Colorado Springs when that document is finalized by the attorneys.

Chairman Greg Gent said the IGA would cover the exclusion of certain property from the DWFPD service area and the filing of petitions for exclusion of such property.

Educating voters on decisions for the future
Residents attending the Oct. 18 meeting asked for clarification on where the district posts its public meeting notices. Popovich said they are posted on the district website, on the news board in front of station on Gleneagle Drive, and submitted to El Paso County.

Then directors and staff answered questions from Gleneagle Civic Association representative William Lowes (a past president of DWFPD) and Gleneagle North Homeowners Association President Bill Fillion on what Resolution 16-9 meant for the future of the district.

Burns said that the Colorado Springs City Council approved the IGA unanimously on Oct. 11. The next step was for a judge to approve it. The IGA would cover the exclusion of DWFPD between Interquest Parkway and Northgate Boulevard. The overall effect will be to reduce the size of DWFPD by half of its current 22 square miles and reduce its total revenue by 66 percent. The timeline:

- In 2017 DWFPD will still receive 100 percent of previously projected revenue that was generated in 2016 by property taxes.
- Jan. 1, 2017: exclusion of Phase One Property, from Interquest Parkway north to the proposed location of the Powers Boulevard extension with I-25 (north of The Classical Academy).
- In 2018, DWFPD will receive property tax revenue generated in 2017, which will amount to half of recent "normal" revenue.
- Jan. 1, 2018: exclusion of Phase Two Property, extending the rest of the way up to Northgate Boulevard.

- In 2019 and onward, DWFPD will receive no revenue at all from any of the de-included territory south of Northgate Road.

Lowes asked why the district did not discuss this plan with residents and did not request that the city provide fire protection for the remaining northern section of the district since the city is taking away 50 percent of DWFPD's territory and over 60 percent of the revenue, mentioning a state regulation and an existing agreement with the city written many years ago.

The directors explained that since it was a legal process, it was not possible to make the details public until an agreement with the city was figured out. They also said that their attorney told them there was no way to make the city take over emergency services for the remainder of the district north of Northgate Road.

Fillion said the district needed to explain the current situation clearly to residents who will likely be presented with a mill levy ballot measure in November 2017. Assistant Chief Scott Ridings said now that the timeline is known, the district will be asking the community what they want in fire protection service levels and therefore what mill levy amount might be requested by the district.

Director Harland Baker said, "We need to resize (the district and its services) for what (residents) want to do. We do have a savings account. We have time to deal with this." He said the district will show residents the data so that they can decide what services they will have available in three years.

Gent said, "If our district is cut in half and our taxes cut in half, everything would have to be cut in half," unless resident approved a mill levy increase in 2017. The district will prepare two budgets so there is a contingency plan, he said.

In response to Lowes' question, Burns said the district's outstanding \$1.2 million in long-term debt, spent to build the new Wescott Station 2 at 15505 Highway 83, would still be the responsibility of the district, not the city, to pay off. "All the trucks are paid for. Station 2 is the only debt," he said.

2017 draft budget revised

Burns said he had reworked the 2017 draft budget now that "we have a known set of circumstances" about the de-annexation timeline and its associated long-term revenue stream. He said he was suggesting cost-saving measures in many areas, including the possibility of not offering any overtime shifts next year unless they deployed firefighters to wildland fires, since those costs would be reimbursed. This move could save the district over \$100,000.

However, this could also mean that if a firefighter called in sick or took vacation, and since for safety reasons trucks can't be dispatched with only one crew member on them, there would be some days when Station 2 might be closed and all operations would center on Station 1 on Gleneagle Drive, Ridings explained.

Station 3 will go back on the market

Gent said that Station 3, on a half-acre of land at 15000 Sun Hills Drive, was recently appraised for \$220,000. For several years, the directors have discussed what to do with that property, and the consensus at this meeting was to proceed with trying to sell it. It is currently being used for storage, training, and some meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

The next Donald Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Nov. 15 at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Dr. For information, call 488-8680 or see www.wescottfire.org. The district is also on Facebook.

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Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Oct. 26 Budget, hiring discussed

By Lisa Hatfield

On Oct. 26, as they had done at their Sept. 28 meeting, the directors of the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) discussed the 2017 budget and how to improve the district's hiring process to avoid this year's challenges and resolve vacancies.

Fire Chief Chris Truty has proposed a 6 percent pay

raise to move TLMFPD closer to the average wage for comparable districts. The directors also tossed around some ideas for long-term plans regarding a permanent location for the TLMFPD administrative offices, which are now in a leased space outside of the district, and possibly combining them with a new fire station.

The next TLMFPD meeting will include a public bud-

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