

asking for salary increases and more fitness testing for all firefighters. Sixty-three percent of the budget is firefighter com-

pensation and 36 percent is other operational costs.

As a result of a possible merger with TLMFPD, as well as to keep compensation competitive, Burns is asking to increase salaries to be comparable to that of TLMFPD. Ridings said all employees will see increases, but the basic entry-level firefighter position will see the most change, with an increase of 52 percent from \$37,900 to \$57,700 annually. Although the chief and assistant chief jobs will not receive full dollar-for-dollar increases, all other job descriptions will.

Directors Gary Rusnak and Mark Gunderman asked about TLMFPD employee's overall compensation package, including insurance and the Health Reimbursement Account. TLMFPD employees pay a percentage of their salary into their health insurance. Rusnak said he didn't want to see DWFPD employees get a raise only for them to have to pay into their insurance and lose that increase.

Rusnak and Gunderman also asked if this type of raise is sustainable going forward. Ridings said in the past, Wescott salaries were increased stepwise based on seniority. He didn't say whether the wage package would change going forward after this one-year increase.

The budget also includes a \$10,000 request for more fitness testing for all firefighters to include annual chest X-rays.

Attorney Matt Court suggested the public hearing for budget review be set for the Dec. 4 meeting, with the draft budget being available to the public the week prior.

Gallagher amendment update

Court gave the board an update on the Gallagher Amendment, a voter-approved measure that requires 45 percent of the state's total property tax burden to be paid by residences and the other 55 percent paid by nonresidential (commercial) property. A Colorado General Assembly committee reviewed the amendment and made recommendations to a legislative council that will decide the fate of the amendment. The committee made three recommendations:

- Repeal the amendment altogether.
- Break the state into eight regions, all of which would have an initial residential property tax rate. El Paso County would have a beginning rate of 5.88 percent.
- Backfill property tax losses due to Gallagher for fire and library districts only and for only one year.

Prospects for formation of a fire authority

Directors Larry Schwarz and Joyce Hartung, as well as Burns, attended a committee meeting with members of TLMFPD in ongoing discussions about a possible merger. Schwarz said they reviewed a 16-question list covering topics ranging from the number of firefighters per district to salary and pensions, volunteers, and mill levies. The outcome of these meetings will likely be a fire authority, which would allow each district to maintain its own board and mill levies while combining operational budgets and workers. See related TLMFPD article below.

Court added the fire authority would be a fourth special district and could be dissolved if in the future both districts agreed it wasn't working.

Gunderman asked what the benefit would be to the community in creating a fire authority. Schwarz said although both districts have mutual aid agreements, this would improve response times because the closest unit would respond.

Both districts would purchase new uniforms, patches, and vehicle logos.

One obstacle to the discussion came with the way DWFPD identified its rollover money for the last two years, said Ridings, but the Wescott auditor fixed the issue. Burns said he met with Black Forest and Falcon fire departments, both of whom are working on local issues including elections and are not interested in being a part of a merger or the fire authority at this time. However, they might consider coordinated policies in the future, depending on the election outcome.

Station 2 land decisions

Burns said the developer working on the property near Station 2 would like to create an easement with the district to use a portion of their land for signage. The station, which sits at Stagecoach Road and Highway 83, has land at the intersection of these two roads where a large sign would be built. Court said there would be several easements to sign between the district and the county or with the developer if the board agrees to move forward.

The Flying Horse North developer agreed to give the district a portion of land along Stagecoach that could be used for bringing equipment into and out of the station.

The board decided to table the decision until one of Court's associates, who is skilled in real estate law, could talk with the board. Several members of the board intended to walk the property to understand what is being asked for by the developer.

Subdistrict consolidation

Rusnak asked if the northern subdistrict could be dissolved to have just one underlying/standing district with combined budgets and/or mill levies. The current overall mill levy in Wescott's underlying district is 7.00 mills. The northern subdistrict pays an additional mill levy of 14.90 mills approved by voters in November 2017. See www.ocn.me/v17n10.htm#dwfpd.

Court explained the Title 32 special district law requires an election to dissolve a subdistrict, and one for increasing mill levies. The board can create a subdistrict anytime, but it cannot include a mill levy, he said.

The meeting adjourned at 9:13 pm.

The next DWFPD Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Nov. 13. The regular meeting will begin at 7 p.m. Meetings are held at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive. Please call (719) 488-8680, a non-emergency number, for more information, or visit www.wescottfire.org.

Allison Robenstein can be reached at allisonrobenstein@ocn.me.

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Oct. 24

Union frustrated over postponement of collective bargaining agreement discussion

By Natalie Barszcz

On Oct. 24, the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLMFPD) board moved to postpone the continuing discussion on the collective bargaining resolution update due to the need to seek further legal advice relating to the labor agreement that had first been requested in March. The board agreed to remove the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) topic from the agenda in a 5-0-1 vote with board Sec-

retary Mike Smaldino abstaining, with no reason stated.

Director Lance Buckingham arrived late, excused.

Wage report proposal for 2019 budget

Chief Chris Truty proposed changes to the base wage and formulas used in the wage schedule to bring wages in line with the cost of living increase of 3 percent, in addition to increases for certain certifications using a statewide analysis from the Employers

Council. Truty said, "The focus would be on the differentials between different ranks ensuring that those with additional training receive a percentage and not a dollar amount."

"It is about time that other organizations are looking at our wage scale and not the other way around," Truty said.

Truty also said, "It is becoming increasingly harder to find senior EMS/Paramedics, and we need to be offering comparable wages to attract

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