

ees that the omission would not happen again. After making final budget criticisms during public comments at the end of the meeting, Rusnak and Feltz commended Burns for acting quickly to correct the procedural error on the 2018 budget but both insisted that the board was culpable, as well.

District resident Steve Simpson stated that he was unable to find the budget online. Administrative Assistant Stacey Popovich directed him to follow <http://wescottfire.org/board-of-directors-2/budget/#> on the district's website. Popovich also confirmed that Rusnak's and Feltz's emailed questions and comments would be part of the public record. She noted that they would be posted as part of the February minutes a day after being approved at the March 20 board meeting.

Board plied with questions; OCN deemed "dead wrong"

Gent acknowledged that the board had received copious questions and invited Gleneagle North Home Owners' Association Treasurer and district resident Gary Rusnak to begin. Court advised that it was the board's discretion whether to respond or simply note for the record that comments had been taken under consideration.

Rusnak revisited his argument that Wescott did not need to increase the northern sub-district's mill levy to 14.9, citing savings that he roughly calculated made from the district's posted 2018 budget. He estimated a carryover of \$570,000 and a beginning reserve balance of \$1.2 million for 2018, and referred to errors in expenses and the ending fund balance. Former Wescott Treasurer and resident Dennis Feltz targeted issues similar to Rusnak's including the amount of money in reserve, the Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) benefit, and accident and disability insurance.

Feltz expressed frustration and confusion that the board would not be responding to his questions during the public hearing. He asked, "So, we submitted these questions for what reason then? I mean, if we're not going to discuss them vocally, in transparency with the community? I followed the rules, I submitted questions to you; I figured you'd be open to answer some of the questions."

Ross, directing a response to the board, stated, "The public comment portion is to give the public the ability to provide comments to the board and it won't require the board to engage in a question and answer session; whether the individual wants that or not, it's not your requirement to do. You take the information, and you do with it what you deem appropriate."

District resident Steve Simpson inquired about the point of the public hearing if there was no interface. He asked, "Who does this board serve? May I ask that question?"

Director Harland Baker responded, "We serve the public, which is you guys, you and everybody else that's not here. And so, I don't think that we're not going to discuss this, I just think we're not going to discuss it ... with him at the podium. I think as we go into this budget discussion before we ratify it, this will certainly come up."

Director Rachel Dunn and Baker acknowledged the validity of the questions. Baker recognized the potential for errors, discussed the importance of management of the budget, and expressed interest in evaluating the mill levy.

Simpson, although he did not formally submit questions, stated that he shared the same concerns that Rusnak and Feltz addressed. Baker remarked that this year has been exceptional. In past years, residents showed little to no interest in budget proceedings. He added that planning for the 2018 budget presented multiple challenges due to the number of unknown

factors and speculated that the next few years would provide greater financial clarity and align the district's short-, mid-, and long-term plans.

After the public hearing officially closed, Court stated that the board could now consider, and if appropriate, ratify the 2018 budget. Rusnak asked if the board would address any of the objections presented. Gent stated, "We are moving on to the next item." Simpson remarked that the citizens needed to vote for a board that would operate differently. District resident Lt. Bryan Ackerman stated that many people in the community support this board. Simpson repeated his concern that there was a lack of dialogue and voices were being shut down.

Gent asked, "Did you hear what was said in the last board before it was closed down?"

Simpson stated that he was attending Wescott's meeting because of what he saw in the paper. Gent replied, "I read the paper, too, and that's, that's not what happened." Simpson replied, "OK, see that's what we need to hear." Gent continued, "Because, the thing that was not brought up is what was said by somebody in the public that shut down the conversation.... It was not included in the report."

Assistant Chief Scott Ridings interjected that the 2018 budget process started with a first reading at about September 2017. Many of the questions posed during the public hearing were repeatedly asked and answered prior to the budget's adoption in December 2017.

Simpson referenced the paper again. Gent responded that he would not comment on it because the paper was "dead wrong." Director Joyce Hartung also questioned the accuracy of the newspaper article.

Note: OCN stands by its report of Gent's refusal to allow Lowes to speak. In the February article, OCN printed a transcription of its complete digital recording of what was said between Lowes and Gent at that Wescott board meeting.

Some questions answered, budget ratification finally achieved

Ross provided guidance and answered questions posed by the directors. He reminded the board that the budget is a projection, a best estimate, of what the district will do during the next year and that it can be changed. In response to a comment from Feltz, Gent recommended listing the \$622,000 in the City of Colorado Springs' final revenue payment as a separate line item. Ridings inquired about rules pertaining to budget amendments. Ross explained that changes that do not increase expenditures or appropriations do not require public hearing or statutory amendment, but recommended adopting the budget as adjusted.

Directors and staff responded to some of the more pressing questions posed. Gent tackled the issue of vacation time increasing by five times from the 2017 budget. He explained that the district never knows when a Wescott employee will find employment elsewhere. The 2018 budget figure attempts to plan for departing employees who cash out vacation time.

Gent and Ridings addressed the HRA benefit concerns. Gent explained that several years ago a decision was made to take a higher out-of-pocket maximum to save on monthly premiums versus having higher premiums with lower out-of-pocket maximums. Ridings added that the district is self-insuring the higher deductibles and, compared to neighboring fire districts, boasts the second lowest per-employee benefit cost.

Regarding the increased accident and disability insurance, Ridings explained that this benefit is a "big deal" for a district the size of Wescott. The pay gap between Wescott and surrounding fire districts is gen-

erally \$10,000 or more, and the insurance provides a small incentive for firefighters to stay.

Dunn asked for clarification about the American Medical Response (AMR) contract. Burns responded that the soon-to-expire contract between Colorado Springs and AMR will likely affect Wescott, making it difficult to make budget predictions. Ridings confirmed that Wescott maintains open communication with AMR and continually seeks other options for maintaining emergency medical services.

After the board completed its discussion, the directors ratified the 2018 budget.

Administrative business and chiefs' reports
Popovich announced the district's bank balances that included:

- Peoples National Bank, \$3,951
- Colorado Peak Fund, \$495,450
- Wells Fargo Trust Fund, \$869,993
- Total of all funds, \$1.369 million.

Popovich attributed the lower balance due to the SDA payment for the year. The board accepted the financials and minutes as presented.

Burns' announcements included:

- Three new recruits will begin the volunteer firefighter training process.
- Station 2 on Highway 83 is expected to be open full-time in March 2018.
- Wildfire outlook included above average fire potential for the southern plains February through early April and above average—looking more likely as well—in southern Colorado by May with the possibility of a persisting and intensifying drought pattern.
- The district is considering website updates to improve information management.
- The district plans to extend an invitation to the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District for a "purely social gathering" and conversation starter.

Ridings' report included:

- At Station 1, there were 50 service calls in January averaging just under a 6-minute response time in the Gleneagle area. Station 2 response times averaged just under the 12-minute mark, with one possible data entry error. He confirmed that response times have increased since 2016.
- January EMS calls totaled 24. In response to a question from resident Bill Lowes, Ridings confirmed that none of January's service calls involved fire, and out-of-district EMS calls are not counted in the district's statistics.

Additional business included:

- The board passed resolution 2018-003—A Resolution of the Board of Directors calling an election for the Donald Wescott Fire Protection District.
- Baker proposed that the district use the \$622,000 in Colorado Springs revenue to pay off the Station 2 loan. Popovich confirmed a payoff amount of \$1.061 million.
- Burns proposed formation of a board-staff work group with a first meeting scheduled prior to the March board meeting. Once the date is determined, the meeting would be publicized.

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

The next DWFPD Board of Directors meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Mar. 20, at 7 p.m. at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive. Please call (719) 488-8680, a non-emergency number, for more information, or visit www.wescottfire.org. Wescott is also on Facebook and Twitter.

Jennifer Kaylor can be reached at jenniferkaylor@ocn.me.

Woodmoor Improvement Association Annual Meeting, Jan. 29 and Reorganization, Jan. 31

Board sets goals for 2018, conducts board election

By Jackie Burhans

At the Woodmoor Improvement Association (WIA) annual meeting Jan. 29, President Peter Bille chaired the meeting and provided a review of 2017, a discussion of goals for 2018, board candidate statements, and a Q&A session. Later that week, a short reorganization meeting was held to assign board roles.

2017 highlights

Bille noted that WIA is responsible for covenant enforcement, architectural control and common area improvements, and maintenance but is not responsible for road clearing or repairing, which falls to El Paso County authorities.

In 2017, WIA worked with Eagle Scouts on a number of projects, finished the Toboggan Hill parking lot, and partnered with Lewis-Palmer D38 on a Safe Routes to School grant to construct a trail between Lewis-Palmer Elementary and Middle Schools and connecting to Palmer Ridge High School.

2018 objectives

WIA remains committed to Firewise, hopes to develop more trails in common areas, and is looking into building a Woodmoor Public Safety station and doing minor remodeling of the administrative offices.

The board remains engaged with The Country Club at Woodmoor, which had a profitable year.

The project to digitize files continues and is about 60 percent complete.

Awards

The Good Neighbor award was given to Jennifer Cunningham, outgoing secretary and director of Community Outreach. Cunningham was recognized for organizing the installation of locking mailboxes, working on fire mitigation, and helping a neighbor impacted by a house fire.

Eric Gross was awarded the Vincent Elorie outstanding citizen award, named after a former member of the Woodmoor Police Department. Gross was the director of Forestry from 2012 to 2014 and provid-