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than its desired minimum levels.

The new idea was to recruit people who only want to be paramedics and not train to be firefighters, since this might expand the potential hiring pool. Truty therefore asked for board approval to hire up to six non-fire paramedics and amend the 2017 salary structure to include steps for both firefighter/paramedic and the new position. They are looking for paramedics with at least three years' experience.

Background: On May 25, 2016, TLMFPD had voted to approve a new paramedic wage schedule so that the district could hire paramedics and then train them to be firefighters by sending them to 16-week training academies, which are only offered intermittently. That option was instead of trying to hire trained firefighters and then getting them trained as paramedics, which had been the past practice. However, that strategy has not been effective either, partially due to the extended time and money needed to hire and train a new firefighter or paramedic. See www.ocn.me/v16n9.htm#tlmfpd.

Deputy Chief Randy Trost recommended creating a maximum of six new non-fire paramedic positions and rearrange the wage schedule to include a place for them. Wages would be the same as for firefighter paramedics, calculated on the 2017 wage schedule as starting at \$56,507 per year.

"Furthermore, it would also be recommended to hire three additional staff to move our shift staffing to 15. This would allow the district to be operating from a better position in the case of future retirements or resignations," Trost's report said. "Staffing at 15 with a minimum of 14 per shift would allow more flexibility to attend further education and professional development without jeopardizing our staffing levels for response."

Battalion Chief Mike Keough said having an Emergency Medical Services-focused job title would be different than just an ambulance crew waiting for someone to get hurt, because they would be part of the fire crew and assist with other support functions too.

The directors asked many questions about the proposal and how it would affect operations. The shift on duty was all in attendance at the meeting, and the consensus among them was positive. The directors voted unanimously to accept the paramedic-only staffing proposal as presented.

Temporary reduction in staffing level

Truty said the minimum staffing level had been temporarily reduced a few months ago to minimize the drain on firefighters who have been taking on so much overtime work due to unfilled full-time staff positions. The result is that some firefighters are not at home for up to 120 hours in a row.

He said he was still extraordinarily concerned and wanted to take additional action to preserve their health and avoid burnout. He was considering reducing the staffing level from 12 to 11 per shift and taking an engine out of service for a few months until more staff could be hired.

Truty is in the process of talking with the union about

options, and in the next two weeks, they are expected to come to a decision. Lt. Franz Hankins, president of Local 4319 of International Association of Firefighters (IAFF) union, said the union was "not seeing eye to eye" with the administration yet, but "we appreciate the opportunity to have the conversation."

Since this is an operational issue, it can be decided without the board's input, but the consensus of the directors was to do what was needed for the well-being of firefighters.

Mill levy increase discussion continues

Truty said that the citizens advisory task force regarding a possible mill levy increase still had two more meetings left. After that, TLMFPD will make a decision about whether or not to put a measure on the ballot.

He said a document called "2017 Mill Levy Proposal Frequently Asked Questions and Answers" is available to any citizen with questions. The 16-page document discusses why the district is considering placing a mill levy proposal on the November 2017 ballot, what its biggest challenges are, what the district has done to reduce expenses while maintaining services, how the proceeds of the proposed mill levy would be allocated, projected effects of either not pursuing or passing a mill levy increase, and a lot of other background information. See www.tlmfire.org/mill-levy and click on "FAQ," or call 481-3456 to obtain a printed copy.

Financial report

Treasurer John Hildebrandt said that as of March 31, expenses were 3.9 percent below budget. Overtime pay was ahead of budget, but total wages were behind budget due to the staffing situation. Revenues were on track; however, ambulance revenues were 6 percent behind budgeted amounts, he said.

According to the report, overall assets for all the district funds available were \$3.28 million as of March 31. See www.tlmfire.org/budget-information for 2017 budget.

Agreement with Wescott FPD

Administrative Battalion Chief/Fire Marshal Jamey Bumgarner said that as of April 3, the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District (DWFPD) would do automatic aid response to calls only in the southern part of TLMFPD for level D and E level (life-threatening) calls. This agreement was reached to reduce the imbalance in the number of automatic aid calls between DWFPD and TLMFPD, and he said it appeared that so far, the plan was helping to balance the numbers. See www.ocn.me/v17n4.htm#tlmfpd.

The directors requested Bumgarner provide run statistics again at the May meeting.

Chief's report

Truty's report included:

- Three new TLMFPD firefighters will graduate from the training academy in Denver on May 19.
- The El Paso Board of County Commissioners will conduct a workshop on fire district impact fees on May 4 to establish a countywide process. Fire chiefs attending the workshop have been asked to present reasons why those impact fees are justified.

Bumgarner said 23 homeowners' associations had already signed up to send representatives to the May 6 Neighborhood Leadership Wildfire Day. He applauded the Mount Herman homeowners' association for all the wildfire risk reduction work they have been doing in their neighborhood adjacent to the national forest.

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

Meetings are usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month. The next meeting is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. May 24 at TLMFPD Station 1, 18650 Highway 105. For information, contact Jennifer Martin at 719-484-0911. For upcoming agendas, see <http://tlmfire.org/board-agendas-minutes>.

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

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