

Palmer Lake Town Council, Dec. 12

Funds for 2014 budget formally appropriated

By Lisa Hatfield

The Palmer Lake Town Council passed two resolutions to appropriate funds for its 2014 operating budget at the Dec. 12 meeting. Members also discussed plans for a geological survey of Palmer Lake, scheduled a meeting for residents' input about the future of the Palmer Lake Volunteer Fire Department (PLVFD), and approved a new business license.

Fire Trustee Rich Kuehster and Town Clerk Tara Berreth were excused from the meeting.

2014 budget formally adopted

The trustees unanimously approved Ordinance 7, officially adopting the 2014 budget that was formally approved during the Nov. 7 regular board meeting. The trustees also unanimously approved Ordinance 8, which appropriated all the money in the 2014 budget to various funds so that it can be spent in 2014. See <http://www.ocn.me/v13n12.htm#pltc> for more information on the 2014 budget.

Committee reports

Mayor Nikki McDonald said the annual Thanksgiving chili supper fundraiser for the PLVFD on Nov. 30 fed almost 730 people, a record. However, she added that because Palmer Lake's Town Hall was so crowded, the department might consider a different venue in the future.

The Restaurant Association (www.palmerlakedining.com) coordinated the food, hay wagon rides, and a visit from Santa. After the meeting, fire volunteer Abby Vierling told OCN that all of the more than \$6,000 in funds raised will go to the 501(c)(3) PLVFD Association to be used for maintenance of the Palmer Lake Star, as well as PLVFD volunteer training and equipment.

McDonald said that the Palmer Lake Restoration Committee 501(c)(3) (also known as the Awake Palmer Lake Committee) has arranged for a rig to drill 20 to 30 holes in the lakebed for a geological survey to determine the next steps for restoring water to the lake. Dave Wilson obtained grant money from the El Paso County Regional Building Department to help pay for the survey. A rig will drill down to bedrock, which can be done now since the lake is dry, to find the source of the lake water retention problem, Awake Palmer Lake member Jeff Hulsmann

said after the meeting.

Police Trustee Bob Grado said that the Police Department is still in the black.

Water Trustee Michael Maddox said that Water Supervisor Steve Orcutt found a way to spend only \$3,500 to update old diagrams of the dam for an inundation study that was ordered by the state engineer's office, instead of paying \$20,000 or more for a new study.

In November, water customers used a total of 4 million gallons of surface water and well water, and the town is in good shape with its water use, Maddox said.

McDonald said the PLVFD handled 29 calls in November, making 350 for the year so far, and compiled 2,179 volunteer hours, totaling 22,372 hours to date in 2013. The department assisted the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District in the response to an outside fire near Old Denver Highway on Nov. 8. The department applied for a grant to help replace self-contained breathing apparatus equipment that is 15 years old.

McDonald scheduled a meeting for residents' input about the future of PLVFD, "since money is tight ... and our poor Fire Department is limping along." The meeting will be on Jan. 18 from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Palmer Lake Town Hall. It will be the first of several such meetings discussing the possibility of mill levy increase ballot initiatives, possible inclusion in Tri-Lakes Monument district and other ideas to make sure Palmer Lake has fire and ambulance coverage, McDonald said.

Roads Trustee John Russell has been talking with Roads Department employee Jason Dosch about getting estimates from vendors to fix some of the bigger trouble spots. Dosch will make a presentation to the trustees soon. The road scraper's tires are six years old and need to be replaced; the \$10,000 replacement cost is funded in the 2014 budget. Russell said he's very pleased with the wonderful attitude of the "three guys who work in the shop and back each other up."

New business license approved

The trustees unanimously approved a new business license for Cathy Thompson, owner of Johann, an urban-industrial family hair care salon located at Illumination Point on Highway 105.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

The next regular meeting will be held at 6 p.m. Jan. 9 in Town Hall, 42 Valley Crescent. Meetings are normally the second Thursday of the month. Information: 481-2953.

Lisa Hatfield can be reached at lisahatfield@ocn.me.

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Board of County Commissioners, Dec. 10

Commissioners approve some code changes requested by fire districts

By Lisa Hatfield

This article is based on a press release submitted to OCN by Dave Rose, El Paso County public information officer. Some information has been added.

On Dec. 10, the Board of El Paso County Commissioners (BOCC) unanimously approved Resolution No. 13-503 regarding applicability of the 2009 International Fire Code and Appendices adopted by Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District, Cimarron Hills Fire Department, Wescott Fire Protection District, Falcon Fire Protection District, Security Fire Department, Hanover Fire Department, and Peyton Fire Protection District.

The resolution approved many of the changes to county fire codes that had been submitted by this group of fire districts. However, the BOCC amended the proposed document submitted by the fire districts and excluded some of their requests.

The changes are intended, according to the fire districts, to make new homes and commercial buildings more fire resistant in order to protect public safety. Board approval means the county will move from codes and standards based on the 2003 International Fire Code (IFC) to codes and standards based on the 2009 IFC.

Discussions with area fire districts, community groups, homebuilders, and other stake holders began about three years ago. Under state statutes, the fire districts must initiate proposed changes and submit them to the BOCC for approval.

"The board's action today approves approximately 98 percent of the fire code changes adopted by area fire districts and presented for county approval as required by state statute," noted County Attorney Amy Folsom.

The BOCC did reject proposed changes adopted by the fire districts that could result in requirements that new homes over a certain size include expensive sprinkler systems, water storage cisterns, and the use of more fire-proof materials in construction.

The BOCC also rejected the payment of extra fees to the fire districts that have already been charged to some property owners as an alternative to meeting other requirements.

Fire Chief Trent Harwig of the Falcon Fire Department told the commissioners, "Ninety-eight percent of the amendments have been agreed to. The 2 percent that we're talking about is significant. That 2 percent probably has an impact that is greater than all the other 98 percent on the code." For example, he said an amendment to the IFC saying that no home has to have a water supply, adequate access for fire apparatus, or have proper addressing, "that's a huge amendment. That's an amendment to the code making it less restrictive, not more restrictive," said Harwig.

"We understand the need for reasonable changes to the fire code in order to protect life and property, but we cannot support regulations which will make it impossible for many of the Black Forest fire victims to rebuild, or unnecessarily drive up costs and increase red tape for everyone," said Commissioner Amy Lathen. "Neither will we support the practice of charging fees in lieu of meeting code standards."

Commissioner Darryl Glenn, who represents the Black Forest area, was alarmed to hear that a representative of one of the fire districts was insisting that the commissioners approve all recommended changes as a pack-

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